

PARENT INCLUSION ACTIVITIES IN ONTARIO

A Snapshot of Current Activities

People for Education
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BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

People for Education and the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition collaborated on a Parent Inclusion project with funding provided by the Ontario Inclusion Learning Network (OILN) and Public Health Canada. The project was started and completed between January and March 2006. We are indebted to Michael Fay, OILN, Peter Clutterbuck, Social Planning Network of Ontario, Joey Edwardh, Community Development Halton and Carol MacDougall, OHSC for their support of this project.

Valerie McDonald, of People for Education, was responsible for developing an “environmental scan” of current activities to promote parent involvement and to compile that information into this Guidebook of Parent Inclusion Activities.

Fiona Knight, representing OHSC, organized a Learning Exchange for OILN and OHSC members to share the contents of the Guidebook and discuss current initiatives.

This Guidebook is a “snapshot” of current practices in parent inclusion. We are grateful to the many members of OILN, OHSC and the People for Education Network who responded most enthusiastically with information about the innovative activities they have developed in their own communities. The descriptions of activities, projects and ideas for parent involvement have been organized according to a framework for parent involvement developed by researcher, Joyce Epstein. Many of the activities fit in more than one category, but for the sake of brevity, most have only been listed once.

Because of the short timeline of the project, the resulting list is by no means complete. We hope, however, that this Guidebook will inspire others to think of new ways to include parents in the early learning and ongoing education of their children.

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INCLUDING PARENTS IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Parents are engaged in their children's early learning and education in many ways. They are their children's first and most constant teachers; they help with homework, volunteer on field trips, raise money for enrichment activities, serve on school councils and daycare boards and advocate for changes to government policies that affect the well-being of children.

Parents provide a link between the education and childcare systems and the children who are the focus of the systems. What parents need and want is policy and mechanisms that support their ability to be effective partners in their children's education. More important than involving parents formally in their children's schools, is involving them in their children's early learning and education.

Researcher Carl Corter notes that the increased interest in parental involvement can be traced to several factors. Cutbacks in government expenditures fuelled the idea of using parental, community and business resources to make up the differences. Market models of parent choice theorized that informed and involved parents would apply pressure to find more efficient ways to spend public funds. Smaller families and delayed child-bearing mean that parents are now more willing to make investments in their children's education.¹

Ontario's Parent Involvement Policy

In Ontario, parent involvement became an important component of education reform when school councils were established in 1996 and then mandated in 2000.

In November 2004, Ontario's Education Minister appointed a group of 20 parents to develop recommendations about how to strengthen the role of parents at all levels of Ontario's publicly funded education system. The group, known as the Parent Voice in Voice in Education Project, heard from parents from across the province in meetings and in over 1,000 submissions. They heard that parents wanted more information about how the education system works and about how decisions are made. Parents wanted the province's education system to be a more welcoming and inclusive environment for parents and they said they wanted to be partners in the education of their children

On December 1, 2005 the Minister of Education announced a new provincial policy to support parents' involvement in their children's education. The policy is partly based on recommendations from the Parent Voice in Education Project and is intended to create a more welcoming environment for parents in the education system. The policy includes:

¹ Carl Corter, Janette Pelletier. "The Rise and Stall of Parent and Community Involvement in Schools." Orbit, Vol. 34, No. 3, 2004, p. 8-9.

- a commitment to regular regional parent meetings with the Minister of Education;
- the creation of a new provincial Parent Advisory Board composed of and representing parents;
- a parent website portal, e-network and new parent handbook; and
- a provincial Parent Engagement Office.

The six Ministry of Education regional offices will assume more responsibility for mobilizing parents. The new policy also includes:

- a \$1 million grant program to support school councils involved in special local initiatives to reach out to new parents;
- \$500 per school council for outreach and communications;
- funding for school boards to support board-level parent involvement committees;
- a \$750,000 fund to support provincial and regional projects promoting parent involvement;
- \$60,000 for provincial parent groups; and
- \$250,000 for a provincial parent engagement office.²

In March 2006, the Ministry released \$4.8 million to support these initiatives and directed boards to spend all the money by the end of June 2006.

