Parents as Partners in Their Children's Learning: Toolkit

Parents as Partners Toolkit

Introduction

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These pages provide parents and schools with a practical resource to support partnership with parents in all aspects of children's learning. They look at the ways parents and caregivers can be involved and include advice and practical materials to support parental involvement.

The toolkit includes:

- Checklists
- Practice examples that can be used or adapted
- Activities
- Methods to help people identify issues and express their ideas
- Ways of resolving parental complaints/concerns

Who the toolkit is for:

- Parents: there are ideas about how to get involved in their child's education and learning.
- Teachers and school staff: there are practical methods and good practice examples of how to develop effective partnerships with parents.
- PAC: there is material to support PAC development.

The toolkit will also be useful to other people who are helping parents and teachers work together to support children's learning. This might include community learning and development teams, family support staff, and learning support staff. It will be useful to all those people who have an interest in making the school a part of the community it serves, including students, children's extended families, and people from the local community.

The Difference Parents Make

What does parental involvement in children's learning mean?

There are three main ways parents can get involved in supporting their children's learning:

- Learning at home: Parents are the first and ongoing educators of their own children and, as such, should receive information and support to help develop their child's learning at home, in the community and at school.
- Home-school partnership: Schools must be open to the involvement of parents in the work they do and they should consider ways of providing information that helps parents engage with school and their children's education.
- Parental representation: Parents should have the opportunity to express their views and have these taken into account on policy matters affecting the education of their children. All parents are members of the Parent Advisory Council at their child's school.

The BC School Act recognises the vital role that parents play in supporting their children's learning by giving 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. It aims to help parents to be:

- Involved in their child's education and learning
- Welcomed as an active participant in the life of the school
- Encouraged to express their views on school education generally.

These partnerships help all children become:

- Successful learners
- Confident individuals
- Responsible citizens
- Effective contributors.

Benefits of Involvement

The benefits for the children are:

- It is easier for children to learn when they get encouragement from home.

- They will do better and achieve more when their parents are involved.
- Children get access to more activities in and out of school when there are more adults to help.
- Their concerns can be sorted out more quickly when their parents have a positive relationship with school staff.
- They are happy when their parents are enjoying events in the school.

The benefits for parents are:

- Their children do better when they are involved.
- They are better able to help and encourage their children.
- They have more information about their children's education.
- Parents can build their own confidence and skills.
- Where there is a positive relationship between parents and their child's school there are benefits all round.
- Parents get reassurance that their children are receiving a good education.

The benefits for the school are:

- Parents bring skills which complement teachers' skills and expertise.
- Parents contribute their time, so together parents and teachers are able to do more activities with students than teachers can do on their own.
- Students' achievement and behaviour improve.
- Parents have ideas about how the school can best support the children.
- Teachers have people with whom they can talk over ideas and get help when developing plans for the school.
- Parents can give advice and help reach other parents.

The benefits for Administration are:

- The ideas and experience of a wider pool of people lead to a better strategy which will support participation by more parents.
- Administration gets information on how its policies and education provision are working out in practice.
- Administration is able to discuss plans and ideas for education development with a wide range of parents.
- Parents who are involved in other representative groups help make sure the education policies link in well with the other policies and provision for people living in that area.

What helps parents, teachers and administration work together?

People can work together most easily when three factors are present.

- Issues: People are working together on issues which they think are important.
- Ways of working: The way they work together respects and values each person's contribution. It is realistic in terms of the time and effort it takes. The process welcomes and encourages people who have less experience or confidence.
- Getting results: Working together gets results. People can see their effort has been worthwhile and that they have been listened to.

'When I started coming to the parents' meetings I was scared to speak. Now I'm not, and I'd like to be able to speak in public like the others.' A parent

Checklist - questions to help identify and encourage healthy partnerships

- [ ] Are parents involved in deciding what the issues are?

- [ ] Do parents choose issues that are most important to them? Are all parents involved in this process in ways that are accessible to them?

- [ ] Do people know about other routes they can use to raise issues that are of concern to them?

- [ ] Do all parents have the opportunity to contribute?

- [ ] Is information available in the languages used by parents of children at this school or living in this area?

- [ ] Do parents know they can get access to supports such as translators to help them get involved?

- [ ] What arrangements are there to include parents who live a distance away?

- [ ] Do parents know they can contribute in many different ways – such as text, email, letter, phone, leaving comments and suggestions at the school, as well as through meetings?

- [ ] How are people who are less confident or less experienced getting encouragement to take part?

- [ ] How will people know if their ideas and views have led to changes?

Example - parents supporting healthy eating

An elementary school involved parents in improving school meals. Parents tested school lunches and took an interest in the nutritional value of the meals, which led to the school meals service changing its menus. As the school meals improved more children chose to have them regularly.

With the help of a local trust fund and local gardening firm, a school garden was developed to grow fresh produce for use in school meals and for snacks.

Example - a school community collaborating on a safer school travel plan

Parents and staff of Cedar Hill Middle School worked in cooperation with Saanich Safer City to create a safer school travel plan. Through the program, priorities were defined and realistic solutions were created for addressing identified school road safety related issues.

Cedar Hill Middle School worked together with key community partners to achieve this goal. The solutions generated identify strategies from three key perspectives: Education, Enforcement and Engineering. The final plan identifies both short and long term goals within each focus.

Purpose of the Safer School Travel Plan:

- Identify safety concerns for the student population, parents and school staff traveling to and from the school.
- Collaborate with the municipality, school community, school district, police, ICBC, and other stakeholders to identify and implement changes to enhance safety of student travel.
- Develop and include strategies for all modes of transportation and from the three key disciplines of Education, Enforcement and Engineering.
- Increase support for safe pedestrian and bicycle travel and/or other vehicle reduction initiatives.

Click **here** to view their full report.

Involving All Parents

Because all children benefit from the interest and involvement of their parents, it is important to make sure that all parents have opportunities to be involved in their children's learning and education.

Every parent wants the best for their child but may have difficulty participating in some activities. This does not mean that they are not interested or not doing what they can to support their child's learning but they may find it difficult to be involved in the school. The key is to ensure that as many opportunities as possible are available to parents.

Barriers to Involvement

Time

Parents are busy people. They might:

- Be working either full- or part-time
- Be bringing up young children
- Have children attending different schools.

Family circumstances

Families come in all shapes and sizes and have different needs. Parents may find it particularly difficult to attend meetings if they:

- Have a child with special needs
- Have a baby or other caring responsibilities
- Work shifts or work away from home
- Have a complex family structure: they might be separated from their partner; some might have new partners.

Geography

The area parents live in can be a significant factor in how much they are involved in school-based activities. Some barriers to their involvement include:

- Parents and students having to travel some distance to the school
- Lack of transportation
- Having to walk through unsafe areas

Parents may feel uncomfortable in school surroundings for a number of reasons:

- It may bring back unpleasant memories of their own school days.
- Some may feel that their own lack of knowledge or skills puts them at a disadvantage.
- Some parents may have difficulty themselves with reading or writing.
- English may not be their first language.
- Parents may feel that there is no place for them in the school or that the school is not welcoming.
- Some men may feel out of place and that they don't have a role because many activities held during the day are mainly attended by women.

Unfamiliarity

Many parents feel that membership of a formal parent body is 'not for them'. They may perceive them as 'closed', 'cliquey', 'elitist' or 'formal', or not see themselves as the right kind of person to be involved. These perceptions can be a real barrier to parents putting themselves forward.

Activity 1
Involving all parents at your schools

Purpose	Who will be involved

To measure where you are now in involving all parents. This activity can be repeated later to measure progress and to consider how you achieved this.

- o Parent Council
- o Other agencies
- o School staff
- o Students

Work in pairs

Step 1
On a scale of 0-5, where would you say you are now in relation to involving parents?
0 = lot of room for improvement
5 = things are exactly how parents want them

Why have you decided on this rating?

Make a list of the different ways parents are involved in supporting their child's learning

Step 2

Where on the scale would you like to get to?

What needs to change to move up to where you want to be?

What kinds of things do parents, students and staff need to be doing to reach this score?

What difference will this make to students, parents and the school?

Step 3

After working in pairs share your scores with others in the group on a blank 0-5 scale to get an overall picture

Step 4

Share views on why you think you are where you are on the scale and what you could do to improve. Plan out the action that is needed to reach where you want to be – keep this realistic and achievable.

Carry out this exercise again 6 to 12 months later to assess the progress achieved.

What it looks like when things go well

- The school is a welcoming place with space for parents and clear indications that they are welcome and valued, e.g. a parents' room or welcome posters, possibly developed with parents, in all the languages represented in the school.
- There are opportunities at various times during the day, and in the evening for parents to meet teachers to discuss their child's progress.
- School events and activities take account of any specific cultural or religious festivals that may affect the involvement of some parents.
- School events and activities take account of any financial limitations that may affect the involvement of some parents. Arrangements are made to waive the cost and/or events are scheduled to reflect provincial payment dates (e.g. child tax benefit payments).
- Parents are able to get actively involved at various times in both regular (e.g. weekly commitments) and infrequent activities.
- The school is aware of any particular difficulties a parent may have in participating in school activities (e.g. through disability, access or language difficulties) and makes arrangements to provide appropriate support.
- Parents are asked when their child enrols if there is anything that would help them to get involved, e.g. translation, interpretation, childcare, transport.
- The school development plan provides an opportunity for staff, parents and students to have discussions about the different ways parents could be involved in school activities and how these will be developed and supported.
- Childcare and/or transport are arranged (or paid for) for parents' evenings, Parent Advisory Council meetings or other events where some parents might need it.
- There are social events that build relationships between parents, teachers and school staff.
- Parents are asked directly and personally to participate in a particular activity by the teacher.
- Parents are encouraged to get other parents involved - by bringing a friend.
- No parent is turned away if they volunteer to help and the skills and enthusiasm that parent volunteers bring are matched to the needs of the school.
- There are activities that make it easy for families to take part and develop positive relationships with each other, school staff and other families, e.g. outings, picnics and cultural events.

Foster Parents and Guardians

Foster children can face barriers to achieving success in education. In order to achieve this, it is vital that schools are aware of the children in their school who are in care and that they keep in contact with the appropriate parent or guardian. This may be a relative or a foster parent. It is equally important that Parent Advisory Councils be welcoming to foster parents and guardians and include them in all school activities.

Checklist – questions to help you think about how you support equal opportunities and diversity

☐ Do parents who do not use English as their first language get information about their children's learning and about opportunities to get involved? (This includes parents who are deaf and use Sign Language as well as people who use other spoken languages.)

