



**Parent Involvement Committee  
Report No. 20-082**

**14 October 2020**

## **PIC Brainstorming Session - Reimagining Parent Involvement in 2020**

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### **PURPOSE:**

1. To brainstorm strategies to support parent involvement and school councils in the 2020-2021 school year.

### **SUPPORTING OUR STRATEGIC PLAN:**

2. Recognizing and investing in the contribution that parents make to their child's education and the school communities across the District helps to support engagement and is an important component of fostering a Culture of Caring.

### **CONTEXT:**

2. The 2020-2021 school year presents a whole series of challenges which are unique. Parent involvement in education will look entirely different this year. Recognizing this, there is an important opportunity for PIC to hold a brainstorming session to consider the unique needs of parents in the 2020-2021 school year and to best meet those needs. Using Thoughtexchange during the meeting, PIC will engage in a discussion about parent involvement in 2020-2021 and how PIC can help to support those needs. PIC members are asked to review this report and come to the meeting prepared for an interactive discussion about what PIC can do to support parent involvement in 2020-2021. This discussion connects the current reality and needs of parents with the PIC workplan, the annual parent conference and school council training day, the operations of school councils, the budget allocation for parent involvement and much more.

### **KEY CONSIDERATIONS:**

#### **3. Parent Needs**

Parents are coming to this school year with many different priorities and concerns. Safety is a key issue and maintaining safety protocols is essential to schools remaining open. Parents have had many changes in their connection to schools. Some parents have students attending in person and others are attending virtually. Parents cannot enter the school building and meetings are

online or by phone. Whether children have returned to school in person or are enrolled in an Ottawa-Carleton Virtual School (OCV), parents continue to require more support and outreach. Given the number of changes occurring this particular year, there is a need for greater investment in parent engagement such as translation, professional development for principals and educators on engagement strategies with families. What support do parents need to be involved in their child's education? What practices or resources need to be reimagined to accommodate this school year?

#### **4. School Councils**

The regular operations of school councils will be impacted this year. Meetings will be held virtually and opportunities for community building are significantly changed. What resources and supports do school councils need to be effective in 2020-2021? How might this impact communications and the school council training day?

#### **5. Advancing Equity in Parent Engagement**

As the OCDSB launches a new [Indigenous Equity and Human Rights Roadmap](#), there is a strong focus on equity. How can we bring an equity lens to the work of PIC? What specific actions and/or initiatives may help to better engage parents who traditionally face barriers to engagement?

#### **6. Parent Conference and School Council Training Day**

The annual parent conference and school council training day needs to be reimagined in a virtual context. The attached overview provides some preliminary thinking about what a virtual conference could look like.

#### **7. Strategies to Overcome Barriers to Parent Involvement**

At the February meeting, PIC discussed strategies and tools to overcome barriers to parent involvement. Many of the ideas generated will be good for future consideration but may not be achievable during the pandemic with current limitations on physical distancing and parent access to schools. The following list of strategies from the session may still be practicable and assist in planning activities for parent engagement in 2020-2021:

- create and develop a series of webcasts;
- provide information on how education works in Canada and develop a glossary of terms for newcomers;
- use clear messages and avoid jargon;
- solicit more feedback and input from parents;
- translate and produce reference and parent support material (i.e., Help with Mathematics) easier to understand with more diverse imagery and use of graphics; and
- communicate the many ways parents may engage in their child's learning.

#### **8. PIC Mandate and Responsibilities**

PIC advises the Board from a parent perspective, champions parental engagement and contributes valuable input at meetings of PIC and other Board subcommittees. *Ontario Regulation 612/00* sets the mandate for the PIC. It lists the following primary objectives:

- undertake activities to help parents support their children’s learning at home and at school;
- support, encourage, and enhance meaningful parent engagement at the board level;
- to improve student achievement and well-being;
- provide information and advice to the board on parent engagement; and
- communicate with and support school councils.

PIC’s responsibilities are:

- to develop strategies and initiatives that the Board and the Director could use to communicate effectively with parents and to engage parents in support of their children’s learning at home and at school, and to advise on the use of these strategies;
- to communicate information from the Ministry to school councils and parents;
- to determine, in consultation with the Director, how Ministry funding, if any, for parent engagement initiatives is to be allocated;
- to work with school councils;
- to share effective practices to help engage parents in their children’s learning, identify and reduce barriers to parent engagement, and help ensure that schools are welcoming to parents;and
- to support initiatives that help build knowledge and skills that will assist the PIC and school councils of the board with their work.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

### **9. Budget Changes**

During the 2020-2021 budget process, the issue of parent engagement was a topic of discussion and the following clause was incorporated in the motion that was ultimately passed by the Board on 26 August 2020:

*THAT a budget allocation of \$150,000 be made for the funding of effective school councils across all schools and the work of an engaged Parent Involvement Committee to ensure it meets obligations regarding communications with School Councils and to “undertaking activities to help parents of pupils of the board support their children’s learning at home and at school.*

What advice and guidance can PIC offer on the effective allocation of these funds?

**10. Human Resource Allocations**

PIC has previously inquired about the allocation of human resources to parent involvement and school council support. While the OCDSB has staff designated to support parent involvement, it is part of a broader portfolio and those individuals often face competing demands on their time. Should consideration be given to allocating funds in a more targeted way to support parent engagement?

**COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:**

11. The discussion at PIC will inform much of the work and communications to support parent involvement.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

12. Using a live Thoughtexchange during the meeting, Committee members will have the opportunity to respond to the following question:

*Given the uniqueness of the 2020-2021 school year, what can PIC do to support parent involvement and school councils?*

There will be staff available to explain the Thoughtexchange process and to help facilitate the discussion.

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