Research on Parent Involvement

The stated aim of parent involvement in most jurisdictions is to improve student achievement and learning. Yet Corter states that there is little evidence that it boosts school performance. “Many studies have found that parents who are involved in schooling are more likely to have children who perform better but involvement may be correlated with other factors that contribute to academic success (higher income status, less family stress, parental involvement in other aspects of the child’s life etc.)”³

However, there are some programs that improve academic outcomes and there may be non-academic benefits to parent involvement such as building support for public education, building community and developing more effective parenting.⁴ Corter argues that we need more research to examine how different forms of parent involvement change children’s environments and their learning.

Research reported in the Royal Commission on Learning indicates that what parents do with their children at home is more important to their children’s achievement than

2 Ministry of Education, “Developing Partners in Education”, (Discussion Paper: December 1, 2005, vol. 2). <<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/05.12/developing.pdf>>

3 Carl Corter, Janette Pelletier. “The Rise and Stall of Parent and Community Involvement in Schools.” *Orbit*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 2004, p. 7.

4 Ibid.

parents' social class or level of education. However, parents can contribute to "higher student achievement, higher aspirations, improved attendance, improved classroom and school climate, and more positive relationships between parents and teachers."⁵ These contributions include:

- following the child's progress at school and helping at home with homework and projects;
- attending various school performances and sports events; and
- acting as a volunteer in the classroom.⁶

"Research strongly suggests that such activities have a more direct and positive impact on the student's progress than does active participation in parent organisations, valuable though this may be for the school in general."⁷

SIX TYPES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

According to Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center of School, Family and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, parent involvement in education can be categorized into six types:

1. **Parenting--** Families take care of the health and safety of children, and maintain a home environment that encourages learning and good behavior in school.
2. **Communicating--** Schools reach out to families with information about programs, student progress and transitions to higher grades.
3. **Volunteering--** Parents make significant contributions to the life of the school.
4. **Learning at home--** Family members help their children with homework assignments and other school-related activities.
5. **Decision-making--** Schools may include parents in decision-making about their own children or involve them in school decisions through school councils, committees and regional school councils. Parents may also join independent community groups to work for improvements in education.
6. **Collaborating with the community--** Schools can help to link families with support services offered by other agencies, such as healthcare, cultural events, tutoring services, and after-school child-care programs. They also can help families, students and community groups provide services to the community.⁸

Each of these types of parent involvement can be supported and enhanced by schools and community organizations.

5 Royal Commission on Learning, *For the Love of Learning: Making It Happen* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1994), p. 106.

6 Royal Commission on Learning, *For the Love of Learning: Making It Happen* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1994), p. 108.

7 Ibid., 107.

8 Epstein, J. (1995) "School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 701-702. <<http://www.edletter.org/past/issues/1997-so/sixtypes.shtml>>

PARENTING

Families take care of the health and safety of children, and maintain a home environment that encourages learning and good behavior in school. Schools and community organizations may provide training and information to help families understand their children's development and help them establish home environments to support children as students.

Ministry of Children and Youth Services- Ontario Student Nourishment Program

<http://www.cfcs.gov.on.ca>

Student nutrition programs across Ontario serve more than 270,000 elementary and secondary students. These programs provide breakfasts and healthy snack programs that are often coordinated and run by parent volunteers. In March 2005, the government increased its investment in student nutrition programs to \$8.5 million annually and moved to a decentralized program model.⁹

Government funding is distributed directly to local programs through 15 lead agencies located across the province based on a formula designed to support families and communities who are most in need. The programs engage parents through websites, parent council presentations, brochures, community events and local media. Student Nourishment Programs promote healthy eating which helps to increase concentration and student success. In addition to these benefits the program creates a positive school environment, promotes volunteerism among parents and students and strengthens connections between schools and communities.

Niagara Region Public Health Department: Youth Connection Elementary Program

www.regional.niagara.on.ca

Public Health departments in every region offer a wide range of activities that engage parents in promoting healthy living with their children. Here are some examples of parent inclusion activities in Niagara Region:

1. *Healthy School Website*

The site has a section for parents with important information about a variety of topics, including “Positive Parenting” information sheets.