☐ Are parents who have a disability aware of support they can receive to get to the school and to other events such as consultation meetings?

☐ Do parents and teachers have access to aids and equipment, or to services such as translators, which will help them to communicate with each other?

☐ Do parents who find it difficult to come to the school on their own know that they can bring a friend or relative who may be able to support them?

☐ Are there arrangements in place for parents who have other daytime responsibilities to keep in touch with the school?

☐ Is there encouragement and practical help for fathers to be involved?

☐ Is the school environment welcoming for dads?

☐ Are both mothers and fathers encouraged to be involved in every aspect of parental involvement?

☐ Is there practical support to help parents – mothers or fathers – who are living on their own with the children to be involved?

☐ Do parents know that their partner or a relative can represent them in situations where the involvement is specific to their role as the child's parent?

☐ Do all partners of all parents feel they are welcome to get involved as volunteers at the school, and be part of the events to involve families, so that each child is there with their family?

☐ Are there arrangements in place to make it easy for parents living in each part of the school catchment area to be involved?

☐ Does the school keep parents of children and young people who are temporarily absent from the school informed of school activities?

Children's circumstances

☐ Are the parents of children with additional support needs encouraged to take part in the same range of activities as other parents?

☐ Are children who are cared for encouraged to identify the people who are taking on parenting roles for them and who they want to see being involved?

Example - bilingual reading club

Four primary schools which are part of a learning community with a large number of minority ethnic families worked together to set up a Reading Club initiative for parents and children where English is not their first language.

Regular afternoon reading club meetings were held for parents and children with interpreters present to translate and support discussion with teachers. Themed story packs with activities (games, soft toys and puppets) were provided in the family's own language and sessions were held emphasising the value of reading together at home. Other resources available included:

- Dual-language books - fiction and non-fiction
- Dual-language dictionaries
- Translation and interpreting services.

Many parents reported a benefit to their own learning and felt that their English improved. Mothers reported social benefits in meeting with other mothers, and a general improvement in their own relationships with their children.

Staff said that they have developed a greater insight into and understanding of the needs of bilingual learners and parents. They can now enjoy much more positive, supportive relationships with bilingual parents.

Example - a Parent Resource Room

What space in your school can parents call their own? Over 10 years ago, parents in the Fernwood community created a room for themselves at George Jay Elementary School. This comprehensive initiative paved the way for sweeping changes to the relationship between the school and its parent community.

About the Resource Room:

- The Parent Resource Room is open daily from 8:30am to 3:30pm.

- A Family Liaison and Community Outreach Counsellor offers:
  - Counselling and support to parents dealing with issues such as family conflict, drug and alcohol problems, separation and divorce, grief and loss, or anger management.
  - Assistance with plans to manage a child's difficult behaviour at home.

- o Referrals to local agencies and organisations.
  - o Information and assistance with school issues.
  - o Advocacy and mediation.
  - o Information on local services, recreational programs and housing.
  - o Assistance with career planning and life skills.
  - o Parent education programs on a wide range of issues.
  - o Volunteer training and help in finding a volunteer placement at George Jay School.
- Parents use the Resource Room to...
  - o Find support and meet other parents.
  - o Read the newspaper and enjoy a cup of tea or coffee.
  - o Borrow materials on parenting and educational issues.
  - o Access support services.
  - o Use the clothing exchange.
  - o Use a computer.
  - o Find information on community resources.
  - o Pick up a loaf of bread (on Wednesdays)
  - o Work on a project for a teacher.
  - o Attend parenting classes.
  - o Much much more...

Example - involving fathers - the Challenge Dad project

The Challenge Dad project engaged men in learning opportunities that valued their existing skills and experience as a parent and as a foundation for further learning.

A range of activities and events were offered through the project:

- Engagement activities, such as five-a-side football
- Learning activities, such as joint parent and child events and one-to-one literacy work
- Parenting or social skills.
- Challenge Dad activities were weekly or monthly dependent on the availability of the fathers. Working fathers, for example, preferred activities to happen on the weekend.

Other ideas for involving fathers

Some schools have developed successful programs for involving fathers that are not based on the traditional models of activity-based family learning. Examples include:

- Engagement with individual fathers about a specific child's learning and behaviour
- Making use of father-specific skills to support work in the classroom and also to support children in a mentoring capacity
- Father-support networks and adult learning programmes for fathers as part of an 'extended school' program.

Activity 2
Identifying skills and experience that parents bring to the school

Purpose	Who will be involved
To conduct a survey at a parents evening to identify: o The skills and experience parents have that they could offer to the school o The times that best suit parents for involvement with the school	o Parent Council members o Principal o School staff o Parents attending Parent evenings

A sample parent survey is provided. Some specific questions could be added. The survey is designed for an interviewer to complete in one-to-one conversation with parents. Parents evening or other school events might be good to carry out the survey.

The survey could be extended outside the school to meet parents in places they feel comfortable. Visits to community groups might help parents feel more at ease. Talking to parents at the school gate as they drop off or pick up their children is another option.

Once the survey has been completed the information can be used to help the school and the Parent Council to work out ways to involve parents by asking them to share their skills and experience. Information about times which are good for parents will help with planning activities, events or meetings.

The survey could be repeated at the beginning of the school year to include parents who are new to the school

Sample parent survey
School Parent Advisory Council

Introduction

Hello. I wonder if you could spare a few minutes. My name is ………………...
and I'm a member of the Parent Advisory Council. One of the things we do as the
Parent Advisory Council is support the school by involving all parents as far as
possible. We know that everyone is busy but it would really help us if you could
answer a few questions about your interests and skills and whether you feel you
have time to get involved in some way to support your child and all children at the
school.

By answering this you are not making a commitment and you don't have to take part
but it would really help us to plan activities for parents and children in the future. [If
parent refuses, offer them the form to fill in at home and return to school if this is
what they would prefer.]

Could you tell me your name and which classes your children are in.

Parents name   Child / children's classes

Question 1
Do you think you have any particular interests, experiences or skills that could help
the school in any way? May be just two or three things?

Prompt
There may be things that you already do at home, cooking, sewing or craft activities,
gardening, decorating.

There may be skills that you use at work, IT skills, typing, web design, catering.

You may have interests or hobbies, sport activities, or arts and music skills or
interests that you could share.

Question 2
We know that all parents are busy people but we would like to ask if you have any
time that you could spare to support the school or support school activities. We are
not looking for any major commitment but just to get an idea of what times suit
people best.

What time would suit you best?

Before school ☐   Immediately after school ☐   During the school day ☐

Evenings ☐   [If yes]   Start time: Finish time:

Weekends ☐

Is there anything that would help you attend at any time – e.g. transport or childcare?

If you are interested in getting involved would you rather just do something occasionally (say once a term) or could you make a more regular commitment?

How much time do you feel you would be able to offer - even 10 mins can be useful?

Thank you very much. One of the things we would like to do is to share this information with the school to help us to plan future activities. Are you happy for us to do this?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes could you please mark this form to show that you are happy for this information to be shared?

Are there any other comments or suggestions that you would like to make about the school or Parent Advisory Council?

Signed ……………………………………………………………….

Thank you again.

Learning at Home

Children learn from the moment they are born as they begin to absorb information and make sense of their world. As well as providing the basics for growth and development, food, comfort and security, parents also provide stimulation through everyday activities, games, rhymes and language that help a child to learn. Many of these activities are part of everyday life - preparing and eating meals together, doing the washing, shopping, watching TV, visiting friends and family - but for young children they are opportunities for discovery and learning.

'Eighty-five per cent of the language we use as adults is in place by the time we are 5 years old and 50 per cent is in place by the time we are three years old.'

This emphasises the importance of parents and the home environment in supporting children's learning and development. Mostly this happens naturally as part of family life. Parents want to do the best for their children and do what they can to achieve this. However, once children start school it is not always easy to know how best to help your child. As children grow older it is easy to forget the strong influence that the home and the community still have on their learning and education. After all, children only spend 15 per cent of their time in school. Schools can do a lot to make the links between what is being taught in school and learning opportunities that exist at home and in the community. This section looks at how parents can be helped to continue their children's learning at home.

When Things Go Well

What it looks like when things go well

- Parents get lots of encouragement from the school to take part in their children's learning - and there is evidence that they do take part.
- Schools and teachers keep parents informed of what their children will be learning in school so that they can discuss this with their children at home.
- Parents and staff tackle areas of difficulty and concern together.
- Schools provide specific fun activities for children and parents to do at home.
- Parents support their children's learning by helping with homework and making links with other areas of school work.
- Parents spend one-to-one time with their children and also enjoy shared family activities/visits.
- Parents and children know that everyone's contribution is valued.

- Children receive additional support from the individual attention they get from their parents.
- The ways of communicating with parents reflect the diversity of parents and their needs.
- There are open channels of communication so that parents feel comfortable talking to teachers and making them aware of how children's learning is being supported at home.
- Teachers discuss with parents and children the activities they undertake at home so that these can be incorporated into their learning in school.

Checklist – parents and teachers working together to promote parents' involvement in children's learning

☐	Do parents get information about how they can help with their children's learning? Is this provided in a variety of formats including written and face to face? Are other forms of electronic methods used?
☐	Do parents know how they can share information about their child with the school? How are they able to do this?
☐	Are parents asked about how they want to get information and communicate with the school and does the school make arrangements to respond appropriately?
☐	Is it easy for parents to communicate with the school in ways that suit them?
☐	Is there a school website? Does it include a parents' section? Does it contain details of what children will be learning each term? Does it contain suggestions of what parents can be doing at home to extend and reinforce this learning?
☐	Is there information in the school and in other places about access to adult learning and other ways parents can build their own confidence and skills?
☐	Are parents encouraged to share their interests and skills with their children? How does this happen?
☐	Does the school ensure that they understand the needs of all parents and provide ways of supporting them to help their children's learning at home? For example, some parents might need help with literacy and numeracy skills in order to support their child.
☐	Do parents who are not living with their children – for example, parents who are separated or someone who is working away – get regular updates on what is happening for their child?
☐	Is there support within the District to support parents, families, and children who may be experiencing particular difficulties?
☐	Do parents know that members of the extended family can be involved too, if this is how the family want to do things?
☐	Are schools working together to help parents as well as children with the transition from Pre-school to Elementary, Elementary to Middle and Middle to Secondary school?

