



PARENT ENGAGEMENT
TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Presented to the
Minister of Education
September 15, 2021

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Message from the Chair

The Honourable Cliff Cullen
Minister of Education
Government of Manitoba

Dear Minister Cullen,

It is my honour to present the Parent Engagement Task Force Final Report and Recommendations to the Minister of Education. The Task Force worked independently through its engagement with Manitobans. I would like to thank my Vice-Chairs, MLA Janice Morley-Lecomte and MLA Ian Wishart, the Task Force Members, and the support from the Department of Education. This Task Force had a strong and diversified membership that was able to provide reflective recommendations from Manitobans. I wish to recognize the time commitment given by our Task Force.

The Task Force is pleased to have met its mandate to help shape roles and responsibilities of School Community Councils; explore how parents/caregivers can participate in supporting their children's education with respect to time commitments; explore best practices for parent/caregiver engagement; and assist in improving educational experiences and outcomes through innovative, collaborative approaches among parents/caregivers, teachers, and principals.

Our engagement produced nine theme areas with 27 recommendations on how to move forward with parent/caregiver engagement as a key component in improving the education system. The Task Force carried out a high-level and extensive engagement with Manitobans. Our work was very thorough and significant discussions were had with over 20,800 Manitobans.

The Task Force observed that many Manitobans want to see representation of their communities in school leaders and parent councils. Parents want to contribute to their school and children's education in meaningful ways, and build capacity in schools with school leaders and parents/caregivers—with the local voice to inform the education system. Other observations concerned legislation regarding Manitoba's education system, and the fact that many communities across our province, both rural and urban, view schools as essential to communities.

Parental/caregiver engagement is crucial to a child's educational success. Our Task Force was aware of the importance of parental/caregiver contributions and our recommendations reflect the input we have received.

Through the Task Force engagement with Manitobans, we noted that there were some issues expressed beyond the mandate of the Task Force. The Task Force brings these to the attention of the Minister of Education.

The recommendations presented in this report are reflective of what was heard from parents/caregivers and stakeholders.

I submit the report in good faith to the Minister of Education for review and deliberation.



Respectfully,
Scott Johnston
Chair, Parent Engagement Task Force
MLA Assiniboia

Land and Treaty Acknowledgement

The members of the Parent Engagement Task Force acknowledge the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Ininiwak, Anishininiwag, Dakota, Dene, and Inuit, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

Our engagement work has taken place on the lands of Treaties 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

The Task Force wishes to gratefully acknowledge the support of the Indigenous Inclusion Directorate within Manitoba Education for its guidance in the development of this Land and Treaty Acknowledgement.

Introduction and Context

The *Better Education Starts Today: Putting Students First* strategy was developed in response to the recommendations arising from the Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education report as well as the learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commission identified a sense of urgency in improving student achievement in Manitoba schools and identified 10 imperatives for action needed to achieve this.

The Better Education Starts Today (BEST) strategy is the vision and set of priority actions—organized around four pillars of student success—that takes this body of work and outlines a clear plan of action to modernize and support an innovative education system where students succeed, no matter where they live, their background, or their individual circumstances.

Decision Making Brought Closer to Students

In recognition of the importance of local voice in education, proposed changes to the education system would formalize the role that parent councils play. Outside of the Frontier School Division, current parent advisory councils are informal structures that provide an avenue for parent/caregiver participation at the school level.

Table 1: Current and Proposed Future States of Parent/Caregiver Council Models

Parent Advisory Council (Current)	School Community Council (Proposed Future)
No formal requirements in the Act (other than in Frontier)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Councils for all schools would be formalized ■ Provide advice to the principal
A forum for parents and community members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All parents and caregivers are members; broader membership is being explored
Informal structure that encourages parent and caregiver participation at the school level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Supported by parent engagement resources to promote involvement and diversity and to support school leaders ■ Regions/divisions will consult with the councils during budget consultations

Going forward, the voice and role of parents/caregivers is brought closer to decision makers by ensuring every school in Manitoba has a school community council where **all** parents/caregivers are members. Beyond traditional activities of Parent Advisory Councils, members of School Community Councils will also provide advice to school leaders (principals) to inform the strategic priorities and planning for the school based on local perspectives, priorities, and needs.

Under the proposed model, every school will also have a parent engagement officer to formally support the school community council and principal. This position will help

to promote the involvement of parents/caregivers under the broad umbrella of parent/engagement activities and ensure that the diversity of the school community is reflected.

This model for parent/caregiver engagement will provide ways to bring forward the positions, perspectives, and voices of the entire school community to support student success and well-being.

Striking a New Parent Engagement Task Force

In April 2021, as a first priority, an engagement plan, *Charting Our Path Forward*, was released. This plan is part of a commitment to ongoing engagement to inform the work of the priority actions in the BEST strategy. The plan detailed ways for residents, community organizations, parents, teachers, principals, staff, school community members, education stakeholders, and students to get involved and help shape Manitoba's education system.

Of specific note, the engagement plan announced that the early phases of planning would be guided by key advisory groups including a new **Parent Engagement Task Force**.

A key component of improvement efforts is shifting decision making in the system closer to students, including enhancing the role that principals, teachers, and parents/caregivers play. To inform planning, a Parent Engagement Task Force was launched in May 2021 to guide public input and provide advice to the government on how to advance enhanced parent/caregiver engagement going forward. The Parent Engagement Task Force is designed to help shape the roles and responsibilities of the proposed School Community Councils and identify strategies to increase parent/caregiver participation.

The members of the task force represent a diverse group of individuals from across Manitoba and include parents, community and school leaders, and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). The members of the Parent Engagement Task Force are as follows:

Scott Johnston (chair), MLA for Assiniboia

Ian Wishart (vice-chair), MLA for Portage la Prairie

Janice Morley-Lecomte (vice-chair),
MLA for Seine River

Terry Brown, K to 12 Review Commissioner
(Parent)

Amanda Gurke, Turtle River/Indigenous
Inclusion Directorate Advisory Committee
(Parent)*

Pamela Nowosad-Federowich, Brandon—
Manitoba Association of Parent Councils
Nominee (Parent)

Jason Perring, Winnipeg—Manitoba Association
of Parent Councils Nominee (Parent)

Rachel Smith, Family Advocacy Network
(Parent)

Jodene Baker, Winnipeg (Parent)

Michael Babb, Winnipeg (Principal)

Susanne Marius, Winnipeg—Francophone/
French Immersion (Principal)

Brent Hauser, Rural (Principal)

Colin Campbell, Rural (Assistant
Superintendent)

Don McCaskill, North (Area Superintendent)

* availability supported limited participation

The Mandate of the Task Force

The mandate of the Parent Engagement Task Force as set out in its Terms of Reference (Appendix A) was to guide public input and provide advice on parent/caregiver engagement by listening to Manitobans to

- help shape the roles and responsibilities of the School Community Councils
- explore how parents/caregivers can participate in supporting their children's education in ways that respect their time commitments
- explore best practices for parent/caregiver participation and engagement
- assist in improving educational experiences and outcomes through innovative, collaborative approaches among parents/caregivers, teachers, and principals

The Task Force broadly considered all aspects of parent/caregiver engagement and received invaluable input through regional public consultations, workshops, meetings with other jurisdictions, stakeholder interviews, and research on best practices. The combined input from the public and other sources was instrumental in informing the perspectives and recommendations presented in this report.