2. *Heart Healthy School Award Program*

This program acts as an umbrella under which many other healthy active tobacco-free living activities occur throughout the school year. It is usually led by

⁹ Ministry of Children and Youth Services. “Ontario Government Helping Thousands More Students Arrive At School Ready To Learn” (Press Release: March 9, 2006).
<<http://www.cfcs.gov.on.ca/CS/en/newsRoom/newsReleases/060309.htm>>

interested parent volunteers and includes activities such as poster contests, participation in nutrition month activities and international walk-to-school day.

3. Nutrition Month Campaign

Activities in this annual awareness event vary each year and may include activities such as enlisting parent volunteers to teach grade 7 students how to prepare healthy lunches or to encourage primary students to complete healthy food diaries at home with their parents.

4. TV Turnoff Campaign

An initiative led by the health unit, this campaign encourages children to turn off all screens for one week during the month of April and to become more physically active with their families. Students track their physical activity and viewing time in a Student Guide. Parents are encouraged to participate with their children.

5. Injury & Substance Abuse Prevention Workshop

This workshop, led by public health nurses, teaches grades 1-3 students about safety and substance use. The workshop consists of four topics: bike safety, pedestrian safety, poison safety, and drug information. Parents are encouraged to review workbooks with their children.

6. Kids & Parents Learning Together Workshop (That “P” word – Puberty)

Grade 5/6 students and their parents participate in a workshop led by a public health nurse. It is designed to help students and parents become more comfortable with the physical and emotional changes of puberty and to allow students to interview and talk with parents/guardians about their thoughts, feelings, and questions concerning the changes they are experiencing.

7. “What’s the Buzz on Drugs and Alcohol”

Public health nurses provide parent presentations on substance use prevention and parent/student presentations on drugs and alcohol.

8. ADHD Family Support Group – Helping Others Parent Effectively (HOPE)

This support group is co-led by a public health nurse and a parent for parents/caregivers/family of children living with ADHD, learning disabilities, or mental disorders.

Ontario Early Years Centres

<http://www.ontarioearlyyears.ca/oeyc/en/home.htm>

Ontario Early Years Centres are places where parents and caregivers can take part in a range of programs and activities with their children aged 0 to 6. Trained staff and volunteers offer services and programs for parents of children to help parents learn new parenting skills, provide information and referral to other community programs and support early literacy. There are more than 100 centres across Ontario.

Ontario Physical and Health Education Association-- Ophea

Ophea is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting school communities through advocacy, programs and services, and partnership building. Ophea has a number of programs that support parents' efforts to help their children make a lifelong commitment to active, healthy living.

1. Living School

<http://www.livingschool.ca/>

The Living School initiative brings together students, parents, teachers, administrators, boards of education, public health, sport and recreation organizations, community coalitions, local businesses, and municipal governments. Together, they develop, support, and evaluate a comprehensive and coordinated approach to chronic disease prevention in elementary school communities. The Living School initiative currently involves 35 schools from 19 school communities across Ontario. Current funding for the initiative has been provided by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

2. CyberCops

<http://ophea.net/Ophea/Ophea.net/CyberCops.cfm>

CyberCops is an educational, computer-based program that teaches students in Grades 7 and 8 about the risks and safety issues associated with internet use. CyberCops assists students in acquiring the skills needed to recognize and respond to situations that threaten their personal safety and well-being as a result of using the internet. The resource also includes a Parent/Teacher Guide to help parents help their children to use the internet for positive purposes while minimizing risks.

3. Take Action

<http://ophea.net/Ophea/Ophea.net/takeactionoverview.cfm>

Take Action is a comprehensive, classroom-based program designed to support educators and engage school communities in teaching safety awareness regarding medicines and harmful substances. The program provides information about tobacco, alcohol and substance use. Activities are sent home with students and several of these are specifically related to the home environment. Parents are encouraged to complete the activities with their children to reinforce learning.