☐	Are there links with other agencies that can support parents in their role as educators – for example, Libraries, Community Centres, Community Learning Centres, Social Workers, Adult Literacy Staff?
☐	Do parents know about and get access to the resources that are available?
☐	Have parents been involved in developing the school newsletter and any other leaflets that are sent to parents?

Example - Supporting children's learning at home

A teacher has developed a range of leaflets to keep parents informed on what children are learning in the class and how they can support this at home. There is a welcome leaflet and a general leaflet which describes the curriculum, illustrated with pictures of children in the class. These are available to all parents in a display by the entrance to the class.

In addition there are leaflets covering specific topics used by the teacher throughout the year. Each leaflet has four sections:

- At school we are learning about ... (eg The jobs people do, Night time)
- At school we will ... (indicates what it is that children will learn)
- We will learn by ... (describes the activities that will be undertaken)
- At home we can ... (suggests activities that parents and children can do together at home to support their learning)

The leaflets are simple, clear and attractively illustrated and each one highlights three or four simple activities that all parents can undertake with their child at home.

Example - Support for schools from other teams

Following the introduction of easy-to-use cameras, a course was piloted to encourage parents to learn to use the cameras and support their child's learning at the same time.

Parents were invited to come along and have some fun with the cameras. They took the cameras home and recorded their child's learning at home. On return to the school an IT tutor and a literacy tutor, using the school's computer suite, worked with the parents to use the software to create storybooks with text and special effects.

Most parents had no previous computer experience, but over the six-week course learned how to produce storybooks including some of the pictures they had taken. Parents and children were thrilled with the results and with their new-found skills, which were put to use in the class, where the parents are helping the staff and children to use the camera more effectively.

Example - Communicating with parents about their child's progress

An elementary school sent out questionnaires to get a clearer idea of parents' and children's views of homework and what information they wanted from school.

A workshop for parents, teachers and students to explore purposes, expectations and communications in relation to homework was held. This was followed up with a small working group to develop a homework policy and communications system for home-school links. Parents and children are involved in a weekly review of their learning using a new home-school diary. The school also bought a number of books on learning and learning styles for the parents' library and the staff library.

The benefits were:

- Parents had a greater understanding of what goes on in school, could communicate regularly with the school and had a clearer idea of the school's expectations of homework.
- Parents had a starter for discussion with their children about what they had been learning in school.
- Children had a weekly opportunity to review their learning, assess their achievements and highlight their learning needs.
- Staff had a clearer idea of the sorts of activities that parents wanted for home learning and had an easy and routine means of communicating with parents.
- Schools organised family learning events, giving the opportunity to make initial contacts with parents.

Example - Including all parents in a playing with math project

An elementary school in an area with many ethnic communities developed a project to help parents support their children's learning in math.

School staff received training on the math program which was going to be used and parents were given a personal invitation to attend an informal meeting about the program. The Principal, the class teacher and the tutor who had developed the resource spoke to parents at the meeting. Interpreters were provided.

Parents agreed to come to the school for an hour each week (for six weeks), to play math games in school with their child. Interpreters were available to help communication between parents and school staff. Having helped their

child to choose a game, parents took it home and agreed to play with their child for 10-15 minutes each day.

The benefits for parents were that they:

- Felt more comfortable in the school environment
- Became aware of the importance that school staff place on the parental role in children's education
- Gained input from staff that enabled them to support their child's learning
- Identified opportunities for learning that were not previously apparent
- Learned that helping to educate their child was fun
- Saw that school staff valued their first language.

The benefits for staff were that they:

- Became aware that links could be built with parents - it simply required the right kind of activity
- Saw that involving parents requires effort and good planning
- Valued parents' involvement and saw them in a new light.

The benefits for children were that they:

- Enjoyed quality time with their parents
- Saw that staff valued their first language
- Experienced games that they may not have had at home
- Gained confidence in basic mathematical concepts
- Understood their parents are valued when they saw them working in partnership with staff.

This project helped the school identify other ways in which parents can be involved and it has already embarked upon a program of book and toy lending. Since an initial session led by the bilingual support teacher, a parent in the school has led the project.

Activities and Resources

Activities and sample parent prompts

Activity 1 sets out to identify and build on how parents already support their children's learning at home and to make clear links between children's learning in school and at home.

Activity 2 sets out to develop home learning worksheets called 'parent prompts' - linked to various areas of the curriculum for parents to use at home with their children and to provide information to parents on what is being taught in school and suggest activities to support this at home.

The parent prompt outlines the topic areas being covered in school, the skills that are being developed, what the child is doing at school and how the parent can support this with activities at home.

Activity 1
Reviewing and developing a home learning policy

Purpose	**Who will be involved**
o To identify and build on how parents already support their children's learning at home	
o To make clear links between children's learning in school and at home	o Students o Parents o Teachers

Different methods can be used to gather parent and student views about the school's homework/home learning policy including:

- o Carrying out a survey of parent and student views on homework/homework learning. This could even be carried out by some students as part of a homework task
- o Parent Advisory Council and Principal establish a working group of parents, students, and staff. The group could run a survey or hold meetings to find out parents views about:
    - o What they already do to support and extend their children's learning at home and how they do this
    - o Any additional support and information from the school they would find useful to support their children's learning.

Collating information

Collate the views and consider:

- o What the priorities might be to provide clearer, more specific information for parents, for example, developing Home Learning Logs or Agendas
- o Organising activities for parents and children around specific subject areas, for example, involving parents in devising and developing maths games; building up a science lending library; setting up a book/reading club for children and parents
- o Whether there are any specific issues or support needs for some parents or children
- o What other resources there may be to support learning at home, for example, family learning or literacy teams
- o How a policy could be developed to address the priorities

Implementing and reviewing the policy

Once a policy and actions to implement the policy are identified, the next step is to inform all parents and students.
Agree when the policy and actions will be reviewed and evaluated to assess the difference it has made to parents and students.

Activity 2
Developing parent prompts

Purpose	**Who will be involved**
o To develop home learning worksheets – called Parent Prompts – linked to various areas of the curriculum for parents to use at home with their children o To provide information to parents on what is being taught in school and suggest activities to support this at home	o Teachers o Students o Parents o Principal

What is a Parent Prompt?

The two questions that parents ask most frequently are:

o What is my child learning at school?
o How can I help at home?

Each Parent Prompt outlines the topic areas being covered in school, the skills that are being developed, what the child is doing at school and how the parent can support this with activities at home using everyday objects and activities.

Step 1: Teachers identify the learning topics that will be covered in a term/year. Activities are identified that parents can undertake at home with their child that links with and extends the learning taking place in the classroom. The activities should be fairly short but encourage dialogue and discussion between parents and children.

Step 2: Teachers discuss with parents (possibly through the Parent Advisory Council) what prompts are most appropriate and develop a range of parent prompt activities to be issued throughout the term /year as a shared activity for children and parents. It is important that parent prompts avoid jargon.

Step 3: Parents and children undertake activities at home and discuss what is being learned and how it connects to what is being taught in school.

Step 4: Parent and children give feedback on the parent prompt activity to the class teacher.

Sample Parent Prompt

School:	Class:

Subject: Science

Topic	Learning in Class	Home Learning
How things grow and develop	Planting seeds and watching them grow – measuring them weekly.	Look through old photos to see how your child grew year on year. Is there a wall in your house where you measure your child's growth? Which year did he/she grow most?

Feedback
The parent can use a traffic light system to indicate whether the task was:
- Easy – green
- Okay – orange
- Hard - red

Home-School Partnerships

Successful home-school partnership working depends on the development of mutual trust and respect between school and parents. Schools need to use the skills, knowledge and experiences that all parents and all staff bring to the school to support children's learning.

The development of good relationships when things are going well can make it easier for both parents and teachers to approach each other if they are concerned about something.

There are many opportunities to contact parents informally:

* Day-to-day contact in the playground or at the school gate
* Breakfast or after-school clubs
* Fundraising events
* Community activities
* School events - sports day, concerts, etc
* Introductory home visits.

Working in partnership with parents may be new to some staff, who may also need support to make this work effectively. Principals may want to consider what staff development opportunities are available to staff to support them in communicating with parents. For example, workshops for staff on 'How to get the best out of parent evenings' and 'Making the most of one-to-one meetings with parents' can help develop ideas and skills.

When Things Go Well

What it looks like when things go well

* Parents feel that they are welcome in the school.
* There are a lot of opportunities for parents to get involved in different activities and there is evidence that they do get involved.
* The school understands the needs of all parents and develops ways of working which are supportive and inclusive.
* People are asked about what is important to them, and what they would like to see happening.
* Students are contributing their ideas about what is important to them and how they want parents and others to be involved and these ideas are used to increase the involvement of parents.
* Parents are motivated to continue their own learning.
* Everyone recognises that parents have other commitments and responsibilities in their lives.

- Parents are able to take part when and how they can. It is easy to step back and then pick things up later if circumstances change.
- Parents have the confidence and skills to take part and the skills that parents have are used appropriately within the school.
- Teachers engage with parents in a variety of ways on a day-to-day basis in order to build a positive relationship.
- The process recognises the diversity among the parents at that school and is inclusive. For example, there is information about the ways parents can take part in the life of the school in different formats and languages. Interpreters and signers are provided when necessary to ensure that all parents have access to important information.
- The school recognises the reluctance of some parents resulting from their own bad experiences at school and provides positive ways for parents to be involved in their own child's school at a level which they are comfortable with.
- Support and development opportunities are offered to everyone who is taking on a new role such as membership of the parent advisory council or volunteering to help teachers with school activities.
- The school development plan clearly indicates the different ways in which parents can be involved in the school and their children's learning.

Checklist – working together to increase parents' involvement in school

☐	Is the school welcoming to parents – both in terms of how it looks when parents come in and in the way staff greet people?
☐	Is there a special area for parents within the school?
☐	Have you asked parents and students for their ideas?
☐	Can you identify the range of ways parents and staff are able to meet and share ideas about ways people could support the school?
☐	Do activities happen at various times including weekends, holidays, evenings, daytime?
☐	Are parents informed of and involved in new initiatives? Is there effective communication about these and opportunities for parents to discuss how they will be taken forward in the school and what their involvement will be?
☐	Are there opportunities to do one-off things with no long term commitment as well as taking on longer-term tasks and roles?
☐	Are there fun activities to take part in and let people get to know each other outside the school – such as a barbeque in the summer?
☐	Is information made available in ways that reach everyone? Are there any groups of parents or parents in particular situations, who might be missed out?
☐	Is there practical support to help parents be involved? For example, on a parents' evening. Does someone organise lifts for parents who don't have much time after getting home from work? Is child-minding available?
☐	Is it clear that members of the child's extended family are also welcome to be involved?
☐	Is the school aware of any specific skills that parents have and are parents encouraged to share skills and experience in the school setting?
☐	Are there any opportunities to take part in, that don't need much skill or confidence?
☐	Is there information in the school and in other places about access to adult learning?
☐	Do parents and teachers understand about the respective roles and responsibilities when parents (and other people) are there as volunteers and are working with other children as well as their own?