The recommendations respond to each of the four focus areas of the mandate, provide direction on how to build in best practice in the design and implementation of the proposed School Community Council model, and reflect what the Task Force heard from Manitobans.

Organization of the Report

The Task Force has organized the recommendations around nine themes that support the establishment of a leading-edge model for parent/caregiver engagement.

The themes identified are as follows:

1. Diversity, equity, and inclusivity must be guiding principles for parent/caregiver engagement in schools.
2. Clearly define the purpose, roles, and responsibilities of School Community Councils and the roles parents/caregivers play.
3. Build School Community Council capacity.
4. Support participation and inclusivity in school community councils.
5. Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of school leaders (principals and vice-principals).
6. Clearly define the role and responsibilities of the parent engagement officer.
7. Provide resources and funding to support school community councils.

8. Build on best practices from Frontier School Division.
9. Ensure reflective and representative local voices inform the education system.

Each recommendation details the issues and barriers, describes what we heard from people across Manitoba, and identifies required actions, to address the issues, build system capacity, and inform practices in teaching, learning, and leading.

Parent/Caregiver Engagement: Foundations for Student Success and Well-Being

Schools must be welcoming places where students and families feel safe and have a sense of belonging. To support all children in their educational journey, parents/caregivers, school staff, and community each have a role to play in working together to support student success, development, and health and well-being. The success of this three-way partnership recognizes that

- **parents and caregivers** know their children the best
- **school staff and teachers** are the professionals responsible for the delivery of education
- **community** helps to provide current and historical perspective on local culture and engagement

The Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education report underscored the importance of this as an imperative for action: Imperative #8: Expand Community Education and Strengthen Public Outreach and Alliances.

Schools cannot succeed without the cooperation of community members. They must build upon the goodwill that exists within many communities, consolidate initiatives, and facilitate further outreach and engagement to establish the coalitions, partnerships, and alliances to support student learning and success. . . .

The contributions of engaged parents and communities in supporting student learning were highlighted throughout our consultations. A number of references to the well-known African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," supported an education system in which schools are viewed as community service hubs. In these hubs, service providers come together to coordinate integrated and wraparound services for students and their families to address barriers that impede learning and to proactively promote improved achievement. (97–98)

Parent/caregiver engagement is an umbrella term that encompasses the many different ways parents/caregivers engage in their children's education working together with their school community. Respecting the diversity of families and schools, parent/caregiver engagement will look, sound, and feel different across homes and schools in Manitoba.

The importance of parent/caregiver engagement has been demonstrated in the outcomes and success of students (Cotton and Wickland, 1989; Epstein and Sander, 2000; Rosenzweig 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Pérez Sánchez et al., 2013; Jeynes, 2012). It is associated with

- better student behaviour, higher academic achievement, and enhanced social skills
- a decrease in chronic absenteeism and reduction in behavioural issues in the classroom— students need less redirection and show evidence of better classroom behaviour
- students who are more likely to earn higher grades or test scores, graduate from high school, and/or attend post-secondary education
- students who show higher motivation and self-confidence in performing academic activities and have higher self-esteem and have better social skills with peers and adults
- a reduction in risky behaviours such as drug use, unprotected sexual activity, and violence in children and youth

Parents/caregivers are vital to school success where students are at the centre. Strong parent/caregiver voices are needed to provide perspectives and advice to support decision makers within the system to be successful. Through stronger partnerships with the school and teachers, parents/caregivers can understand more fully what is happening in the classroom, how their children are doing, and how they can support their children at home.

To cultivate positive parent/caregiver engagement, school leaders play a key role in creating a safe and welcoming school culture where all school families feel valued and barriers are addressed. To do this, the staff at the school must first value parent engagement; their attitudes and actions will project this, and all communications must be authentic and honest. Where this approach is adopted, **trust** between staff and parents has the opportunity to grow and continues to foster ongoing and positive parent/caregiver engagement. (Campbell, 2017)

Unfortunately, there are a range of barriers that have an impact on parent/caregiver engagement and the ability for parents/caregivers to be involved in school. Some are logistical: parents/caregivers may lack transportation, access to technology, or child care. Parents/caregivers may work shift work and find it difficult to coordinate with school hours. Parents/caregivers can feel disconnected or unwelcome in the school because of language and culture differences, or personal histories. Others may lack the confidence to participate. Intentional approaches to addressing school-specific barriers will be critical to establish welcoming and inclusive schools where parents and educators come together for student success and well-being.

Leading research in parent/caregiver engagement has identified six key ways that parents/caregivers can be involved in their children's education. The framework below published by Joyce Epstein of John Hopkins University (2018) provides important detail.

TABLE 2: Six Types of Involvement to Improve School Climate and Student Success

Parenting	Parenting involves developing expectations and setting limits for children. This may include supervising behavior, limiting televisions, expressing expectations about education, doing things together, identifying opportunities to learn, and engaging in discussions.
Communicating	Communicating involves engaging in parent or school-initiated conversations. This may include discussions of student's behavior and academic achievement, helping to develop post-secondary and career plans, or discussing school activities and direction.
Volunteering	Volunteering involves participation with fundraising activities, volunteering at the school, and participating in school activities.
Learning at Home	Learning at home involves developing supports for academic achievement within the home environment. This may include providing academic lessons outside of school, setting up homework spaces, and facilitating discussions about learning.
Decision-Making	Decision-making involves including parents in decision-making activities related to school governance and organization. This may include participation with a parent organization, or with another school group.
Collaborating with the Community	Collaborating with community involves facilitating resources from the wider community to enrich school life. This may include establishing parent enrichment programs and building connections with community resources.

There are many practical and different ways that parents/caregivers personally engage in their children's education such as

- communication with the school and your children's teachers
- volunteer activities
- talking to your child about what they do in school each day
- supporting in class and at home learning
- participating in parent or school community councils

A School Community Council provides opportunity for parents/caregiver to engage in an advisory role, assisting the school principal and staff with the focus on supporting all students' well-being and academic success. Some advice might be offered for the following areas: school plan and strategic goals, supporting student attendance, student programs, possible construction projects, transportation suggestions, and student behaviour.