Ready for School Connects

<http://www.rfsc.ca/toolkit.html>

This school readiness program supports parents and caregivers who are new to Canada to help their children make the transition from home to school. An online toolkit describes what has been learned during the three year project and offers service providers a program model and tools. The program has components for pre-school children and for parents and caregivers. It was developed by Growing Up Healthy Downtown, a partnership of eight Toronto community agencies.

<http://www.fsatoronto.com/programs/guhd.html>

Settlement.org

<http://www.settlement.org/>

This website for newcomers to Ontario is managed by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), and funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The site contains free resource kits on a variety of topics including parenting, information on early child development and parenting teenagers, many of which are published in multiple languages.

Toronto Catholic District School Board-- Health Action Teams

www.tcdsb.org/physicaleducation

In September 2004, TCDSB launched an initiative inviting schools to become Healthy Active School Communities. At the centre of the plan are Health Action Teams, which include school staff, students, parents and other community stakeholders such as Toronto Public Health staff. These teams are involved in identifying health issues that have a negative effect on student learning, developing plans to ameliorate these issues and implementing the plans. Presentations were made to school principals, School Advisory Council members and student leadership groups. Many tools were developed to support these teams. Kick-off, mid-year and celebratory meetings are held each year. To date, 112 of TCDSB's 200 schools have voluntarily come on board. Many of these teams have had exemplary success in engaging parents.

COMMUNICATING

Schools can involve parents by reaching out to families with information about school programs, student progress and transitions to higher grades. Effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications are accessible to all families and may be enhanced by employing a variety of different strategies, such as regular notices with clear information, emails, telephone trees, translators and face-to-face meetings.

Ministry of Education

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/>

The Ministry of Education website has many resources to help parents participate in their children's education. The site has sections on getting involved, helping children learn to read and learn math, preparing for kindergarten, supporting special education students and school council regulations and guidebook.

Niagara Region Public Health Department: Transition to School – Three to Get Ready...Then off to School

www.regional.niagara.on.ca

A group of more than 20 community partners collaborated to develop a 12-month calendar of tips and information to help parents and caregivers cope with the transition from home/daycare/nursery school to senior kindergarten. The calendar is distributed through the school boards as each child is registered for senior kindergarten. Transition-to-school events are held throughout the community for parents and caregivers and include information on school registration, the Public Health Department, speech milestones and speech services, literacy and numeracy. Early learning activities are offered by Ontario Early Years Center staff for children attending the events with their parent/caregiver. The parents/caregivers report that the sessions are very helpful and the calendar has also received great reviews.

Ottawa-Carleton Catholic District School Board

<http://www.occdsb.on.ca/>

1. *Building Bridges Program*

This initiative supports the transition from daycare to school by improving communication between childcare providers, parents and the school. Parents receive a Preschool Profile form in all kindergarten registration packages (also available on the OCCDSB website). They are invited to ask their children's daycare providers to complete the form and return it to the school. This form provides information about the child's emotional, social and academic development in the daycare setting. The information gives kindergarten teachers more knowledge about the children coming to them and creates better communication with parents.

2. *Community Facilitators*

This initiative is jointly coordinated by the English as a Second Language Consultant and a representative of the Catholic Immigration Centre. Community facilitators from Catholic Immigration contact parents and offer their services for interpretation at meetings with teachers or other events at school. Parents report that the service helps them to be better able to understand the education system and the challenges their children are facing. Schools find communication with ESL families easier so they increase efforts to reach out.

3. *Family Welcome Centre Pilot Project*

This pilot project was designed to ensure that all newcomer students entering school have every opportunity to succeed. The Family Welcome Centre recognizes the important role that parents/guardians play in a student's educational success, and offers families a welcoming and supportive introduction to the board's schools and community. The services, offered at one central location, include:

- welcome and orientation to the OCCSB system;
- initial academic assessments (first language, English and mathematics);
- recommendations for placement and ESL program support;
- liaison with board and school staff, and other settlement and community agencies in the Ottawa Carleton Region;
- information and referral to services that families may require;
- ongoing contact for families using the Welcome Centre services.