☐	Do schools and parents have easy access to resources for translators, getting information into several formats, etc.? How have they been asked about what they support they would find most useful?
☐	Is it easy for schools and parents to get access to advice and practical support on matters such as recruiting and supporting volunteers?

Example - a Parent Ambassador Program

Parents can be a tremendous resource in their child's learning community. However, they are, on the whole, absent from most high schools. The Parent Ambassador Program at Rick Hansen High School in Abbotsford was developed for parents to step into the school culture. Parents volunteer, support school activities and act as advocates for the school in the community.

Resources:

- **Rick Hansen Parent Ambassador brochure**
- **Rick Hansen Parent Handbook - page 5**

Example - involving parents in planning parents' evenings

Parents were consulted on how the school could improve their partnership with parents. Many parents felt that the arrangements for parent/teacher interviews could be improved. The meetings were held in the classroom and waiting parents could overhear what the teacher was saying to others. This meant that parents could feel uncomfortable about raising issues with the teacher.

To solve this problem, the layout was changed. Soft music was also introduced to help prevent others overhearing what was being said.

Activity 1
A survey on arrangements for parent-teacher interviews

Purpose
- o To identify times and methods to make it easier for parents to attend parent-teacher interviews

Who will be involved
- o Parent Advisory Council
- o Principal and other teachers
- o Students
- o Individual parents

Step 1: Planning the survey

- o The Parent Advisory Council works with teachers to plan the questions to ask – see the sample parent survey which can be adapted.
- o Agree how long parents will be given to respond to the survey - four weeks is standard.

Step 2: Contact parents

- o Send the survey to each parent
- o Put up a poster in the school entrance, asking similar questions
- o Ask students what they think through their classes
- o Encourage students and their parents to ask each other what they think will work best.

Step 3: Analyse finding and agree the action to take

- o Collate the replies and analyse the responses given
- o The Parent Advisory Council could do this in partnership with the Principal, other teachers and students

Step 4: Informing all parents
Report back on the survey results and the action which will be taken.

- o Use a variety of methods to get the information across
- o Report back to staff and students as well as to parents

Sample parent survey

Parent-teacher interviews are held each term. We want to be sure that these are as useful for you as possible. We would appreciate any suggestions you have to make these meetings convenient for you and your children. Please tell us your views.

Question 1: time and day of meetings

☐ the current time – weekday 7.00-9.00pm?

☐ a weekday from 4.00pm-7.00pm?

☐ an afternoon at the weekend?

Question 2: Which teachers would you like to meet with?
At the moment the meetings are held with the student's advisory teacher. Some parents have told us they would also like to meet with their child's other teachers. What is your preference?

Question 3: Are there any other comments or suggestions you would like to make?

Thank you for your help.
You can return this to the school office by: post, sending it back with your child or by email – the form is on the school website. Please return it by……………….
Survey carried out by the school Parent Council in partnership with school staff and students.

Good communication between school and parents

Both schools and parents agree that the basis for developing positive relationships is good communication. Thought needs to be put into this and some schools have developed communication strategies which outline some of the principles of good communication and the various ways it will be done.

These are some ideas that have been suggested by parents and teachers:
- Use local media such as TV, radio, newspapers, magazines and posters to let parents know what is happening in the school and share 'good news' stories about what the school and students are doing.
- All information should be attractive and easy to read, using colour and pictures where possible.
- Avoid the use of educational jargon or terms that parents may be unfamiliar with.
- Have one-to-one conversations.
- Have a direct approach to communications with parents - 'just ask them'.
- Use electronic methods, for example text messages and email.
- Build relationships through contact with parents at drama, music and sports events, and parents' nights and school concerts.
- Make use of parent-to-parent contacts, for example 'snowballing' (where one parent agrees to bring along or introduce another), school gate, parents' nights, and information sessions led by parents.
- Make use of existing opportunities, for example focus on transitional phases (elementary to middle, middle to secondary).
- Share key facts such as the research findings on the difference parents make.

Example - use of email as a means of communicating with parents

A secondary school identified the need for a more efficient means of communicating with parents and received support to develop an email system.

The project piloted a dedicated email address for parent enquiries. All parents in the school were surveyed to ask if they were interested in using email and if so, for what types of communication. The email addresses were collected and entered into a new system and a protocol was developed to ensure efficient and effective responses or acknowledgements within a reasonable timescale. Guidance was given to parents/staff as to what the email system could and could not be used for.

Approximately 60 per cent of parents in the school signed up to using the new system. During the three-month trial period the school used the system to send out various information documents to parents including the school newsletter and information on drug awareness events. Parents' enquiries included fundraising and meeting arrangements.

The feedback from parents was positive. They were keen to make use of the system as a means of easier access to information relating to the school.

'Just to say that I am finding the system very useful and efficient.'

'I am very pleased, as a parent, that I now have access to the info certain teenagers in my house leave lying in the bottom of their bags.'

'I think this system will benefit many and has benefits perhaps not envisaged for people like me working away from home.'

How Students Can Help

Students have a really important role in encouraging their parents to get involved with the school. Once they are made aware of how important it is that their parents get involved and support the school they often have a host of good ideas about how this could be done. They often know what would work best for their parents and their families.

Student Councils and clubs can also be a great resource. All of these groups could be asked to consider how parents and the wider community could be involved and support their learning in these areas.

Parent Advisory Councils could benefit from establishing closer links with young people in these groups, both from the cross-over of interest in topical issues and from gaining opportunities to develop closer partnerships.

Ways for Principals, schools and parents to involve students include:

- Student councils
- A District-wide student forum
- A representative on the Parent Advisory Council (properly prepared and supported)
- Circle time - where teachers and children in elementary schools have a chance to talk together and share news and information informally
- Youth involvement in Community Planning networks
- Notice boards which act as a permanent comment board

- Scope for joint work or projects between staff/parent members and student representatives
- Including them in formal and informal consultation processes when new ideas are being developed
- Being part of the social events
- Helping in practical ways with activities at the school.

Example - students interviewing parents and teachers

Students interviewed their teachers and their parent at home to get their views on parental involvement. Some children interviewed step-moms or dads, which was a very good experience for them both and in some cases the first time the step-parents had ever been asked to consider their involvement. All views gathered by the students helped develop a parent involvement strategy.

Comments from children and young people as part of developing this toolkit 'It [the toolkit] should tell parents and teachers to remember to ask us. We can help them with a lot of things.'

'It's not true that kids and their moms and dads won't want to work together. Just because we have arguments about tidying up at home and staying out late, it doesn't mean we aren't all interested in what happens at school. We want it to be a good school too.'

'The toolkit should tell people to ask grandparents to help. My gran teaches me lots of good things. Some of my friends don't have grandparents they see all the time. People could come and be grandparents for every child who needs one.'

Activity 2
Developing a capacity or skills poster

Purpose	**Who will be involved**
This activity helps to:	o Parent Advisory Council
o Identify the skills, experience and qualities that people bring to a group	o Teachers and the parents
o Develop people's confidence in using those skills	o Parents and teachers from several schools who want to work together on an issue which affects them all
o Work together as a team	

Step 1: Setting up the exercise

Nominate someone as a group leader to take people through the exercise. The group leader displays the poster and outlines the task. A sample poster is provided in the PDF file. There is an image of a person in the middle, and in each of the corners there is a heading. Give everyone a copy of the poster and explain what each heading means. Here are some tips:

What's my identity?

This is a 'who am I?' type question and can include anything people feel is important about them. What is their job; do they have any children; are they the person who everyone talks to, the office comedian, the problem solver?

What are my hobbies, interests and passions?

This should list all the person's hobbies and interests as much as possible.

What are my skills, talents and resources?

List all those things the person can do, is good at and enjoys. Also list all the people the person knows who might come in handy, along with any equipment or resources they have access to, i.e. they drive a car, have access to professional fundraisers.

What are my gifts?

This can be difficult for people to do themselves. Think about what friends or work colleagues say about you – why do they like you? People might say you are a great listener, someone to lean on or that you make them laugh.

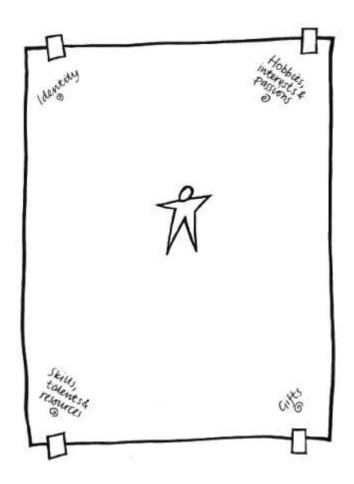**Step 2: Making the poster –** *allow 30 minutes for each person to fill in their poster*

- o Organise people into pairs. It is helpful if people work with someone they feel comfortable with
- o Fill in the details on the poster prompted by questions from their partner if they get stuck. Ask open questions, e.g. "How would you describe yourself?" Remember to add your name to the poster.

- Answers can be written or drawn. For example, a flowerpot or a spade could be used to depict a keen gardener or a peaked mountain for a walker.

Step 3: Sharing and displaying the posters

After everyone has finished their work, hang the posters on the wall and let people walk round and see what others have put up.

In an informal way, people get the chance to see what the skills, abilities and contribution of other parents might be,

Links with Community

Schools do not exist in isolation. They are based in communities and are there to serve those communities. Some larger schools may serve more than one identifiable community and they therefore need to be aware of any differences in approach that are necessary for each community. Schools provide a service that is available for everyone, which makes them a key resource for children and families in that neighbourhood.

Schools are also part of a network of organizations that provide services and support to communities. Parents can encourage or build on links between the school and the local community. The starting point, as always, is what is important for this school. Schools may already involve some people from the community working in the school alongside parents.

Community venues can often be good places to make contact with parents who may lack confidence in approaching the school or getting involved there. For some parents, school can be rather daunting and it is important to meet people where they feel most comfortable.

Parent Advisory Councils are well placed to make links with other agencies. In particular, they are encouraged to develop links with pre-school and further/higher education establishments to ensure continuity of education for children and young people.

