



## **Ministry of Education**

### **Fall Conversation with School Board Leads & Parent Involvement Committee Chairs**

**November 22/24, 2022**

**Inclusive Education, Priorities  
and Engagement Branch**

## Introduction

On November 22 and 24, 2022, the Ministry of Education (EDU) held the Fall sessions of the 2022-23 series of virtual meetings with Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) chairs and co-chairs and school board parent engagement leads. After each session, a summary of participant discussion is shared with participants.

Throughout the virtual engagement series, now in its third year, participants have shared their local challenges, successes, and promising practices to support parent engagement in their children's school and in their learning. In many sessions there have been presentations about Government of Ontario priorities or programs and participants have been invited to provide feedback.

## What We Heard

### Part 1: Updates from the Ministry

Shared insights: The meeting began with a brief recap of past engagements. In ongoing discussions, PIC chairs and school board parent engagement leads have shared challenges, good ideas, and lessons learned throughout evolving health guidelines and pandemic conditions, as well as their methods of allocating and use of Parents Reaching Out (PRO) funding and insights gained. There has been a series of presentations and consultations. Last year for example, participants took part in a seminar about the introduction of mandatory Indigenous-focused learning to the grade 1-3 Social Studies curriculum in September 2023.

Funding for parent engagement: This year, for the first time, funding Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grants has been included in the Grants for Student Needs (GSN). For 2022-23, school boards administer a total allocation of \$2.44M in collaboration with their Parent Involvement Committees (PICs) and are encouraged to work with additional parent groups and community organizations to identify projects

The GSN component for PRO grants joins existing GSN components that support the parent engagement activities of school councils and PICs. For 2022-23, the total allocation to support parent engagement across all school boards, including both base funding and PRO, is \$5.47M.

In response to participant suggestions, an updated Parent Engagement Funding FAQ that will be revised to include expectations for use of PRO funds and whether unused PRO funds for the current year can be carried forward to next year.

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*O. Reg. 612.00 provides for meetings of school councils and PICs to be held in-person, by electronic or telephonic means, or a combination of both. s.12, s.40*

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## **Part 2: Learning and Listening: Supporting Parent Engagement Together**

**Discussion:** *Please share with us what you are hearing from parents in your community. What are they feeling confident about? What concerns parents?*

### **Confidence**

Participants indicated that overall, their communities are pleased with the return to full-time in-person learning with the option of remote learning, as well as the return of extra-curricular activities and field trips. The dedication of teachers to welcome and build relationships was noted. Many spoke of in-person PIC and school council meetings with refreshments served to encourage networking. In some cases, there has been a renewed interest in participation, with new parents wanting to be involved and learning about activities.

### **Challenges**

Although in many cases the response has been positive and progress in rebuilding appreciated, challenges and inequities remain.

- a welcoming climate is not universal – participants spoke of uncertainty about invitation to enter the school, and lower rates of volunteerism than pre-pandemic – both impacting newcomers and families new to the school more greatly
- collaborative home/school partnerships need to be rebuilt
- some parents do not feel represented on school council and PIC; need to recruit and welcome Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) parent members
- mental health remains a top concern for parents; participants reported high incidence of absence among students and are concerned that poor mental health may often be behind the absence
- in secondary schools, there are behavioural concerns and a reported high incidence of vaping among students
- parents are concerned whether children should be wearing masks, and are divided on the issue
- academic and social catch-up is an issue, and parents want to know more about how to support their children at home to address learning loss and recovery; there is concern about EQAO scores, particularly grade 3
- there are questions of whether tutoring funding will carry through past March, and if there will be funding for summer programs
- information regarding the Catch-Up Payments has not reached segments of the parent population; it was suggested that government should have earmarked the money more directly rather than giving flexibility on how the funds are spent
- the potential for more strike action affecting schools is of concern, as is parental balancing of on-line instruction and work obligations
- ongoing concerns include, safe schools and bullying, class sizes, insufficient teachers and occasional teachers, transportation (bussing), and school accommodations (portables); as well, parents are concerned about secondary pathways and how parents, particularly newcomer parents, can support their children's choices

**Discussion:** *As we return to “normal”, how has your PIC been able to reach out and connect with parents and families?*

### **Success and Effective Practice**

*Participants spoke new ideas and practices, as well as applying what they had learned through navigating the pandemic:*