4. Supported School Readiness

This board-sponsored home visiting program ensures that students entering schools in areas where poverty is a significant factor are well-prepared to come to school. The Manager of Child Care and a board committee oversee the program. Community volunteers, trained as home visitors, visit the home of each child who has newly registered for kindergarten. Parents give permission to be contacted upon registration. The experienced visitors have a checklist of activities and information for parents as well as a package with a book, scissors, glue and crayons. The visits take place before school begins, usually in the spring. The visitors share their observations with the classroom teachers and make referrals to community services for students who require them. Feedback from the schools indicates that parents are more aware of what school entails and how they can prepare their children.

Parry Sound High School Council: Meet-the-teacher-barbeque

School council members organize an annual barbeque with the support of the student council, students and teachers to provide an informal and festive way for parents, students and teachers to meet. Local media and board personnel are also invited to attend.

People for Education-- Parent Resources

www.peopleforeducation.com

People for Education is a charitable, non-partisan parents' group working to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools. The website has many useful resources to help parents understand the education system and learn how to participate in their children's education. Tip sheets on Parent-Teacher interviews and High School Courses and Choices are available in multiple languages.

Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)

http://atwork.settlement.org/sys/atwork_library_detail.asp?doc_id=1003365

Settlement Workers in Schools is a school-based outreach program designed to help newcomer students and their families settle in their schools and communities. SWIS workers explain essential school information and refer newcomers to the appropriate school staff as necessary. The SWIS program has developed the *Newcomers' Guides to Elementary and Secondary School*, a series of handouts on key school topics. The guides

are available in 18 languages and are posted at Settlement.org. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Settlement Agencies and School Boards collaborate to offer SWIS programs in six communities in Ontario:

- Hamilton Settlement Workers in Schools Hamilton SWISH
- Kitchener Settlement and Education Partnerships in Waterloo Region SEPWR
- Ottawa Multicultural Liaison Officers MLO Program
- Peel Multicultural Settlement and Educational Partnership MSEP
- Toronto Settlement and Education Partnerships in Toronto SEPT
- York Settlement and Education Partnership in York Region SEPYR

Settlement.org

<http://www.settlement.org/>

This website for newcomers to Ontario is managed by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, (OCASI) and funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The *Guides to Elementary and Secondary Schools* can be downloaded by chapter in many languages. The Guides provide information about all aspects of the education system for newcomer parents. The site also contains information about ESL, Literacy and International Language programs.

VOLUNTEERING

Parents make significant contributions to their children's schools. Schools can encourage participation by creating flexible schedules, and by matching the talents and interests of parents to the needs of students, teachers, and administrators.

Delta Family Resource Center

<http://www.dfrc.ca/>

This Toronto resource center developed a handbook for parents entitled, "Parents-in-Action, What You Need to Know about Your Child's School Experience," to complement the Center's Parents-in-Action training program.

Perth and Huron Counties-- Healthy School Initiative

Healthy Living Perth and Take Heart Huron introduced a Healthy School Initiative in eight elementary schools in the fall of 2005. Healthy School Committees include staff, students and parents who work together to assess their school's effectiveness in nutrition and physical activity, set priorities and implement action plans. Schools overwhelmingly reported the program was easy to implement and had a very positive impact. The Initiative has since expanded to ten more elementary and two high schools. For more information contact Healthy Living Perth Coordinator, Kerry Price kprice@pdhu.on.ca

Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board- Early Literacy Initiative

Kindergarten teachers lead a language enhancement and early literacy program with the help of volunteer parents. Parents are recruited and trained to read quality literature to children and focus on exploring and developing concepts and text features. This program assists in early intervention to enhance the children's receptive and expressive language and provides an equal opportunity to all children (including those not read to at home) to develop a strong language foundation. Parents benefit from learning about how the process of learning to read evolves and have an opportunity to be involved in their child's school.

York Region Health Services: GIVE (Get Involved, Volunteer in Education)

GIVE! is a collaborative volunteer training program designed by York Region Health Services to offer learning opportunities for parents and other community members while providing support to schools. The focus of this program is to build the confidence of participants, provide transferable parenting and employment skills and create links within the community.

GIVE! provides experiential training on topics such as communication, bullying prevention, conflict resolution, child development, cultural sensitivity, nutrition, and health and safety for school volunteers. Participants report that the program helped them gain a sense of empowerment and comfort within the school setting and the community.