When Things Go Well

What it looks like when things go well

- Parents get information from the school about a range of services and activities available in the community.
- The school and Parent Advisory Council of elementary schools have positive relationships with the pre-school groups in their community and parents with children at those groups are welcomed at school and parent activities.
- Information about the school is available in other community venues, in particular: libraries, and community centres.
- Bilingual community members support parents for whom English is not their first language in communicating with the school.
- The school uses other community venues for some of its activities, for example swimming pools, sports and leisure centres, theatres and museums.
- Local businesses contribute to children's learning by offering visits or work placements and coming to school to talk about their work.

- Local shops and businesses support fundraising events or sponsor particular school activities.
- The school participates in major community events, for example local celebrations.

Checklist – parents and teachers developing links between a school and the local community

☐ Do parents and teachers work together to identify the priorities for your school and where help from other people could be useful?

☐ Have you identified people in your community who would like to offer their time and skills to help the school? Have you identified what particular skills community members might have that would be of use in the school?

☐ Does the school encourage people who are not parents of children at that school to get involved? This could be people who are part of children's extended families, or people who have a close association with the school. This can be a good way of bringing in people who might have more free time than many parents do.

☐ Have you looked for ways to draw in people who have interests or skills that the children would enjoy – such as people who are keen about sports or art or music?

☐ Have you identified people and organisations in the local community who may be able to give you access to premises? This can be useful if you want to hold meetings or other activities outside the school.

☐ Do you want help from other local groups around fundraising for the school? Could you do some joint activities where you share the money raised?

☐ Do you have events coming up where the school could work with other people in your community?

Example - a community working together to help the school

Parents at an elementary school decided to tidy up the playground over the summer holidays. This included tidying the woodland garden area during summer break.

They put up a poster in a local shop asking for volunteers as well as sending a note home with the children. The work happened over several weekends and there were many helpers.

- The people who took part included a lot of parents who did not have time to help on a regular basis or through the week.
- Some older children who were now at secondary school came along to help.
- Other people who were not parents came because they were keen to help or because they were friends with one of the parents.
- Some people were there on most days.
- Others just came for a few hours on one day.
- People did different tasks.
- Some people handed in food, so everyone could share sandwiches and home baking each day.

One person took lots of photographs. They were all posted up inside the school and some of the best and funniest went into the window of the local shop with a big thank you sign.

The 'Making the most of your community' activity sets out to identify the resources that are available to support children's learning in the community and to share this information with parents through a community directory or a community learning showcase.

Activity 1
Making the most of your community

Purpose	**Who will be involved**

Purpose
- o To identify the resources that are available to support children's learning in the community
- o To share this information with parents through a community directory or a community learning showcase

Who will be involved
- o Parent Advisory Council, students
- o School staff
- o Family Learning or Community Learning and Development teams
- o This might be an activity you could undertake with other schools in your area as a joint activity

Step 1: Identify key organisations and community groups

Draw up a list of all the organisations, individuals, and groups that members of the school community are already involved in or aware of, who may have an interest in the school. If the Parent Advisory Council, Student Council and Staff Team each produce their own list, this should cover most of the groups and organisations. This will help you identify sources of information already available and will prevent duplication.

The list might include:
- o Children's groups; pre-school groups, after school clubs, youth groups
- o Sports clubs/activities for children and adults
- o Religious and cultural groups and organisations
- o Voluntary and community groups
- o Libraries, health services
- o Community and adult learning providers
- o People who represent the community, such as councillors

Step 2: Identify those who could help the school, its pupils and parents

Discuss how they already contribute to the work of the school and how their role might be developed. You will have a long list and might want to organise it in some way by grouping them together. Identify those you feel most closely support what the school is trying to achieve and which support parents and promote children's learning and development in the community.

Step 3: Share your findings with parents and students

Invite these groups to a community showcase where they can display information about their organisation and tell others about what they do. Invite all parents and pupils and encourage them to come along and find out what is available in their community.

Step 4: Prepare a community directory

Ask the groups to write a short paragraph on what they do to support children's learning and development and collate these into a Community Learning Directory – make sure not to duplicate resources already available. Make this widely available to students, parents and staff.

Fundraising for the School

Fundraising has traditionally been an activity that many parent groups have undertaken very successfully over the years and have raised many thousands of dollars to support their children's schools.

In their discussions of the school development plan, Parent Advisory Councils may identify particular items or activities that would benefit from additional funding. There may be discussions about what the priorities are and these can then be checked out with other parents.

Once targets are set, it may be effective to form a fundraising sub-committee. Some parents will have particular talents in that area and it may be a way of involving a wider group of parents to help with specific activities.

What it looks like when things go well

- Parents, teachers and students are involved in identifying priorities for fundraising and in generating ideas to achieve these.
- Different fundraising approaches are used for different purposes.
- Local businesses and shops are involved through donations or prizes or sponsorship of appropriate items or activities.
- Events and activities appeal to a range of interests and personal budgets - there's something for everyone.
- Fundraising events are an opportunity for parents and teachers to work together on a common task and develop positive relationships.
- There are fundraising events organised by students linked to educational activities within the school.
- Activities follow the three 'Fs' (Fun, Food and Families) formula. Events that provide fun activities for all family members - adults and children - and also provide food are usually the most successful and the ones that people want to come back to again and again.
- Parents are able to contribute any particular skills or talents they have.
- The school 'piggybacks' on any wider community fundraising events.
- As well as a few 'big' events in the year there are some smaller-scale ongoing fundraising events.
- Everyone's contribution of effort or money is appreciated - however small.
- Success is celebrated and people are thanked.

Example - using local business to sponsor an activity

An elementary school has developed its website with funds from a trust set up by a local company. In return the company gets a mention on the

website and some free publicity. This school has also developed a partnership with another firm that has helped the school purchase additional computer and IT equipment.

Checklist – fundraising events

☐ Is there someone who will make sure that everyone knows what they need to do for the preparation of an event?

☐ Do you need a licence for the event?

☐ If you are planning something that is weather dependent, do you have a contingency plan?

☐ Have you covered any health and safety issues?

☐ If you are hiring premises or equipment – have you time within the hire period to set up and tidy up?

☐ Have you got enough helpers?

☐ Do they all know what they are going to be doing?

☐ Who is going to set up and tidy up?

☐ Have you organised enough for people to do at the event? Do you want or need to have a raffle to keep them happy – and contribute to the fundraising effort!

☐ Have you got enough food/drinks?

☐ Have you got any equipment you need: plates/glasses/napkins/PA system?

☐ Have you publicised the event early enough?

☐ If numbers are limited – have you made this clear so that people are not disappointed if they cannot get a place?

☐ Do you have a plan for collecting money?

☐ Have you got enough money to complete the organisation of the event before the money for ticket sales comes in?

☐ If you need a certain number of people to come along to break even, do you have a plan for how you are going to encourage more to come if numbers are looking low?

☐ If there are likely to be left overs of any kind – food/drink – how are you going to dispose of it?

Developing a Strategy for Parental Involvement

Developing a strategy for parental involvement can help to:

- Promote the involvement of parents in the education provided by the school to their child and to students generally at their child's school
- Give advice and information to parents
- Promote Parent Advisory Councils and support their operation
- Take account of the needs of all families
- Consider how the strategy will promote equal opportunities
- Include a complaints procedure in respect of the District's functions under the Act.

The following checklist is based around two key issues: the school's role in promoting parental involvement in school education; and parents' capacity to support children's education and engage effectively with schools.

Effective parental involvement is the joint responsibility of professionals and parents. The questions are designed to help develop an appropriate strategy for parental involvement and to support parents' involvement in the development and review of that strategy.

Checklist – questions to help develop a strategy

Developing a strategy

☐ Do you have arrangements in place to develop or review a strategy for parental involvement?

☐ Do you involve parents in the process of developing or reviewing your strategy?

☐ Do you consult and involve students about the strategy? For example, Student Councils.

☐ Do you include other partners in developing or reviewing your strategy?

Promoting parental involvement

☐ Does your strategy cover the three levels of engagement with parents:

- o Learning at home?
- o Home/School partnership?
- o Parental representation (PAC)?

☐ Does your strategy provide a clear statement of how barriers are being removed to promote more parental involvement?

☐ Does your strategy outline how your district and schools work with parents who find it difficult to support their children's education due to family circumstances?

☐ Does your strategy take account of the needs of cared-for children?

☐ How does the strategy promote equal opportunities and take account of the needs of particular minority groups in your local area?

☐ Does your strategy make appropriate links with other relevant policy areas? For example, curriculum, support to students, pre-school, additional support needs, and other relevant agencies.

☐ Does your strategy take account of the training and development needs of staff and others working with children and families?

Establishing and supporting Parent Councils

☐ Are your parents aware of their rights as members of the Parent Advisory Council and what this means?

☐ Does your school promote your Parent Advisory Council?

☐ Does your PAC provide training for parent representatives?

☐ Are parent representatives able to identify what they need, to carry out their functions and access appropriate resources?

☐ Does your school assist parents' representatives to ascertain the views of the wider Parent body?

☐ Does your school/district offer guidelines for parents' representatives?

Advice, information and handling complaints

☐ Does the strategy set out the policy and procedures your district and school has for giving advice and information to parents?

☐ Do these procedures apply in the case of parents who do not live with their children?

☐ Does your district and school have arrangements in place for dealing with concerns/complaints from parents or anyone acting on their behalf?

☐ Are parents in general made aware of your district's complaints procedure?

Communicating the strategy

☐ Do staff and parents who want to get more involved have a general knowledge of the parental involvement legislation?

☐ Do all school improvement plans include parental involvement?

☐ Are parents of pre-school students made aware of the benefits of parental involvement in children's education?

Monitoring and reviewing the strategy

☐ Does the strategy include arrangements to monitor and evaluate the impact of your district's policies on parental involvement?

☐ Do you consider and respond to parents' expectations and views on how they are involved in school education?