- Participants reported planning to build on their successes of engagement of more parents and different parents during lockdowns through continued virtual or hybrid meetings, as encouraged by recent amendments to O.Reg.612/00; PICS note increased access for families who find transportation, winter travel, distance, health, or care of young children to be barriers to participation
- increased communication capacity in school boards is leading to plans for greater communication among school councils and with the PIC (i.e., school council networks, expansion of communication platforms, etc.)
- surveys of parents to determine needs - if barriers remain or have changed (e.g., time of meetings, language barriers, health concerns)
- refreshments/dinner served at meetings to address barriers for parents stretched between work and family obligations
- noting that many parents who have been new to their schools in the past two years may not have been inside the school, hosting tours and school council presentations to welcome parents and encourage their ongoing participation in the school, school council and PIC
- PICs are planning in-person conferences with key-note speakers and workshops on topic parents have indicated interest in (e.g., mental health, stress and anxiety, literacy, exceptional children, special education, community resources)

**Discussion:** *Please share your board’s plans for Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grant funding this year.*

Participants shared their appreciation of earlier notification and increased predictability resulting from the move of PRO funds to the Grants for Student Needs (GSN).

- PIC and board practices to allocate funds include:
  - applications received by the board and a reviewed by a subcommittee of the PIC
  - encouragement of application and use of PRO funds through newsletters and lists of suggested projects
  - surveys of schools to determine if the funds should be distributed to schools, or provide central topics parents want and need (e.g., capsules to help parent with Google drive, Google docs etc.)
  - PIC partnerships with provincial parent organizations or neighbouring boards to design and deliver projects (e.g., support packages for school councils and principals to build the success of their councils and recruit members; welcome guide for newcomer families)
- Areas of emphasis for projects include:
  - alignment with the objectives of board improvement plan
  - encouragement of increased parent presence and volunteerism
  - encouragement of partnership and networking among families of schools/learning networks for efficient use of funds



- it was requested that there be review of the funding formula to consider French-language school boards' vast geographic coverage

**Discussion:** *What would you like to discuss or learn about at the next parent engagement meeting?*

Interest was expressed in learning more about:

- ways parents can support their children to address learning gaps
- interpretation of EQAO results
- special education needs, and addressing barriers
- destreaming
- pathways and transition to post-secondary, including conversations on skilled trades
- transportation (routes, eligibility) and accommodation (e.g., portables, new schools, school closure, attendance boundaries), and who makes the decisions
- support and training for parent leaders and volunteers about how to overcome barriers to engagement and reach out and support more parents and community
- anti-oppression training and resources for parents and parent leaders

### **Looking Ahead**

Participants asked the ministry to consider review and update of the school council guide and principal profile, and possibly also the PIC handbook as both are relied upon by these parent-led organizations

## **PART 3: Resource Links**

*To support the work of PICs, selected topical source links were shared:*

**Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week:** [Bullying – we can all help stop it | ontario.ca](https://www.ontario.ca/page/bullying-awareness-and-prevention-week)

**Plan to Catch Up:** [Catch Up Payments | ontario.ca](https://www.ontario.ca/page/catch-up-payments)

**PPM119 :** [Education in Ontario: policy and program direction: Policy/Program Memorandum 119 | Ontario.ca](https://www.ontario.ca/page/education-in-ontario-policy-and-program-direction)

**Ministry of Education home page:** <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ministry-education>

**Parent and Curriculum Resources:** <https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/parents>

**Skilled trades:**

- Dual Credit Programs: [www.ontario.ca/page/dual-credit-programs](https://www.ontario.ca/page/dual-credit-programs)
- Specialist High Skills Major: [www.ontario.ca/page/specialist-high-skills-major](https://www.ontario.ca/page/specialist-high-skills-major)
- Skilled trades: [www.ontario.ca/trades](https://www.ontario.ca/trades)

# Conclusion

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Throughout the series of engagements, PIC chairs/co-chairs and school board leads have continued to demonstrate their commitment to enhancing parent engagement and supporting parents and families of their boards. Many participants in this session expressed parental confidence about the return to in-person schooling and in-person meetings, however, challenges remain. Participants articulated need for clarity about in-person welcome to schools for parents and families, and shared various means their PICs have undertaken to encourage participation. Once again parents expressed appreciation of the opportunity to meet with each other and with the ministry; it was requested that consideration be given to re-establishing the PIC Symposium, perhaps through virtual means.

We are grateful to all participants for your willingness to share challenges, innovations and effective practices that support parents and families. The perspectives, questions and concerns shared will be used to inform Ministry actions, and to plan future engagements.

Thank you for your continued commitment to work with your school boards to support, encourage and enhance parent engagement in support of student achievement and well-being.