Ottawa-Carleton Catholic District School Board

1. Board Volunteer Days

Teachers and consultants provide a variety of in-service sessions for parents in areas where they might be volunteering or helping in schools such as with math or literacy. The sessions are very popular with parents.

2. Volunteer Coordinator

The Board has hired a volunteer coordinator to recruit volunteers from the community and facilitate the process of conducting police checks and to interview prospective volunteers to determine their interests, goals, availability and choice of location. The coordinator provides a screening process for schools and has increased the board's volunteer complement.

Wilkinson School Council

A Toronto board school council has started a program to welcome new parents, inform them about school events and encourage parent involvement at the earliest stages of their children's formal education. During kindergarten registration, school council volunteers greet parents as they arrive, offer coffee, tea, juice and cookies, and help entertain their children during registration. After the parents have registered, the volunteers provide them with a copy of the council newsletter, an invitation to any upcoming events (Fun Fair, Movie Nights), and an information sheet about the school council and other volunteering opportunities in the school.

LEARNING AT HOME

Family members help their children with homework assignments and other school-related activities. Schools and community organizations may provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home.

Ontario Teachers' Federation and Frontier College-- Literacy Links

www.otffeo.on.ca

This new project is a joint initiative of the Ontario Teachers' Federation and Frontier College. Funded by the Ministry of Education, the project is designed to help parents develop practical ways to support literacy at home and to strengthen connections within communities. A series of *Connecting Community Conferences* will provide an opportunity for principals, teachers, parents and community agencies to expand community networks, learn what schools and communities are doing to promote student success and identify ways to work together.

Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board--Parents as Partners in Education

This initiative assists parents and guardians with low literacy skills to help their children at school. Coordinated by the board's Adult Literacy Co-Coordinator, the board offers a manual and a series of six parent workshops including:

- Families and Schools: Listening and Learning;
- Families and Schools: Working Together;
- Helping with homework;
- Understanding the provincial report Card;
- Provincial testing: What's it all about?; and
- Summer Fun, Growing Pains.

The program gives parents an opportunity to understand the education process, their child's school and how they can help. Many of the parents have not had a good experience with school, and this initiative helps them build positive relationships.

DECISION-MAKING

Schools may include parents in decision-making about their own children or involve them in school decisions through school councils, committees and regional school councils. Parents may also join independent community groups to work for improvements in education. Schools and community groups can support parent involvement in decision-making by providing training and information to help them participate effectively.

Association for Bright and Gifted Children of Ontario

<http://www.abcontario.ca/>

This volunteer, provincially incorporated support and advocacy group, has chapters across Ontario. It is dedicated to providing information and support to parents of bright and gifted children/adolescents through newsletters, networking, an annual conference and local workshops.

Association Franco-Ontarienne des Conseils Scolaires Catholiques (AFOCSC)

<http://www.afocsc.org/>

AFOCSC promotes the interests of Catholic education in the French language in Ontario. The AFOCSC is directed by a board of directors of eleven people, a representative from each of the eight school councils, a representative of the school administrations, a moral adviser, and a general director.

Autism Society of Ontario (ASO)

<http://www.autismsociety.on.ca/>

ASO has 29 Chapters throughout the Province of Ontario and provides information and education for families, supports research, and advocacy for programs and services for the autism community.

Canadian Parents for French, Ontario

<http://www.cpfont.on.ca/>

CPF is an organization of individuals and families who value French second-language programs. They work to enhance the quality of French as a Second Language education in schools and in communities. Members plan, provide and encourage activities in French outside the classroom.

Families Are Important Resources (FAIR)

www.fsatoronto.com/programs/guhd/fair.html

FAIR is a project of Growing Up Healthy Downtown, a partnership of eight community-based multi-service agencies working with families across downtown Toronto. It offers a range of programs to support children from birth to age six and their families. The FAIR project will increase skills and knowledge for parents, enhance local parent advisory councils and develop broad-based networks. The long term impact of this project will be sustained involvement of disadvantaged families in their communities either through FAIR, parent networks or with other groups.