Timeframe for Developing a Strategy

Aims	Tasks	Time frame (suggestions)
Identifying issues	• Inform parents and schools what is happening and how they can contribute. • Hold open discussions to gather views on what the main issues and priorities are for your area. (See examples) • Arrange support for parents who may need this to contribute effectively, e.g. because of disabilities, or where English is not their first language. • Involve relevant staff and keep them updated. • Think about how to involve students, eg involve the school's parent council. • Tell other people in your local community who have an interest.	6-10 weeks
Writing the draft strategy	• Set up a working group to develop a draft strategy for consultation. • Working group can comprise of school staff and parents. Continue to offer practical support for parents taking part. • Build in examples of parents being involved that have worked well in your district. • Involve appropriate parent or community groups to ensure that a broad range of experiences and ideas contribute to the strategy.	4-8 weeks
Consulting on the draft	• Share the revised draft strategy with the parent advisory council and finalize it. • Obtain approval from the education committee for the strategy.	6-8 weeks

Communicating the strategy	• Hold events for people to hear about it. Get publicity for it. • Get copies into places that are easily accessible for parents; have summary versions available in different formats and languages. • Organize publicity in local newspapers. • Obtain approval from the education committee for the strategy.	Launch event and ongoing
Implementing the strategy	• Help the schools to think about how they can implement the strategy. Hold a session for staff and parents to look at how the strategy can help promote good partnerships in your school. • Encourage the parent council to think about how the strategy can be useful to them and promote a good partnership with the school.	Ongoing with specific targets included in planning
Reviewing the strategy	• Work in partnership as issues/points arise. • Make the links with the ongoing involvement of all parents on a day-to-day basis and the ongoing review. • Invite staff and parents to take part in a regular review. • Involve the Parent Council, staff and students in what you are updating.	Suggest every 2-3 years?

Managing Complaints

No matter how strong partnerships are, or how good strategies and policies are, things can still go wrong. It is important therefore to have clear arrangements in place so that staff and parents can resolve issues together, with support if necessary.

In order to maintain positive relationships, it is usually better for all parties if parental complaints/concerns can be resolved at school level as quickly as possible. How you learn from complaints, and make improvements as a result of complaints, says a lot about your school.

SD61 POLICY 1155 - Complaint Process for a Resolution of Concerns

The purpose of this Complaint Process is to ensure that any individual's concern will be given respectful attention while upholding the integrity of the educational system. The attendant regulations provide clear procedures for the communication and resolution of any concern held by members of our Educational Community. The Educational Community includes parents, students, all Greater Victoria School District employees and members of the public.

School Principals shall communicate the procedures, outlined in the attendant regulation, to their students, staff, and parents on a regular basis.

SD61 Regulation 1155 - Complaint Process for a Resolution of Concerns Purpose:

The Complaint Process ensures that any individual's concern will be given respectful attention while upholding the integrity of the educational system. It provides clear procedures for the communication and resolution of any concern held by members of our Educational Community. The Educational Community includes parents, students, all Greater Victoria School District employees and members of the public.

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. Any Greater Victoria School District employee contacted by a member of the Educational Community with a concern will advise the person of the complaint process and encourage the person to express the concern to the individual involved.
2. Every effort should be made to resolve the concern at Step 1 of the process.
3. The process will be carried out within a reasonable time frame.
4. The person with the concern must be informed of the progress in each step of the process.
5. The process does not deny access to the Greater Victoria School Board's Bylaw 9330.1 "Appeal Process Decisions Regarding Students" to resolve a concern held by a member of the Educational Community.

PROCESS

Step 1 Initial Contact

The person(s) will express the concern(s) to the individual involved.

a. Both parties will attempt to:
   o Define the concern(s);
   o Clarify the issue(s);

- o Develop an appreciation and understanding of each other's point of view;
- o Resolve the concern(s).

If there is no resolution, the staff member will refer to the principal/supervisor.

Step 2 Facilitated Contact

The person(s) will meet with the principal/supervisor or designate. At the meeting the principal/supervisor or designate will:

- Gather information;
- Attempt to resolve the concern(s);
- Document the information by recording issue(s) and possible solution(s);
- Resolve the concern(s).

If there is no resolution, proceed to Step 3

Step 3 District Contact

The principal/supervisor will forward all documentation to the Zone Assistant Superintendent/Director with recommendation(s) for resolution of the concern(s).

The Zone Assistant Superintendent/Director will review all information relevant to the matter:

- contact the concerned person;
- attempt to resolve the concern and inform the person(s) involved.

If there is no resolution, proceed to Step 4

Step 4

The Zone Assistant Superintendent/Director will forward all documentation to the Superintendent

a. The Superintendent will gather all information relevant to the concern(s) and, if necessary, will meet with the parties to resolve the concern(s).

It is anticipated that the concern(s) will be resolved prior to Step 4, if not, Bylaw 9330.1 "Appeal Process Decisions Regarding Students" should be considered

The **VCPAC advocacy program** is also available to provide information, materials, and support for individual parents that express concerns as well as inform parents/students of their rights, and of SD61 policies, and regulations. They can guide the client through the proper complaint and appeal procedures if need be and will continually strive to keep issues clear and focused on early resolution.

Examples

Example - developing a strategy

Parents and staff worked through together to develop a Policy on Parental Involvement. There were a number of steps to the process.

Getting started - identifying the issues

A representative focus group of 15 parents held a meeting, with a community learning and development worker as facilitator. This took the form of a brainstorming session based on:

- What does parental involvement mean?
- Sharing good practice and ideas
- The barriers to parental involvement.

Working party to develop the policy

A working party was set up consisting of equal numbers of parents and staff. It was set up to take forward ideas from the focus group, to consider what the solutions were to the problems identified, and to continue the process of working together to develop the policy document.

Involving more parents

Parents and education staff facilitated focus groups to share the policy in its early draft form and gain views on it from more parents. Parents from the working party and the first brainstorming session led the focus groups, supported by a member of staff. Views were collated and fed into the working party developing the policy.

Staff involvement

A school focus group was set up to ensure their views were included.

Reaching more parents

Further focus group meetings took place to provide an update on the draft policy and gather further comments/feedback.

Parents present to staff

Parents presented the final draft at staff and Parent Council meetings.

Final checks

The draft policy was sent out to all who had been involved in its development and all parent representative groups. Further changes were made at working party meetings. The final policy was then agreed and a date set for review.

Launch of policy and spreading the word

An Action Group was formed to plan for the policy launch conference and to support the ongoing work with the policy. Some parents who had not been previously involved and staff from other areas of work were included, eg the early years worker from the childcare partnership.

Parents' conference

A conference was held to launch the policy. Workshops were led by parents and supported by staff, and covered many areas highlighting where parents are involved in their children's education. Professional actors demonstrated barriers to parental involvement through short skits.

Benefits included:

- Staff and parents working together
- Everyone having an equal say
- Bringing together ideas that led to solutions
- Attention to language and jargon in the policy

Example - a parents' conference

A conference was organized with the aim of achieving effective involvement of parents in education. The conference was attended by parents, teachers, school staff, community members and representatives from voluntary organisations. The work of local staff supporting and encouraging attendance was seen as crucial to ensuring the attendance of a range of parents. Some of the parents present indicated that this was the first time they had attended a conference. Childcare facilities, transport and entertainment for children all helped parents to attend the conference.

On the day

The day consisted of a presentation followed by workshops covering the wide range of ways parents are involved in their children's education. The workshops encouraged participation and gave delegates an opportunity to discuss issues and share experiences.

The workshops were an opportunity for participants to voice their opinion on how they thought Aberdeen City Council should design its policy on involving parents and carers in their children's learning. Questions in the workshops were based around:

- Where does learning take place?
- Who is involved?
- What can parents contribute?
- What barriers exist to parental involvement?
- What reduces the barriers and how can we eliminate them?

After lunch, delegates were re-energised through the 'Family Learning Surprise'. This involved five-minute maths aerobics sessions which consisted of spins, steps, and hops. At the end of the conference delegates were asked to give feedback. The high number of responses (93 per cent) reflected the general 'buzz' generated by the conference.

Activity

The following activity sets out how to gather ideas and views on themes for the strategy framework and for people to be able to participate easily and express their views.

Activity 1
An open space event to identify key issues

Purpose
- o To gather ideas and views on themes for the strategy framework
- o People to be able to participate easily and express their views
- o You want people to learn from each other
- o You want a session that is lively and fun

Who will be involved
- o Parents who are not actively involved as well as parents who are part of representative bodies
- o Teachers, support staff and senior managers
- o Young people

The 'Open Space' Event

An open space event can be an excellent way for a wide range of staff and parents working together to explore good practice or identify issues. Open space events are best run with a minimum number of around 20 with the maximum about 100. Allocate people to groups before the event if possible.

In advance of the event participants identify the theme/s for discussion. A speaker is needed to lead the event. The leader opens the event by introducing the theme. The theme is then discussed in groups of between 4 and 10 people and participants identify issues. Delegates are not expected to 'represent' the views of their school or council; their individual views and ideas are what will count.

Example of a key theme

How do we work together to promote parental involvement to help children to do their best and be all they can be?

Issues for discussion

- o What can schools do?
- o What can parents do?
- o What can others do?

Running the meeting

Participants are asked to:
- o Identify their issues and ideas related to the theme
- o Discuss their issue
- o Identify causes and possible solution to problems/issues identified
- o Prioritise three key action points to resolve the issues.

Outcomes

A report of the event is then prepared and shared with participants, the education authority, parents and the school. Actions agreed can then be used to advise development of the strategy.

Developing a Parent Council

Constitution and Bylaws

An organization's constitution and bylaws are living documents, and should be well known to the members, executive, partners, and others interested in the organization.

Copies of the constitution and bylaws should be available at all meetings, posted in a conspicuous place, and included at the front of any manuals or guides frequently used by the membership or executive.

Purposes of a Constitution

A constitution states the reasons why an organization exists. A well written constitution

- defines the organization's reasons for being
- clarifies its mandate and purposes
- can be used to focus its activities.

A constitution should be brief (1-2 pages), and separate from the bylaws

Purposes of Bylaws

Bylaws are an organization's operating rules. Well written bylaws

- define the roles of the membership and executive
- provide direction and authority to the membership and executive
- provide a method for holding everyone in the organization accountable for their decisions and actions.

Requirements of the School Act

The School Act requires PACs and DPACs to make bylaws governing their meetings and the business and conduct of their affairs. The Act's requirements are specific, as follows:

PACs—School Act, section 8(5)

A PAC's bylaws are to be made in consultation with the principal, and must include rules governing

- the dissolution of the PAC
- election of members to represent the PAC on the school planning council
- election of members to represent the PAC on the district parent advisory council.

Elections to the school planning council and DPAC must be by secret ballot [School Act, section 8(6)]

Involving Your Membership

It is important to involve your members in creating and reviewing your council's constitution and bylaws. Both documents belong to the membership, not to the executive or constitution committee. You can involve your members through various means, such as

- a letter or notice that the constitution and bylaws will be reviewed, with a survey or questionnaire on key issues. The survey or questionnaire can be dropped off at the school without coming to a meeting.
- an informal get-together off school property to talk about the parent role in the school
- a special meeting, or dedicated time at a regular meeting, where parents are invited to discuss the council's mission, purposes, and operating rules
- a committee to review the constitution and bylaws, and make recommendations to the executive and membership
- a follow-up meeting to discuss the committee's recommendations and approve any changes.

