

## Parents as Partners- the role of DPAC

Parent groups have been active in BC's public schools for over eighty years. On September 8, 1915, the first official parent organization was launched at the oldest school in the province, Craigflower on the outskirts of Victoria.

By 1922, the idea of parent involvement in education had spread so far across the province that it was evident that a provincial organization was needed. More than 60 associations sent 283 delegates to a conference in Vancouver to create a plan for a provincial federation. On April 22, 1922, the BC Parent Teacher Federation was formed, and plans were made to promote the ideals and objectives of the organization in all schools in the province.

Over the years, the provincial federation was successful in providing input to government on many educational, health, and safety issues affecting children and youth in BC. The name was changed to include the words "Home and School", and the federation became a member of the Canadian Home and School Federation.

The BC chapter undertook provincial surveys, the last of which was to gather input for the Royal Commission on Education in 1987. Following the two-year Commission, the BC government amended the School Act to give parents the right to belong to a parent advisory council in their school, and through it to advise the board, principal, and staff on *any* matter relating to the school. Many parent organizations already in place in schools became the official parent advisory council for the school. Many more schools acquired a council for the first time.

More legislative changes came in 2002. Parents were given the right to form a district parent advisory council in their school district, and through it to advise the board on *any* matter relating to education in the district.

The purpose of DPAC is to encourage and promote meaningful parental involvement in the education of all students within the public school system.

The role of the DPAC is to advise the school board on parental views about the school districts programs and policies. This is done by meetings with the superintendent and by the superintendent along with his associates attending DPAC and DPAC executive meetings.

The school trustees elected to make decisions on behalf of the entire community may consult with the DPAC prior to making decisions. The trustees will meet with the executive by invitation at executive meetings and regularly attend DPAC meetings. Any one can bring forth an issue to either the Ed Policy committee which deals with educational issues like Schools of Choice; OP Policy for items relating to the physical plant such as parent rooms and seismic. These committees then make recommendations to the Board.

The DPAC expresses its views after receiving feedback from the PACs. Any parent of a child registered in the district is eligible to send a representative. The DPAC communicates with PACs through email, mailing systems and attendance at regular monthly meetings. Each school sends a parent rep.

BCCPAC is the parent voice on provincial committees dealing with a wide range of issues, including student assessment, Aboriginal education, curriculum, and school safety. Just as a principal consults with the PAC on school issues and a school board consults with the DPAC on district issues, the Minister of Education consults with BCCPAC on public education issues in the province.

The district level parent body is responsible:

- for providing parent representation on all district standing and ad hoc committees
- for participating in the selection of key district personnel
- for participating in setting the district annual budget
- for providing input to the District Leadership Team
- for providing input on in-camera discussions and decisions to ensure that the parent voice is heard
- for collaborating in the evaluation and development of educational policies and procedures
- for collaborating in the planning and delivery of in service, including in service about parent involvement
- for ongoing liaison with all education partners
- for utilizing effectively the school district's services to disseminate information to the district parent community
- for utilizing and distributing funds allocated for the support of parent involvement in the education of their students
- for ongoing advocacy for parents and students
- for holding regular meetings with PACs and ensuring district-wide school representation in the district PAC

The school district and school administrations are responsible:

- for providing parent representatives with complete and clear information on a timely basis so that effective parent participation is optimized
- for providing active support and resources to parents facilitating the full realization of a responsible and responsive partnership
- for collaborating with PACs and DPAC as partners in the organization of schools and the district.

The primary objective of our schools is to meet the educational needs of our students, and the genuine participation of parents at all levels in their students' education has been demonstrated to have a proportional, significant and positive impact on student achievement, and emotional/social well-being.

Everyone should be cognizant that when parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socio economic status, ethnic/racial background, or parents' education level, at all ages at all grade levels; students have better attendance, and more positive attitudes and behaviours. Schools where parents are involved have improved teacher morale, are held in higher regards in the community; their programs increase student success rates compared to identical programs without parental involvement. Parents know their student best and are their best advocates. The relationship of parents and parent organizations with all educational partners is pivotal for educational decision-making, which has students as its first priority.

It should look like this:

- Communication between home and school is regular, two-way and meaningful
- Communication between parent representative organizations (PACs, DPAC) and administrative staffs at the school and district levels, is regular, two-way, meaningful and reflective of their joint responsibilities for students' educational needs
- Parenting skills are promoted and supported at classroom, school and district levels
- Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning
- Parents are an integral part of educational problem identification, strategy development and implementation plans for their individual student and representative parent organizations for students at large

- Parents are welcome in the school and their support and assistance, beyond fundraising, are actively sought
- Parents, as full partners, are involved in a genuine and continuous way at all levels of decision-making in the schools and the school district
- Parent involvement is a process that evolves over time
- District policies, regulations and bylaws are consistent with the policy of meaningful parent involvement
- Meaningful parent involvement is taken to include the following:
  - driven by educational motive
  - is directed at the needs of the individual student and students in general
  - assumes that home and school are interdependent
  - assumes that parents need to be educated about the school and that teachers need to be educated about the home
  - is viewed as an important vehicle for school improvement
  - is based upon sustained and free collaboration between school and home

Resources should be provided to schools, PACs and VCPAC to develop parent involvement programs

#### WHY INVOLVE PARENTS IN EDUCATION?

Parents have important insights and understandings that can enhance decision-making in schools. They have an important task in reminding schools of what is meaningful and relevant to their children. Parent participation can assist in increasing goodwill and communication and in developing a sense of community within the school. When parents begin to take a more active role in their child's school they begin to broaden their perspectives, thinking and acting more globally, taking into account how decisions affect all students, not just their own. In the end we have decided as a culture that education is too important to be left just to educators, and that parenting is too important to be left solely to the parents. Those axioms...lead to shared power and shared responsibilities.

Parents have the right and responsibility to participate in the process of determining the educational goals, policies and services for their children. They have a primary responsibility to ensure that children are provided with the healthy and supportive environment necessary for learning. They have a responsibility to help shape and support the goals of the school system and to share the tasks of educating their young. Parent and family involvement must be supported by homes, schools, communities and interested others by working together in a mutually collaborative way.

All parents/families and educators must make family involvement in education a priority. The foundation for a successful home-school partnership is effective communication, which encourages the development of mutual support between home and school. Parents and educators must effectively communicate and join forces to make sure children are successful learners. A broad spectrum of families, school staff and community representatives must be significantly involved in school governance and decision making in the local school and system wide level. Improved student achievement must be the equally shared responsibility and ultimate goal of parents, teachers, the school system as a whole and the community at large. All this is necessary to enable parents to become active partners in education.

I envision parent partnership as a way to assist families, the community, the school district and staff, working in collaboration in all aspects of the learning process. I envision this being done through mutual respect, sharing knowledge, supporting each partner's role, consulting on all matters, and appreciating the contribution each partner makes. Parents and teachers are partners in children's learning. By working together and being involved in the decisions affecting our children makes this a successful partnership. "What can we and the school/ school district do together to make something possible? Partnership with parents plays a key role in promoting a culture of co-operation between parents, schools, the board and others. A key objective is that parents can play a full and active role in the assessment of their child's needs.

Thank – you.

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Victoria Confederation of Parents Advisory Council