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario

<http://ldao.ca/>

LDAO is a charitable non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of children, youth and adults with learning disabilities. The organization is supported by thousands of members across Ontario and has a newsletter, an information line and annual conferences.

Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education

<http://www.oapce.on.ca/>

OAPCE represents parents and guardians of children enrolled in publicly funded Catholic schools in Ontario. The association hosts an annual conference, and provides input to the Ministry and the government on education issues from the perspective of Catholic parents. Over 1000 Ontario Catholic schools have parent members of OAPCE.

Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations

<http://www.ofhsa.on.ca/>

This organization of volunteers has worked to support public education at the school, school board and provincial level since 1916. OFHSA provides support, training, resources and advice to parents and members, offers an annual conference, a newsletter, and submits research papers for government and Ministry consultations.

Ontario School Council Support Centre

<http://www.schoolcouncils.net/>

The Ontario School Council Support Centre is a research and support centre operated on a volunteer basis. Resources and information provided by the Support Centre are intended to provide impartial, research-based, or experience-based perspectives to enable school councils to become increasingly effective and focused on improving student learning.

Parents partenaires en education

<http://reseauppe.ca/>

This provincial organization represents the parents of children registered in publicly-funded French-language schools in Ontario. It provides a variety of publications on education issues, has an annual conference, and is the voice for francophone parents in provincial education consultations.

People for Education

www.peopleforeducation.com

This provincial parents' group works to support publicly funded education in the province by engaging parents to be more involved in their children's education, conducting a province-wide Tracking Project of staff, programs and resources in every Ontario school and coordinating a comprehensive media strategy to publicize education issues. They have a website, an information phone line, an annual conference, a listserv, conduct training for newcomer parents and publish a bi-monthly newsletter.

Regional School Councils

Many areas of the province have regional or district school councils that work to involve parents and school councils in understanding and becoming actively engaged in current issues in education. They are umbrella organizations for all the school councils in a board or region. They play an important role in strengthening the involvement of parents and the community in its schools and in Board decision-making. Some examples are:

1. Greater Toronto Catholic Parent Network

<http://www.gtcpn.com/>

2. The Lakehead Regional School Councils

3. Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils

<http://www.ocasc.ca/>

4. Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Council Parents Association

<http://www.occscpa.ca/>

5. Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Councils

<http://www.pvnccdsb.on.ca/schools/catholic-school-councils.asp>

6. Thames Valley District School Council

<http://www.tvdsb.on.ca/schoolcouncils/districtdir.shtml>

COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY

Schools can help to link families with support services offered by other agencies, such as healthcare, cultural events, tutoring services, and after-school child-care programs. They also can help families, students and community groups provide services to the community.

Community Living Ontario

<http://www.communitylivingontario.ca/>

Community Living Ontario is an association of over 100 affiliated local associations that provide direct services and support to individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families. Community Living Ontario supports the activities of local associations by providing resources, information, training and consultation in the areas of family support, education, human rights, community participation and advocacy. "Building Inclusive Schools," is a three-year project to help school districts adopt inclusive education.

Ontario Inclusion Learning Network

<http://www.count-me-in.ca/about.htm>

OILN is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada to develop provincial and regional inclusion learning networks and create a policy framework to use inclusion principles and strategies in the delivery of public health programs in Canada.

Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition

<http://www.opha.on.ca/ohsc/>

OHSC works to raise awareness within the government and the public of the value of and the need for comprehensive approaches to school-based health promotion. Members participate in four or five teleconferences per year to enable members across Ontario to share successes in school-health promotion and to identify opportunities for promoting healthy schools.

Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO)

<http://www.ociso.org/>

OCISO has Multicultural Liaison Officer (MLO) partnerships with several Ottawa area school boards to address the settlement needs of immigrant children and their families. The MLOs orient immigrant students and parents to the education system and to their roles and responsibilities, offering service in more than 20 languages. They encourage parents to get involved in the school, advocate for students and parents, provide language and cultural interpretation at meetings involving staff members, parents and students and contact parents about the educational and social development of their children and keep them informed about events at the school.