Parent Engagement Task Force— Focus Areas of Engagement

Task Force Engagement

Parents/caregivers have an important collective voice in Manitoba’s education system and the Task Force aimed to engage in dialogue to inform recommendations to the Minister of Education.

The Task Force used the following questions to guide discussions with parents/caregivers and stakeholders through the various engagement sessions to inform all areas of their deliberations.

1. What currently works in your school community to get parents and caregivers engaged and keep them engaged?

Schools across Manitoba use a variety of ways to connect with school community members including newsletters, social media, text messaging, volunteering, Parent Advisory Councils, school events, and outreach, as examples. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how innovative parents and educators are as they continue to connect virtually and through tiered participation in Parent Advisory Councils.

- What are the things that your school(s) is/are doing that you think are working well?
- How do school staff or others reach out to invite your involvement?
- What methods of communication are working to keep you informed?
- What are the ways you are meaningfully involved and provide input around your child’s education?
- Are there orientation programs or open house events in place for parents at your school?

2. What are the barriers to parents and caregivers being more engaged in your school?

For some parents/caregivers things like distance to the school, other time commitments, work schedules, access to technology or the Internet, and access to child care can make it challenging for them to engage with teachers, principals, and the broader school community. What are some of the challenges that you or others in your school community face when it comes to being engaged in your child’s learning or being involved with the school?

- Are the various opportunities to engage clearly described and accessible to all parents?
- Does your school make technology available to support participation?

- Are parents' varying socio-economic, language, or cultural backgrounds factors that limit their engagement in your school?
- Are you able to communicate effectively with your child's school in ways and at times that work for you?

3. What supports will School Community Councils need to do their job?

School Community Councils will ensure a more prominent role for parents and caregivers in their child's education with a focus on providing input on student achievement and well-being. All parents are members of the Council for the child's school. They will not replace the role of educators or do the work of trustees. Instead they will offer their expertise on their own child(ren) and the needs of their communities. There are many successful and active Parent Advisory Councils in schools across the province; however, not every school has one. Through School Community Councils, all parents can use their knowledge to advise principals about school planning and priorities, and new programming.

- What would help you or parents at your school to engage this way?
- What resources and information do you need at the school level to work with the principal and school staff to build understandings about this new role and facilitate inclusive engagement among all parents?
- How can the parent engagement officer for your school support these councils? What things could they do to help engage and hear from more parents?
- What other resources or supports like technology or child care would support parents to participate?

The goal for each engagement was to learn from participant experiences and to be able to build on successful practices already in place, identify future resource needs to successfully support parent/caregiver engagement and launch School Community Councils, and to remove barriers to engagement.

Public Engagement Process

The Task Force undertook an ambitious engagement schedule and extensive review of best practices around parent/caregiver engagement to inform the recommendations. They engaged with over 20,800 people in Manitoba through virtual regional parent/caregiver engagement sessions, telephone town halls, workshops, meetings with key stakeholder groups, and various written submissions.

Task Force Engagement	Participants	Sessions
Virtual Regional Engagement	1,159	15
Telephone Town Halls	19,079	4
Targeted Stakeholder Sessions	601	34
Total	20,839	53

Regional Parent/Caregiver Virtual Meetings

Between May 20 and June 22, 2021, the Task Force hosted virtual meetings across Manitoba through 15 regional sessions with 1159 people attending. Participants primarily self-identified as parents/caregivers or as working in the K to 12 education system in Manitoba (teachers, principals, educational assistants, clinicians and trustees).

The key themes emerging from the virtual meetings included the following:

- leveraging parent councils and using innovative tools and strategies to help their school community engage
- the importance of local/regional voice
- barriers to parent/caregiver engagement
- the proposed areas that parent/caregivers may provide advice to school leaders on

Telephone Town Halls

More than 19,000 Manitobans participated in regional town halls in Winnipeg (5,417 attendees), Northern Manitoba (1,212 attendees), rural Manitoba (7,079 attendees), and Winnipeg (5,371 attendees).

Questions from attendees and parents were broad and included ones about equitable school funding, how to engage parents, poverty, addressing school closures, the role and implementation of the parent engagement officer, local representation, and the need for diversity of representation at all levels.

Targeted Stakeholder Sessions

Parent Council Perspectives

Two virtual workshops were completed with members of existing Parent Advisory Groups, engaging approximately 35 individuals. The participants advised on the proposed role of parents/caregivers, membership compositions, and barriers parents face in participating and engaging in the life of the school.

Educator Insights

Information from 479 educators was received through sessions held with teachers and school staff and survey responses from school division administrators. Their responses provided key insights into existing practices, lessons learned, and the spectrum of innovative ways that outreach and communications happen. Participants shared a diversity of perspectives about parent engagement and beyond, including local voice, school resources, changing assessments and testing, and public reporting of outcomes. Leaders shared that building on what is currently working in the system should be the starting point for reimagining education.

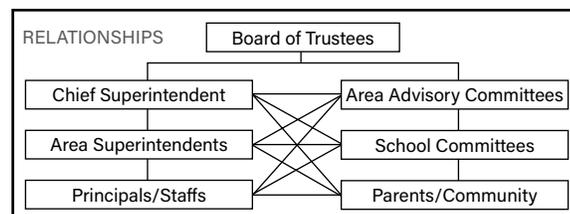
Spotlight Frontier School Division A Made in Manitoba Best Practice

The unique model in Frontier School Division attributes its success to a three-tiered governance structure where parents and community members form the foundation at all three levels:

- School Committees
- Area Advisory Committees
- Board of Trustees

Unique to this model is that School Committee members who assume roles on Areas Advisory Committees do this in addition to, not instead of, their School Committee role. Further, those Area Advisory Committee members elected to the Board of Trustees accept the responsibility and accountability in addition to their role on the Areas Advisory Committee and School Committee.

This creates a unique web of relationships across the vertical and horizontal levels of governance.



The structure relies on strong relationships and communication among the Chief Superintendent, Area Superintendent, principal and staff, parents, and committees. The School Committee's role is governance. The principal's role is administration, and together they form the leadership team for the school.

A Governance Support Officer (GSO) is in place to support this three-tiered system of elected officials to be as effective as possible in their roles as well as providing general support to school administrators and school committees in working together as a team. In addition, the GSO assists school administrators and Chiefs and Councils in the understanding and implementation of Education Agreements.

The school division provides financial support to School Committees.