If you are creating a constitution and bylaws for the first time, or are undergoing a major review, plan to spend several months on the project. These documents require close attention to detail and plenty of discussion. All members should have the opportunity to consider the issues and express their views.

BCCPAC recommends that councils review their constitution and bylaws annually. A regular review focuses members' attention on the council's purposes and objectives, and encourages members to reconsider its mission. Members may find that the council's needs have changed.

Should Our PAC or DPAC Become a Society?

A few PACs and DPACs in BC are registered societies under the BC Society Act.

PACs and DPACs created under the School Act can carry on all of their activities without registering as a society. This includes applying for grants and licenses.

A PAC or DPAC considering registering as a society should obtain legal advice. For information on incorporating a society, contact the Society/Cooperative Association Unit at 250-356-8673, (in Greater Vancouver, direct dial 604-775-1046), or consult Information for Incorporation of a British Columbia Society, available on the web at **www.fin.gov.bc.ca/registries/corppg/forms/reg20.pdf**

Sample Constitution for PACs and DPACs

The samples in this manual offer the best suggestions available. You are encouraged to use them to develop your own documents, suited to your organization's needs.

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Constitution

Note: Where there are differences in the suggestions for PACs and DPACs, the wording for DPACs appears in italics.

Section I – NAME

The name of this Council is...

> The name should include the name of your school *(or school district)*. The titles "parent advisory council" and "district parent advisory council" are sanctioned by the School Act.

The Council will operate as a non-profit organization with no personal financial benefit accruing to members.

The business of the Council will be unbiased in respect of race, religion, gender, politics, sexual orientation, and physical or mental ability.

Section II – PURPOSES OF THE COUNCIL

> The following list reflects the full range of activities PACs and DPACs are typically involved in. The list is not necessarily in order of priority. Through discussion, your membership will decide which purposes are most important to your council.

The purposes of the Council will be:

1. To promote the education and welfare of students in the school
2. To encourage parent involvement in the school, and to support programs that promote parent involvement
3. To advise the school board, principal, and staff on any matter relating to the school, other than matters assigned to the school planning council
4. To participate in the work of the school planning council through the Council's elected representatives
5. To promote the interests of public education and, in particular, the interests of (name of your school)
6. To provide leadership in the school community

7. To contribute to a sense of community within the school and between the school, home, and neighbourhood

8. To provide parent education and professional development, and a forum for discussion of educational issues

9. To assist parents in obtaining information and communicating with the principal and staff about their child's progress or other concerns

10. To assist the principal and staff in ensuring the highest safety standards are maintained in the school and neighbourhood

11. To organize and support activities for students and parents

12. To provide financial support for the goals of the Council, as determined by the membership

13. To advise and participate in the activities of (name of your district parent advisory council) and the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils

Section II – PURPOSES OF THE COUNCIL

The purposes of the Council will be:

1. *To be the collective voice of parents in the school district*

2. *To advise the school board on any matter relating to education in the district, including the district's Accountability Contract*

3. *To communicate with parents and parent advisory councils on educational matters*

4. *To promote the interests of public education and, in particular, the interests of (name of your school district)*

5. *To provide parent education and professional development, and a forum for discussion of educational issues*

6. *To assist parents in forming a parent advisory council in every school*

7. *To assist members in obtaining information and communicating with district personnel*

8. *To provide and support a local advocacy project*

9. *To communicate with other organizations in the community and province on educational matters of common interest*

Section III -- INTERPRETATION OF TERMS

"community organizations" means groups that demonstrate an interest in education and are not already included in the scope of the Council's constitution and bylaws

"district" means School District No. ( )

"DPAC" or "district parent advisory council" means the parent advisory councils organized according to the School Act and operating as a district parent advisory council in School District No. ( )

"PAC" or "parent advisory council" means the parents organized according to the School Act and operating as a parent advisory council in (name of your school)

"parent" is as defined in the School Act and means
       (a) the guardian of the person of the student or child,
       (b) the person legally entitled to custody of the student or child, or
       (c) the person who usually has the care and control of the student or child

and, for the purposes of these bylaws, means the parent or guardian of a child or children enrolled in School District No. ( )

"school" means any public elementary or secondary educational institution as defined in the School Act operating within School District No. ( )

"SPC" means the school planning council created for (name of your school) according to the School Act

Sample Bylaws for PACs and DPACs

The samples in this manual offer the best suggestions available. You are encouraged to use them to develop your own documents, suited to your organization's needs.

Table of Contents

Bylaws

Note: Where there are differences in the suggestions for PACs and DPACs, the wording for DPACs appears in italics.

Section I – MEMBERSHIP

Voting members

   1.   All parents and guardians of students registered in (name of your school) are voting members of the Council.

Non-voting members

   2.   Administrators and staff (teaching and non-teaching) of (name of your school) may be invited to become non-voting members of the Council.

   3.   Members of the school community who are not parents of students registered in the public school system may be invited to become non-voting members of the Council.

   4.   At no time will the Council have more non-voting than voting members.

Compliance with bylaws

   5.   Every member will uphold the constitution and comply with these bylaws.

Section I – MEMBERSHIP IN A DPAC

   1.   All parent advisory councils in School District No. ( ) are voting members of the Council.

   2.   A member will be represented on the Council by the person elected annually by the member for that purpose.

   3.   There will be no other members of the Council.

DPACs are recognized in the School Act. Every PAC is entitled to elect one of its members to be its representative on the DPAC for a term of one year. The election must be by secret ballot. See **Tab 2**, **The BC School Act**, sections 8, 8.4, and 8.5.

Section II –MEETINGS OF MEMBERS

General meetings

1. General meetings will be conducted with fairness to all members.

2. General meetings will be held not less than four times during the school year. One of those meetings will be the annual general meeting.

Conduct

3. At general meetings, members will not discuss individual school personnel, students, parents, or other members of the school community.

4. The Council will refrain from partisan political action or other activities that do not serve the interests of the school or the public school system.

Notice of meetings

5. Members will be given reasonable notice of general meetings.

Notice of meetings can be sent in various ways—by flyer, newsletter, e-mail, or website. A calendar of meetings for the year satisfies the requirement for reasonable notice.

See **Tab 19**, **Communication in PACs, DPACs, and School Planning Councils**.

Section III – PROCEEDINGS AT GENERAL MEETINGS

Quorum

1. A quorum for general meetings will be ten* voting members (*the minimum number of voting members that can reasonably be expected to attend).

1. *A quorum for general meetings will be 10% of the voting members.*

2. If at any time during a general meeting a quorum ceases to be present, business then in progress must be suspended until there is a quorum present or until the meeting is adjourned or terminated.

> A quorum is the minimum number of voting members that need to be present at a meeting to make decisions. The requirement for a quorum ensures that a representative number of voting members are present in the room when decisions are made. The quorum cannot be waived or suspended, even by unanimous consent.
>
> For more information on quorum, see **Tab 14**, **Effective Meetings**, page 8.

Voting

3.   Except as provided elsewhere in these bylaws, all matters requiring a vote will be decided by a simple majority of the votes cast (50% plus 1).

4.   In the case of a tie vote, the chair does not have a second or casting vote and the motion is defeated.

5.   Members must vote in person on all matters. Voting by proxy will not be permitted.

5.   Members will vote through their elected representatives. A representative must be present at a meeting to vote. Voting by proxy will not be permitted.

6.   Except as provided elsewhere in these bylaws, voting is by a show of hands or, where requested by two voting members present, by secret ballot.

7.   A vote will be taken to destroy the ballots after every election.

Section IV -- EXECUTIVE

Role of executive

1.   The executive will manage the Council's affairs between general meetings.

Executive defined

2.   The executive will include the president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, immediate past president, and such other members of the Council as the membership decides.

> The composition of your executive should suit your council's needs. At a minimum, you should fill the positions of president, secretary, and treasurer.
>
> PACs are required by the School Act to elect three representatives to the school planning council. One of the representatives must be on the PAC executive. To meet this requirement, one of the representatives may already hold an executive position, or you may modify your PAC bylaws to create an additional executive position called "PAC Executive Representative to the SPC".
>
> You may choose whether to include your DPAC representative on your executive.

Eligibility

3.   Any voting member of the Council is eligible to serve on the executive, except employees or elected officials of School District No. ( ) or the Ministry of Education.

3.   Any elected representative of a Council member is eligible to serve on the executive, except employees or elected officials of School District No. ( ) or the Ministry of Education.

Perception of Bias – Councils need to appear to be representing the voice of parents and protecting the integrity of their membership. Members who are school board or Ministry of Education employees or elected officials may be seen as having a bias and not speaking or acting solely on behalf of parents.

For information on perception of bias, see **Tab 8**, **Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest**, pages 6-8.

Election of executive

4.   The executive will be elected at each annual general meeting.

5.   Elections will be conducted by the chair of the Nominations Committee.

Term of office

6.   The executive will hold office for a term of one year beginning immediately following the election (or between specified dates, for example, from July 1st to June 30th).

7.   No person may hold the same executive position for more than four years.

Vacancy

8.   If an executive member resigns or ceases to hold office for any other reason, the remaining executive members may appoint an eligible member of the Council to fill the vacancy until the next annual general meeting.

8.   If an executive member resigns or ceases to hold office for any other reason, the remaining executive members may appoint an eligible representative of a Council member to fill the vacancy until the next annual general meeting.

Removal of executive

9.   The members may, by a majority of not less than 75% of the votes cast, remove an executive member before the expiration of his or her term of office, and may elect an eligible member *(an eligible representative of a Council member)* to complete the term.

10.   Written notice specifying the intention to make a motion to remove the executive member must be given to all members not less than 14 days before the meeting.

Remuneration of executive

11.   No executive member may be remunerated for serving on the executive, but may be reimbursed for expenses reasonably and necessarily incurred while engaged in the Council's affairs.

Section V – EXECUTIVE MEETINGS

Meetings

1.   Executive meetings will be held at the call of the president. At least one meeting will be held before each general meeting.

Quorum

2.   A quorum for executive meetings will be a majority (50% plus 1) of the members of the executive.

Notice

3.   Executive members will be given reasonable notice of executive meetings.

Voting

4.   All matters requiring a vote at executive meetings will be decided by a simple majority of the votes cast (50% plus 1).

