

Good communication between schools, school councils, and parents is enhanced by

A Positive School Climate

How do you know if you have one?
Here are some signs to look for:

School environment feels inviting

- A 'Welcome' sign is posted at the entrance.
- Visitors are acknowledged when arriving.
- New families are given welcome packages when they register (letter from principal, school newsletter, maps, list of staff, parish letter, etc.)

Regular communication

- Monthly newsletters, calendar of activities.
- Bulletin boards, website kept current.
- Information and invitations for parents to get involved or attend school functions
- Council members act as ambassadors at school events

Success is celebrated

- Opportunities exist to recognize all students
- Children's work is on display.
- Student/staff accomplishments inside and outside of school are showcased. e.g., charity, volunteer work, social justice, etc.

Signs of Catholicity are present

- Spiritual banners, cross, bible, crucifix, prayer and Eucharistic services.

Family events build community

- Families and the community are invited into the school for social events (BBQ, workshops, etc.)
- Children can write an invitation to parents.

Staff participation at school events

- Remember to invite staff to council events.

RESOURCES

Ministry of Education — Hand-book for School Councils Guide

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/council/guide.html

Ottawa Catholic School Board Policy and Procedures for School Councils

www.ottawacatholicsschools.ca/policy.php

Ministry of Education — Parents

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents

People for Education

www.peopleforeducation.com

Ottawa Catholic School Board

www.ottawacatholicsschools.ca

Ottawa Catholic School Parents' Association

www.ottawacspa.ca

The Newcomers' Guide to Education

www.settlement.org/edguide

Research Shows

Strong Partnerships

Equal

Student Success

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Communication Strategies for School Councils

DIRECTOR'S FORUM 2008

This pamphlet was developed as a result of the discussions at the Director's Forum held at St. Patrick High School in February 2008.

All school councils and principals in the Ottawa Catholic School Board were invited to participate in the discussion.

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MAKING CONTACT

How Councils can Strengthen Parental Communication

- Provide information to parents well in advance, then send reminders. (Make sure all communication has been reviewed by your principal.)
- Use various ways to get your message out — newsletters, e-mail, web posting, message board in school, two-sided billboard, bulletin boards, telephone trees, etc. (Ask your principal about SynreVoice telephone messaging.)
- Keep websites informative and current — daily announcements, monthly school and council newsletters, activities in the school, class-specific information, homework, etc.
- Ensure communication between school/council and parents is two-way; use active listening; invite opinions, feedback and comments; survey the community to determine their needs. Make contact information for some council members available to parents.
- Link with parishes by putting school news in the church newsletter & website, and vice versa.
- Share ‘Good News’ stories about your school with the local community newspaper and the parish newsletter.
- Encourage teachers’ presence at events; participating in school council or other activities.
- Look for opportunities to make contact with the parent community — have a school council information table at events or parent-teacher interviews, open houses, information nights, etc.
- Invite and encourage the parent community to attend school events, awards, liturgies, concerts, workshops, that are not targeted specifically at parents.
- Continue to remind parents where to find school information. Don’t give up!

GETTING PARENTS INVOLVED

Steps Councils can Take to Attract and Retain Parental Volunteers

- Early in the fall, make a list of the year’s events and announce volunteer opportunities.
- Designate an individual to create volunteer list and use it when organizing events at school. Provide a volunteer form at front desk of school for people to fill out and provide their contact information. Collect a list of parent strengths/ talents. Call them to make contact, even if you don’t need their help right away.
- Break up big commitment activities into small manageable pieces. Offer different “levels” of involvement and describe what needs to be done and the effort involved.
- Compile a binder or folder with information and planning tips on how to run specific events or activities. Assign a parent to maintain and update it throughout the school year.
- Welcome new families to the school with an invitation to attend a council meeting; welcome and introduce people at each council meeting.
- Keep an open mind to any suggestions. Be receptive to new ideas and ways of doing things.
- Recognize the unique gifts and differences of all those who volunteer.
- Councils should look beyond fundraising. Host social events for families, speakers for parents, etc. Council meetings can focus on a specific topic for discussion — announce plans and invite parents to attend.
- Have a “bring-a-friend” night at council. Invite a new parent – offer to drive.
- Remind staff to encourage parental involvement; there is value in making parents feel welcome in the school.

- Thank-you’s are important. Show appreciation and recognition for all who help. Highlight the positive actions of parents in a public forum, say thank-you in person or with a card, or provide coffee and treats at a meeting.
- Encourage involvement by using sub-committees instead of a single coordinator to plan events and activities.
- Have someone with experience chair a committee and newer parents can help out. The next year, with newly-gained experience, these parents will feel more comfortable to lead.
- Mentoring parents is key to creating a succession plan, so that there are always experienced, informed people in place to take over key roles.

INVOLVING ALL FAMILIES

Overcoming Challenges to Involvement

- A ‘Welcome’ sign in different languages shows respect and acceptance.
- Have multilingual signs, in the languages of the community, visible throughout the school.
- Recognize cultural challenges — provide translations of letters, notices, etc., into languages of the community.
- Provide interpreters for important meetings.
- Use plain language — keep it simple.
- Distribute ‘coupons’ to school events where there is a charge for admission, food, etc.
- Consider support for those who need rides or childcare for events. Provide babysitting and transportation. Look to your high school for student volunteers for babysitting.
- Consider accessibility challenges (crutches, wheelchairs, etc.) when planning events.