Targeted Stakeholder Viewpoints

A series of meetings with representatives from Indigenous and newcomer organizations, organizations that represent and work with those living with disabilities, community connectors, and Frontier School Division—to name a few—were hosted over the engagement period. These consultations highlighted barriers, needs, and experiential insights that when taken together and addressed could promote greater inclusion and diversity of participation in school community activities. In particular, the meetings highlighted the importance of cultural awareness and competencies, consideration for the unique makeup of familial relationships, and providing funding to help remove barriers to participation for resources like respite and child care to support participation. In addition, the Task Force gained insights into implementation, governance, administrative supports, and training from provinces that have implemented formalized models to support enhanced parent/caregiver engagement.

Overview: Research and Literature

There is growing awareness that parents are invaluable to student success. This is evidenced by an expansive and evolving body of academic literature, educational policies and expert reports focused on engaging parents and caregivers in education. Recognizing that perceptions and research in this field evolve as society changes, it is essential to ensure that the recommendations are informed by the most salient, up-to-date ideas in the knowledge landscape of parental engagement in education.

This literature review accomplishes that objective. It identifies the key issues influencing parent involvement in schools and scans the conditions under which effective engagement is nurtured and fostered in the school, home and community. The most important conclusion arising from the findings is that schools are key players in facilitating opportunities for parent engagement with the diverse needs of families and the community in mind. Although there does not appear to exist a single, preferred method to involve parents/caregivers in schools, it is evident that best practices have emerged out of the growing body of knowledge surrounding the field.

Findings were obtained using a mixed body of academic publications and grey literature, including government reports, reviews and policies. A jurisdictional scan explores pan-Canadian and international best practices on parental involvement in education and school community councils using a mixed body of academic publications and grey literature, including government reports, reviews and policies.

The full findings are available in Appendix B.

What We Heard and Learned: Recommendations for Strengthening Parent/Caregiver Engagement

The following section outlines the key themes and issues; what the Parent Engagement Task Force heard; and their related recommendations that were informed by best practices in the research and feedback received through engagement.

Note to reader: The statements in the “What We Heard” sections below directly reflect the issues and perspectives shared by participants based on their understanding of proposed system changes. Throughout the engagement, Manitoba Education officials provided clarification to address areas of misinformation and help inform productive conversations.

Theme 1: Diversity, equity, and inclusivity must be guiding principles for parent/caregiver engagement in schools.

Creating welcoming and inclusive schools is essential to making sure the diversity of the school community voice is heard and reflected in the policies and decisions made at the local school level. Issues of uniformity of voice or failure to address barriers to participation in parent councils dilute diversity and fail to reflect the full scope of school community needs and perspectives.

A focus on direct outreach, removing barriers to engagement, and implementing intentional solutions to support engagement of all (and not just a few) can enhance inclusivity, equity, and diversity of representation. Ensuring that all parents/caregivers in the school community are able to engage in the education of their children is essential to enhancing student success and well-being.

Bridging cultural understanding by including multiple cultural norms and practices can be an important way to enhance diversity and create welcoming and inclusive environments that lead to increased quality engagement.

What We Heard:

Across all engagement sessions and stakeholder group meetings, the subject of diversity, equity, and inclusion was brought forward, as well as the many barriers that parents/caregiver face that impact their ability or willingness to engage.

Participants widely acknowledged that parents with high socio-economic status often have more opportunities to shape and participate in their children’s education. It was recognized that often the same small group of parents/caregivers come forward, resulting

in a perception of the group being “cliquey,” unwelcoming, and not representative of the diversity in the school community.

Parents/caregivers strongly emphasized the need for diverse perspectives on councils especially for newcomer, Indigenous, and LGBTQ2S+ communities, the disability community, and people with varied socio-economic status.

Other barriers to engagement parents/caregivers experience that were regularly raised included lack of time; coordinating with school hours due to shift work; access to supports like child or respite care, technology, or transportation; low comfort levels participating (including environments that are unwelcoming); and poor communication at all levels. In the context of School Community Council meetings, participants shared the need to make meetings more accessible (e.g., child care, virtual option) and to provide ways outside of meetings for these parents to give feedback and be heard.

In various sessions, the need to consider differences in cultural norms and opportunities to think about ways that meetings, school events, and other activities can to a greater extent be more culturally relevant, particularly for school communities with high numbers of Indigenous and newcomer families, was raised. Many participants supported having roles in the school—like the Cultural Support Workers, the Student Success Program, and Indigenous Grad Coaches in the Winnipeg School Division—to help in this effort.

“Our school has been very innovative in trying to get parents involved during the pandemic. Providing child care and hosting virtual meetings has helped but there are still challenges getting new and different parents involved.”

Parent Participant – Regional Meeting

Many questions were further raised around how well a renewed model of parent/caregiver engagement would be able to represent community members and their needs and interests. Many shared that there exists a high level of intimidation for some parents, and that direct and intentional outreach must be made to create an inclusive welcoming environment.

In schools with broader diversity in engagement, the important role that the principal played in creating the environment for engagement to flourish was widely acknowledged.

Recommendations:

1. School principals, in consultation with the parent engagement officer and School Community Councils, develop policies, plans, and guidelines to address and remove barriers to parent/caregiver participation and ensuring equitable, fair, and accessible engagement opportunities for the diverse school community. This may include interpretation services, access to technology, child and/or respite care, accessible

locations, among other items. Reporting on this work should be included in school plans and reported back to the community.

2. Incorporate culturally relevant and inclusive practices including Indigenous ways of knowing and doing in all aspects of parent engagement and School Community Council operations, policies, and resources so that they are reflective of the local school community and serve to advance Truth and Reconciliation.

"I participated in our school's PAC for one year but chose not to come back because the only activity that our PAC did was fundraising."

Parent Participant – Regional Meeting

Theme 2: Clearly define the purpose, roles, and responsibilities of school community councils and the roles parents/caregivers play.

Implementing a model of parent engagement that elevates the role that parents/caregivers play in the education system would represent a change from current parent councils bringing decision making closer to parents. These School Community Councils will work with the principal on matters affecting the school community and move beyond traditional functions that might include fundraising and teacher appreciation. They extend and elevate the advisory roles that parents/caregivers play to inform planning and strategic priorities reflective of the diversity of the school community. Articulating what is changing to parents/caregivers will help support a common understanding of new roles and responsibilities.

Effective School Community Councils will require supports to ensure that executive and other members have the necessary competencies and knowledge to execute their roles and responsibilities. Building this capacity will require education and training opportunities, including school planning, processes and procedures, and accountability and governance. This work could be complemented through a targeted launch in selected schools across Manitoba to build out and refine the School Community Council model and resources before scaling out across the province.

What We Heard:

Over the course of engagement sessions, a mix of views around the roles and responsibilities that parents/caregivers could and should play was heard.