5.   In the case of a tie vote, the chair does not have a second or casting vote and the motion is defeated.

Section VI - SCHOOL PLANNING COUNCIL, DISTRICT PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL, AND EXTERNAL COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

School Planning Council representatives

1.   Three representatives to the school planning council (SPC) must be elected annually from among the voting members who are not employees or elected officials of any school board or the Ministry of Education. One of these representatives must be an elected member of the Council executive.

District Parent Advisory Council representative

2.   One representative to the (name of your DPAC) may be elected annually from among the voting members who are not employees or elected officials of School District No. ( ) or the Ministry of Education.

Election of SPC and DPAC representatives

3.   The election of representatives to the SPC and DPAC must be by secret ballot.

Term of office

4.   SPC and DPAC representatives will hold office for a term of one year.

Vacancy

5.   If an SPC or DPAC representative resigns or ceases to hold office for any other reason, the membership may elect an eligible member of the Council to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the term. Such election must be by secret ballot.

External committees

6.   The membership or executive may elect or appoint a member *(a representative of a Council member)* who is not an employee or elected official of School District No. ( ) or the Ministry of Education to represent the Council on an external committee or to an external organization.

7.   The representative will report to the membership or executive as required.

Section VII – CONDUCT OF EXECUTIVE AND REPRESENTATIVES

Code of ethics

    1.   On election or appointment, every executive member and representative must sign and agree to abide by a code of ethics acceptable to the membership.

> A sample Code of Ethics appears at the end of these bylaws. For more information on code of ethics, see **Tab 8, Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest**.

Representing the Council

    2.   Every executive member and representative must act solely in the interests of the parent membership of the Council.

Privilege

    3.   Any information received in confidence by an executive member or representative from school personnel, a student, parent, or other member of the school community is privileged and must not be divulged without permission of the person giving the information.

Disclosure of interest

    4.   An executive member or representative who is interested, either directly or indirectly, in a proposed contract or transaction with the Council must disclose fully and promptly the nature and extent of his or her interest to the membership and executive.

    5.   Such an executive member or representative must avoid using his or her position on the Council for personal gain.

Section VIII – DUTIES OF EXECUTIVE AND REPRESENTATIVES

A. The President will

        (a)   speak on behalf of the Council
        (b)   consult with Council members
        (c)   preside at membership and executive meetings
        (d)   ensure that an agenda is prepared
        (e)   appoint committees where authorized by the membership or executive
        (f)   ensure that the Council is represented in school and district activities
        (g)   ensure that Council activities are aimed at achieving the purposes set out in the constitution

(h)   be a signing officer
(i)   submit an annual report

The meeting agenda is usually the president's responsibility. It is good practice to consult with the executive, membership, principal (for PACs), or superintendent/school board liaison (for DPACs) before the meeting to give them an opportunity for input.

The terms "president" and "chairperson" are often used interchangeably.

The president usually gives a report at each meeting outlining work done and issues considered since the last meeting.

B. The Vice-President will

(a)   support the president
(b)   assume the duties of the president in the president's absence or upon request
(c)   assist the president in the performance of his or her duties
(d)   accept extra duties as required
(e)   be a signing officer
(f)   submit an annual report

C. The Secretary will

(a)   ensure that members are notified of meetings
(b)   record and file minutes of all meetings
(c)   keep an accurate copy of the constitution and bylaws, and make copies available to members upon request
(d)   prepare and maintain other documentation as requested by the membership or executive
(e)   issue and receive correspondence on behalf of the Council
(f)   ensure safekeeping of all records of the Council
(g)   *DPAC—keep an accurate record of PAC representatives*
(h)   *DPAC—assist the president in providing information to local news media*
(i)   may be a signing officer
(j)   submit an annual report

If changes are made to the constitution and bylaws, they should be dated and initialed and a copy placed in the school office for safekeeping.

Financial records should be kept for seven years. Other documents may be kept according to their value or precedent-setting nature. Minutes can be a valuable history of the council.

D. The Treasurer will

(a)   be a signing officer
(b)   ensure all funds of the Council are properly accounted for
(c)   disburse funds as authorized by the membership or executive
(d)   ensure that proper financial records and books of account are maintained
(e)   report on all receipts and disbursements at general and executive meetings
(f)   make financial records and books of account available to members upon request
(g)   have the financial records and books of account ready for inspection or audit annually
(h)   with the assistance of the executive, draft an annual budget
(i)   ensure that another signing officer has access to the financial records and books of account in the treasurer's absence
(j)   submit an annual financial statement at the annual general meeting

E. The DPAC Representative will

(a)   attend all meetings of (name of your DPAC) and represent, speak, and vote on behalf of the Council
(b)   maintain current registration of the Council
(c)   report regularly to the membership and executive on all matters relating to the DPAC
(d)   seek and give input to the DPAC on behalf of the Council
(e)   receive, circulate, and post DPAC newsletters, brochures, and announcements
(f)   receive and act on all other communications from the DPAC
(g)   liaise with other parents and DPAC representatives
(h)   submit an annual report

E. *The District Associate (DA) to BCCPAC will*

(a)   act as the liaison between the Council and BCCPAC
(b)   encourage PACs in School District No. ( ) to be members of BCCPAC
(c)   disseminate BCCPAC information to all PACs in School District No. ( )
(d)   help identify interested and qualified parents for BCCPAC external committees
(e)   help PACs and the Council to process BCCPAC forms, proxies, and applications
(f)   assist PACs and the Council in responding to BCCPAC AGM resolutions
(g)   submit an annual report

F. Members-at-Large (*Directors*) will

(a)   serve in a capacity to be determined by the Council at the time of election, and at other times as the Council requires
(b)   submit an annual report

G. The immediate Past President will

    (a)   advise and support the membership and executive
    (b)   provide information about resources, contacts, and other matters
    (c)   submit an annual report

Annual reports are important because they

    - provide an opportunity to review personal and council goals and achievements
    - provide a record of actions taken
    - outline responsibilities for those considering running for an executive position

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H. The School Planning Council (SPC) representatives will

    (a)   attend all meetings of the school planning council (SPC)
    (b)   represent, speak, and vote on behalf of the Council at SPC meetings
    (c)   request and take direction from the membership and executive
    (d)   be strong advocates for meaningful parent involvement in the school and school planning
    (e)   provide a written report to all general and executive meetings
    (f)   attend general and executive meetings as directed by the membership or executive
    (g)   submit an annual report

Section IX – COMMITTEES

1.   The membership and executive may appoint committees to further the Council's purposes and carry on its affairs.

2.   The terms of reference of each committee will be specified by the membership or executive at the time the committee is established, or by the committee at its first meeting, as the membership or executive decide.

3.   Committees will report to the membership and executive as required.

4.   A Nominating Committee will be appointed annually before the annual general meeting.

A *standing committee* exists every year and may be described in the bylaws. Examples are budget, nominating, programs, hot lunch, special events, and fundraising.

An *ad hoc committee* is created to do a specific task within a certain time period.

Section X – FINANCIAL MATTERS

Financial year

1. The financial year of the Council will be (date) to (date).

Power to raise money

2. The Council may raise and spend money to further its purposes.

Bank accounts

3. All funds of the Council must be kept on deposit in the name of the Council in a bank or financial institution registered under the Bank Act.

Signing authority

4. The executive will name at least three signing officers for banking and legal documents. Two signatures will be required on all of these documents.

Annual budget

5. The executive will prepare a budget and present it to the membership for approval before the current budget expires.

> The budget gives the executive authority to spend money. Without a current budget, the executive cannot spend money. A budget covers a time period within a council's financial year, usually the entire financial year. It must not extend over more than one financial year. For more information, see **Tab 15**, **Financial Management in PACs and DPACs**.

Non-budgeted expenditures

6. The executive will present all proposed expenditures beyond the current budget for approval at the next general meeting.

Treasurer's report

7. A treasurer's report will be presented at each general meeting.

Auditor

8. Members at a general meeting may appoint an auditor.

Council money can only be spent if authorized by a motion passed at a general meeting. One of the most useful motions is approval of a budget. A budget gives the executive authority to make the transactions included in the budget without coming back to the membership for approval.

Section XI – CONSTITUTION AND BYLAW AMENDMENTS

1. The members may, by a majority of not less than 75% of the votes cast, amend the Council's constitution and bylaws.

2. Written notice specifying the proposed amendments must be given to the members not less than 14 days before the meeting.

3. Where the proposed amendments exceed one page, they need not be given to every member, but must be posted in a conspicuous place in the school or made accessible to all members.

Section XII – PROPERTY IN DOCUMENTS

All documents, records, minutes, correspondence, or other papers kept by a member, executive member, representative, or committee member in connection with the Council shall be deemed to be property of the Council and shall be turned over to the president when the member, executive member, representative, or committee member ceases to perform the task to which the papers relate.

Section XIII – DISSOLUTION

1. In the event of winding up or dissolution of the Council, and after payment of all debts and costs of winding up or dissolution, the assets and remaining funds of the Council shall be distributed to another parent advisory council or councils in School District No. ( ) having purposes similar to those of the Council, as the members of the Council may determine at the time of winding up or dissolution.

2. In the event of winding up or dissolution, all records of the Council shall be given to the principal of (name of your school) (*the Secretary-Treasurer of School District No. ( )).

Adopted by (name of council) at (your city or town), British Columbia, on (date).

Signatures of president and one other executive member

CODE OF ETHICS

A parent who accepts a position as a Council executive member, committee member, or representative

1. upholds the constitution and bylaws, policies, and procedures of the electing body
2. performs his or her duties with honesty and integrity and in the interests of the Council
3. works to ensure that the well-being of students is the primary focus of all decisions
4. respects the rights of all individuals
5. takes direction from the membership and executive
6. encourages and supports parents and students with individual concerns to act on their own behalf, and provides information on the process for taking concerns forward
7. works to ensure that issues are resolved through due process
8. strives to be informed and only passes on information that is reliable
9. respects all confidential information
10. supports public education

Statement of Understanding

I, the undersigned, in accepting the position of _____
of _____ (name of your council) have read, understood, and agreed to abide by this Code of Ethics. I also agree to participate in the dispute resolution process that has been agreed to by the electing body, should there be any concerns about my work.

Name of Executive Member, Committee Member, or Representative

_____

Signature _____

Date _____ Phone number _____

This page can be photocopied and used annually for all executive members and representatives.

Administration of the Code of Ethics can be found in **Tab 8**, **Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest**, page 4.