Many parents/caregivers expressed that they were happy with the current ways and areas that they engaged in. Many who already participated in their parent councils noted that the primary activity of was to support fundraising activities that made important investments and contribution to enhance the school experience for students (e.g., playground equipment).

Several participants did reflect a desire to focus the council's role on student education and how to improve or assist the school on improving outcomes. They expressed a desire to be more meaningfully engaged and to have a more active role, but felt constrained by tradition or reluctance from others to do things differently.

Although not common, some participants (parents/caregivers and principals) indicated that school leaders in their school engaged their parent councils to inform planning and understand their collective priorities. In these cases, participants clearly highlighted the important role that the principal had in engaging the council and strong ongoing communications with the group.

Throughout all engagement sessions, there was a perception that parents/caregivers in an enhanced role would become decision makers, rather than participate in an advisory capacity as proposed. Participants indicated that they trust their school leaders to have the right knowledge and experience to make decisions in the best interest of the school community. Many perceived that some parents/caregivers do not have the training to make informed decisions on some matters like human resources or budgeting.

Participants indicated that clarity in the purpose, roles, and responsibilities of the School Community Councils as it compared to existing parent councils operations was important to understand and inform their decisions to engage.

Recommendations:

3. Define the purpose, roles, and responsibilities for School Community Councils to serve the students. In partnership, parents and educators will work to enhance student success and well-being.
4. Reinforce the advisory role of School Community Councils. The advisory role of the School Community Council would not include providing advice on any human resources such as, but not limited to, hiring staff and recommending performance reviews on staff.
5. Provide clarity on the input that School Community Councils may provide regarding the use of suspensions or expulsions as disciplinary tools to ensure that the scope of any deliberation on this issue is limited to related policies and processes. Any deliberations will not permit information of individual cases to be discussed.
6. Develop a policy based on best practices to govern the function of school fundraising activities to maintain focus and alignment within the context of the new elevated role for School Community Councils to focus on student success and well-being.

Theme 3: Build School Community Council capacity.

Effective school community councils will require supports to ensure that executive and other members have the necessary competencies and knowledge to execute their roles and to actively participate.

Building this capacity will require education and training opportunities, on topics including school planning, processes and procedures, and accountability and governance.

Creating opportunity and communication channels for peers to engage and seek advice can support implementation and ongoing capacity building over time.

What We Heard:

Participants perceived that they or other parents/caregivers did not have the right skills to be able to provide advice on proposed areas of focus. When asked, participants supported the idea of being able to engage in training to help them better engage and advance school priorities.

Implementing a council that was perceived to have more formal operational requirements was seen as a potential burden and also barrier to participation, especially in small schools where engagement is already a challenge. Access to resources, like agenda templates and working with supports from the school were a few of the ways that could help break down barriers.

In addition, some parents/caregivers noted that they communicate and connect with other schools in their divisions to understand how they have navigated issues and to learn from their experience.

Recommendations:

7. Develop flexible and accessible resources, training materials, and templates to support effective parent/caregiver engagement within School Community Councils both in person and virtually for greater school community inclusivity. Build capacity and representation for diverse groups, regions, and communities including parents, community members, school staff, and students.
8. Develop flexible policies, overarching procedures, and guiding principles on elements of School Community Council operations to respect and support parent/caregiver engagement to meet local need, support innovation in engagement, and reflect community priorities. This may include but is not limited to roles and functions; meeting structure, quorum, and frequency; conflict of interest; decision making; communication processes; and supporting templates (e.g., standard agendas).
9. Provide School Community Councils with access to provincial and regional communications networks to establish communications channels and facilitate the development of a network of councils to support information sharing, training, policy development, networking, and engagement opportunities.

Theme 4: Support participation and inclusivity in School Community Councils.

It is important that School Community Councils and executive members be diverse and reflect the makeup of the school community. Ensuring representation of different ethnicities, interests, and socio-economic groups is critical to identifying needs, informing planning, and improving student achievement. Recognize that in many instances, parents/caregivers are not the only individuals entrusted with supporting the educational interests of a child.

The makeup of a School Community Council, the belief structure of participants, and their experience with education influence the work and collaboration with school leadership.

What We Heard:

Participants in sessions raised concerns that limiting participation on School Community Councils to only parents/caregivers was not a best practice. People shared the experiences and the value that community member voices can add from a perspective of providing local context and sharing of historical view and values.

Many indicated that the unique makeup of familial relationships in different cultural communities reflected a wider collective responsibility for the education of a child and they should also have the opportunity to be heard. There was strong support for the inclusion of non-parent caregivers, local community members, and Elder voices as some of the key people that can and should advise school leaders.

Participants regularly identified recruitment of volunteers as an issue that at times affected the diversity of the council. Allowing for broader community participation was viewed as a means to help enhance the diversity of local school voice when those parent/caregiver voices did not have the ability to engage.

Although not raised consistently in engagement sessions, best practices and evidence from other provinces indicate that considering student participation on School Community Councils supports additional diversity of perspectives and experiences.

"As a parent involved in our school's council, I come to help my school for my kids and community. I don't have the training to make decisions for things like hiring and budgets—that isn't my role. I trust our school principals and others to do this work."

Parent Participant – Regional Meeting

Recommendations:

10. The School Community Council executive, in consultation with the school principal and parent engagement officer, may include community members to participate in School Community Councils to ensure perspectives are reflective of the school community. Community members may include those who live and/or work in the community, who have common goals or interest with their community school, or who represent the diversity of the students that the school serves.
11. Community members are not eligible to vote for the School Community Council executive or representative on the Provincial Advisory Council on Education (PACE).
12. School Community Councils who have students in Grades 9 through 12, where possible, will hold a minimum of two non-voting student positions within the council. Students are selected by the school principal.
13. Where two or more schools come together to form a School Community Council, at least one individual from each school must participate on the School Community Council to support community inclusion and local voice. Participants could include student members.

Theme 5: Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of school leaders (principal and vice-principals).

The importance of school leaders was identified over and over as a key factor in how engaged and inclusive the school community was and the degree to which families felt welcome.

School leaders set the expectations, tone, and example for the whole school and school community. When parent/caregiver engagement is not prioritized or embraced by leaders, it is widely seen as the key reason for School Community Councils not being implemented with fidelity to the model or working to its full benefit.

What We Heard:

Many parents indicated that their school leaders were regularly engaged with the work of their parent council and as a parent council they felt well supported.

This was echoed by principals who detailed how they regularly engaged in meetings, shared or posted minutes on the school website/portals, provided updates, and supported other engagement events like school barbeques or fairs. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, it was indicated that parent councils were given licences to virtual meeting technology to allow for continued engagement.

Principals and participants indicated the need to be clear on the leadership role and responsibilities that principals have in enhancing parent/caregiver engagement model.

Parents shared concern with the type of issues they may provide advice to principals on. Principals expressed a similar apprehension about the areas of advice and the kinds of information they received. Some indicated they needed training to build their capacity for intentional outreach to engage more authentically with their families.

Participants share their expectations that it is the role of the school leader to establish welcoming and inclusive schools where parents and educators come together to enhance student success and well-being. These comments regularly made reference to the need for strong collaboration and partnership between the parents/caregivers, school leaders, and the broader community.

Recommendations:

14. Outline the leadership roles and responsibilities of school leaders to ensure effective and diverse approaches to parent/caregiver engagement that are welcoming, inclusive, and reflect the school community.
15. Ensure the development of the new provincial school leadership framework clearly articulates the required competencies of school leaders in relation to the successful implementation of School Community Councils.
16. School plans must outline how the School Community Council has been engaged in the development of the annual school plan. School principals provide regular updates on progress toward school plan targets and goals to the School Community Council or at the request of the School Community Council.
17. School leaders are actively considering the membership of their School Community Council to be reflective of their school community. School leaders will work with the parent engagement officer to identify and address missing perspectives.

Theme 6: Clearly define the role and responsibilities of the parent engagement officer.

The parent engagement officer role is an innovative and collaborative way to make connections between teachers, principals, and members of the school community through support of a dedicated individual to facilitate parent and community engagement.

This role would be responsible for enhancing partnerships with parents, communicating about the work of school community councils, encouraging school-parent/caregiver relationships, and providing information and navigation support to families.

Parent engagement officers serve as the liaison between schools, families, the school community council, and the educational system as a whole.

What We Heard:

Participants quickly understood the role of the parent engagement officer and generally had favourable reactions when it was described to them. Participants identified many opportunities that the role could assist with, including grant writing, school events, information sessions for parents/caregivers, supporting school-level planning, supporting the School Community Council with capacity training (roles/responsibilities and operations), providing regular reports back to the School Community Council to enhance accountability, and supporting School Community Council operations (minutes, agenda development, ensure quorum, etc.). Governance Support Officers in the Frontier School Division were noted as currently performing these duties.

Discussions on this topic focused on how this position would be staffed, what competencies are required for it, how would you ensure consistency across Manitoba, whether the position requires new funding, and where this role would fit in the overall reporting of the organization.

The most consistent concern raised was a strong negative reaction to the term *officer*. Many felt the term *officer* carries negative connotations, and several suggestions were made to revise the title to reflect the more inclusive nature that the role represents in bringing the school, parents, and community together.

Recommendations:

18. Revise the title *parent engagement officer* to *parent/caregiver engagement liaison*. Clearly define the role as a partnership builder, facilitator, and connector within and among the entire school community, including school staff and students.
19. Develop a position description for the parent/caregiver engagement liaison that articulates aspects of the role common to the position including qualifications, attributes, experience, and duties related to parent/caregiver engagement and supporting School Community Councils, and identify areas of flexibility to meet local need.
20. Establish a (regional and/or provincial) Parent/Caregiver Engagement Liaison Network to create a professional learning community to support the ongoing operations and capacity building across the system.

Theme 7: Provide resources and funding to support School Community Councils.

Shifting School Community Councils toward an enhanced and elevated role will require and investment of financial resources to build capacity both of the council directly and for other ancillary supports—like dedicated positions—as changes are implemented. Funding School Community Councils allows the group to support student learning initiatives and ensure effective functioning of the council.

There are a variety of School Community Council funding models in other provinces and countries. These models range from discretionary funds, grants, and/or per-pupil allocations that allow School Community Councils to support teacher-initiated projects, school improvement work, and other strategic undertakings. A key use of School Community Council funds are to support training, resources, and other activities that advance the general work and capacity of the council.

What We Heard:

Current parent council members shared the importance of supporting them in implementing an enhanced model. Parents/caregivers indicated that having access to regular funding would allow them to build up the skills of members to support strong operations and governance through training and development opportunities like engaging speakers, attending seminars, or taking a group course. Other jurisdictions, like Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia, indicated that capacity building was one of the eligible categories for which funding to the School Community Council could be used.

Participants also noted that there are costs to removing barriers to engagement to pay for items like child or respite care, fees for technology licences, or transportation costs.

School leaders and administrators cited having stable and predictable funding as an opportunity to create equality in the ability of every school to have the same access to support for operations and capacity building.

Jurisdictions where enhanced models of parent/caregiver engagement had been put in place shared some of the many lessons learned over time. Their best advice indicated the importance of support for both the individual school councils and also ensuring that there are appropriate and dedicated human resource supports at all levels of the system (school, region, and department). They specifically indicated it is not a function that can be done off the side of a desk and emphasized how roles like the parent engagement officer can meet this need at the school level—much like the Governance Support Officer in Frontier School Division. If not considered, the ability to widely and successfully implement will be lost.

Recommendations:

21. Create a funding model to support parent engagement and School Community Council operations that is transparent, fair, and predictable. Parameters must be set explaining the use of funding. Consideration could be given to both a base amount per school and a per-student allocation.
22. Develop policies regarding eligible and ineligible expenditures to be articulated in the *School Community Council Policy Framework and Guidelines* to build School Community Council capacity and support parent and caregiver partnership with the school.

23. Allocate dedicated, fair, and predictable funding and human resources at all levels of the system—schools, regions/divisions, and the Department of Education—to ensure successful implementation and the ongoing operations of School Community Councils and parent/caregiver partnerships.

Theme 8:

Build on best practices from Frontier School Division.

Expand and build on the existing Frontier School Division’s tri-level governance model where parents/caregivers are effectively engaged at all levels of the system, including with the school, area, and decision makers.

Frontier School Division is the only legislated “local school committees” model in Manitoba that has been in place for more than 50 years. Over time, given the uniqueness of their model, they have developed best practices in parent and Indigenous engagement, resources and tools, and governance and leadership models.

What We Heard:

Many stakeholders and participants across different sessions and workshops spoke about the innovative approaches and high-quality education that Frontier School Division delivers for its students in rural and remote areas of Manitoba. Participants suggested that keeping the division as is was the most favourable approach.

Concerns were shared that any changes that have an impact on the service delivery model including education and parent/caregiver engagement would have unintended consequences including potential impacts to relationships and agreements with Indigenous partners, and the loss of area advisory committees and the role and ability to engage with the Elders and the broader community.

Recommendation:

24. Expand and build on the existing Frontier School Division’s tri-level governance model where parents/caregivers are effectively engaged at all levels of the system including with the school, area, and decision makers. The established resources, policies, and other best practices include but are not limited to policy guides and tools, area network tables, governance support officers, operational templates, and the tri-level leadership/governance model.

Theme 9: Ensure reflective and representative local voices inform the education system.

The importance of ensuring a strong local voice is critical to informing the overall education system in Manitoba. It provides vital perspectives to inform planning and making sure all students, no matter where they live, can achieve their potential. Ensuring that the system can capture the diversity of these local voices through reflective and proportionate representation is one opportunity to achieve this. Identifying clear pathways for people to be heard when issues arise is another way to support local voice.

What We Heard:

Participants shared their perceptions that changes in education system governance would result in a loss of local voice and a centralization of decision making in Winnipeg, which would have a negative impact on parent/caregiver options to engage at different levels of the system.

Several times, the term *cookie cutter approach* was referenced, expressing an underlying fear that unique differences, needs, or programming would not be considered or that sufficient flexibility would not be provided to address their local needs.

Rural stakeholders expressed strong connections and ties to their elected trustees with many indicating that we live, work, and worship together. For many Winnipeg participants, they were aware that they had trustees but were not necessarily familiar with who those individuals were.

Participants indicated the importance of parents/caregivers having equal opportunity to shape priorities and provide advice in system wide planning. They were clear about the need to be intentional about seeking out diversity of voice and having proportionate representation. In particular, they shared that schools need to be intentional about bringing Indigenous and other marginalized voices forward.

Strong messaging from participants indicated that a single representative to the Provincial Advisory Council on Education from Winnipeg could not effectively or authentically represent the scope and diversity of experiences of these families and their individual circumstances. Like concerns were shared regarding rural and remote communities as compared to more urban northern centres.

Participants share their perceptions that the enhanced role of parents/caregivers, in combination with the removal of local trustees would result in trustee responsibilities being offloaded on to parents, who are already very busy.

Parents/caregivers indicated they were looking for clarity about where they could go to address issues or concerns that are not resolved at the school levels. Some wanted reassurance about the independence of resources. Others acknowledged that they would look to other avenues to connect with an elected representative, including their MLA or the Minister of Education for advocacy or support to resolve issues.

Recommendations:

25. Develop a model for Winnipeg with more representation on the Provincial Advisory Council on Education, with a minimum of four proposed balanced regions to enhance and create more representation of local voice, diversity of parent and caregiver perspectives, and opportunities to engage at the regional level to create greater access, equity of opportunity, and alignment across the regions.
26. Develop a model for the Northern region in consultation with Indigenous communities to reflect opportunities for local voice, engagement, and participation that recognize the differences for those living in rural and remote communities compared to larger northern centres.
27. Enhance the role and develop related policies for the regionally elected Provincial Advisory Council on Education representative to be able to consider and facilitate issue resolution [for a limited scope of issues] when all other avenues of internal processes for escalation have been exhausted.

Closing Observations

The viewpoints and insights around parent/caregiver engagement gained by the Task Force through direct dialogue with Manitobans provided critical information to shape the recommendations that are presented in this report. In addition to this, over the course of our engagement sessions, we would like to acknowledge that Manitobans also shared their perspectives, concerns, and support for other aspects of the strategy (e.g., proposed governance changes) that extended beyond the mandate of the group.

Although not an exhaustive listing, some of the concerns and perceptions shared included the following:

- parents/caregivers viewing elected school boards as an independent mechanism to which to bring forward concerns/issues
- uncertainty on the impact to local communities
- how catchment areas might work in the future
- concern that there might be changes to local programming

The Task Force also heard about the impacts that other socio-economic factors can have on parent/caregiver engagement. We recognize that a Poverty and Education Task Force will be struck to examine this important issue in greater detail and are supportive of this.

The Task Force will bring these to the attention of the Minister for further consideration.

Appendix A: Terms of Reference

Parent Engagement Task Force

Mandate

The Manitoba government is establishing a Task Force to guide public input and provide advice to the province on how to move forward with parent engagement as a key component of education reform in Manitoba. This Task Force will listen to Manitobans in order to

- help shape the roles and responsibilities of the School Community Councils
- explore how parents can participate in supporting their children's education in ways that respect their time commitments
- explore best practices for parent participation and engagement
- assist in improving educational experiences and outcomes through innovative collaborative approaches among parents, teachers, and principals

Membership

The Task Force will consist of parents, community and school leaders, and MLAs, and will be chaired by Scott Johnston, legislative assistant to the Minister of Education. Members include the following:

- MLAs (Chair: Scott Johnston; Vice-Chairs: Ian Wishart, Janice Morley-Lecomte)
- Parents
- School leaders/division representatives
- Manitoba Education representatives (Deputy Minister of Education, Assistant Deputy Minister of Planning and Transformation, and Director of Transformation Management Office)

Key Responsibilities

- Focus on listening to participant feedback during engagement sessions including 15 regional town halls, four telephone town halls, as well as workshops with parent advisory councils and school leaders as outlined in the engagement plan and based on member availability. Regional sessions will be led and moderated by the Chair and Vice-Chairs.

- Put forth recommendations to the Minister of Education on how to move forward with parent engagement, including the role and responsibilities of the councils, and the resources required to support parent engagement.

The Transformation Management Office at Manitoba Education will be responsible for coordination, logistics, and support.

Timeline

- Public engagement will occur in May and June. Initial recommendations will be submitted to the Minister of Education by September 2021, with a plan for ongoing engagement to be determined.
- A schedule of attendance for these sessions will be established as Task Force members are not expected to be at each public engagement session. During these public engagement sessions, the role of the Task Force is to listen to Manitobans. After the sessions, the members will bring forward observations for discussion at Task Force meetings.
- The Task Force will operate for approximately 12 months, at which point its activities are expected to conclude. If needed, may be extended or renewed.

Meetings

Meetings will be held at the call of the Chair. It is anticipated that virtual meetings will be held bi-weekly until June 30, 2021, and then, if required, monthly thereafter. The schedule may change from time to time in order to meet the work plan to accomplish the tasks as outlined.

Appendix B: Research and Literature Review

In our review of the current research and literature on parent engagement in education, it is evident that there is a growing recognition around the importance of parent/caregiver and community engagement in the education system. From these best practices it is clear that there is not a single approach or solution but rather an array of ways that must be considered to support diverse parent/caregiver, community, and school engagement and collaboration. These approaches are considered in the context of the local community and are built from the bottom up, giving voice to the entire community that ultimately translates into student success and well-being.

Barriers to Engagement

The barriers to parent engagement in the education system are many and diverse. Parents and families face challenges of equity and inclusion. Identity factors including socio-economic status, race and ethnicity, Indigeneity, geography, single parenthood, and parent educational background have ripple-like effects on a parent's time, capacity, and willingness to contribute to the child's education. Engagement strategies must be supportive and organic, recognizing how individual and systemic realities that families may face can marginalize parents from the education system. (Leithwood & Patrician, 2015, 661–668, 680–681; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, 6–9; Parent Voice in Education Project & Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 10.)

Part of the challenge in facilitating effective parental engagement is that strategies are often devised to get more parents “into the school,” omitting the range of activities that occur outside of the school day and classroom. Engagement in education takes many forms, happening in any way, at any place, and at any time. The home is host to a number of aspects of parental engagement that indirectly influence academic outcomes in children, which Fox and Olsen identify as parent-child reading and conversation, a positive and cognitively stimulating environment, and support for social and emotional well-being (Fox & Olsen, 2014, pp. 15–16). Therefore, an expansive understanding of what constitutes involvement must be reflected in our strategies, focusing on how schools and parent councils can support engagement at home and in the community (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, 1).

Planning and Communication

Schools that successfully engage parents are inclusive; differentiating and diversifying options for parent engagement to meet the needs of families, whatever they may be (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, 6; Parent Voice in Education Project & Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 10). Planning by schools with families and the community

in mind, coupled with communication that is clear and consistent (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2005, 10-11; Parent Voice in Education Project & Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 10-13) can foster organic parent-educator partnerships that are responsive to differences in engagement across students and their stages of development (Leithwood & Patrician, 2015, 681). As Leithwood and Patrician note, the goal of engagement is not to serve clients but to gain partners (681).

Parents have been shown to benefit from a number of avenues that disseminate information and share best practices, including websites, email lists, and peer networks (Parent Voice in Education Project & Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 13). Engaging with parents in the form of surveys, focus groups, and town halls, councils and committees empower local democratic planning while ensuring evolving community needs are taken into account (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth 2005). For these forms of engagement to attract and sustain parent participation, schools must ensure that parents feel valued and that time-commitments are clear and understood by all (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2005, 10).

School Community Councils

There is growing recognition that school community councils, through the active participation of parents, contribute effectively to school and pupil improvement, providing opportunities for direct consultation on matters that affect the child's education and enhancing system accountability (Parent Voice in Education Project & Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 11). Many jurisdictions in Canada and the United States have School Community Councils. Looking to other jurisdictions like Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Nova Scotia, to name a few, can provide insights from lessons learned and information on what worked well.

Governance

Within any eminent school organization, establishing a clear mandate and line of authority for a School Community Council is an important first step (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2005, 15; Pushor, 2012, 472–473). Parent members must have a shared identity and understanding of a council's functions, values, and responsibilities before vision and planning begins. This requires both time and training for parents, recognizing that gaining an understanding of a council's purpose and mandate is not a linear, one-time process (Preston, 2011, 203). Provincial policies and bylaws governing parental involvement are important aids in this stage, embedding the information and tools parents require at the local level to engage fully in the school community (Amendt, 2018; Manitoba Education 2005; Ontario Ministry of Education 2010; Parent Voice in Education Project & Ontario Ministry of Education 2005). Alongside policies, provinces should take responsibility for ensuring councils are effectively funded, with a formula that is equitable and fair, simple, and accountable for results (Parent Voice in Education Project & Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 19; The Scottish Government, 2016, 15).

Roles and Responsibilities

Parents

Parents ideally envision their role in education to be influential but not burdensome. The literature conceptualizes three responsibilities school councils take on in contributing to excellence in education. First, school councils should be directly consulted on matters that affect pupil success in the education system (Parent Voice in Education Project & Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 11). School councils should be empowered to make recommendations to the principal and board, a second responsibility reflected in Ontario policy, which defines specific duties for principals related to school councils (Parent Voice, 12). Finally, school councils establish a number of governance procedures and accountability mechanisms to assist the organization in carrying out its mandate (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2005, 17).

Operationalizing the Council's Vision and Goals

The process of organizing and carrying out the work of school councils takes many forms. Committees have been shown to be an effective structure for workload sharing and specialization, and create opportunities for greater inclusivity, opening up the council to more members of the school community (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2005, 17–21). With inclusivity in mind, the format for discussion must be holistic and respectful, amplifying the voices of all community members. Pushor & Amendt emphasize that Indigenous methodologies, such as talking circles, are often the ideal designs for these groups (2018, 214). Actively engaging with Indigenous parents should be a priority, fostering a sense of belonging and cultural awareness into all aspects of the council's work (Leithwood & Patrician, 2015, 681).

Principals

Perhaps most importantly, principals are key players in school councils and their leadership and engagement are crucial to all aspects of a parent council's work (Pushor & Amendt, 2018, 203–211). Principals are leaders among school staff, guiding educators toward best practices in parent engagement and strengthening school-community linkages with the assistance of community liaison staff, such as a school engagement officer (Preston, 2011, 204). Council communication efforts must be promoted throughout the school community, and principals play a leading role in facilitating information sharing among all school-related councils and the school (Preston, 2011, 204; Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2005). Finally, school leaders are invaluable in creating a climate of trust and respect in school councils, providing a strong foundation for inclusive collective action (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth 2005). Given such impactful aspects of school leadership, there are growing calls to integrate parental involvement training into principal and school leadership programs (Parent Voice in Education Project & Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, 18).

Appendix C: Pan-Canadian Overview of Parent Engagement Bodies

Province	Parent Engagement Body	School-Level Role	Governed By	Membership
Manitoba	Parent Advisory Council (PAC)/ Advisory Council for School Leadership (ACSL) Manitoba Association of Parent Councils (MAPC)	Advisory: Advises on matters of the local school and school board (policies, activities, fundraising & school budgets, hiring and assigning principals, and school plan development).	Local policies (school & board) Optional: Every school may establish a parent advisory council or advisory council for school leadership.	No fewer than seven members, with majority (2/3) of members parents; community members make up remaining 1/3.
British Columbia	Parent Advisory Council (PAC) District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC)	Advisory: Advises the board, principal, and staff of the school respecting any matter relating to education.	Local policies (school & district) Optional: Parents can apply to the Board of Minister to establish a PAC.	All parents and caregivers of students in a school are able to participate and are considered members of the PAC.
Alberta	School Councils Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA)	Advisory: Advises principal and the board of the school on any matter related to the school. Consults with the principal on education standards, fiscal management.	Provincial legislation Mandatory: Parents are to establish a council for their respective school.	Flexible number of members with regulated composition: School principal Teachers Parents Secondary students
Prince Edward Island	School Councils/ Home and School Associations District Advisory Council PEI Home and School Federation (PEIHSF)	Advisory: Informs school administration and, on occasion, advises on school effectiveness planning and principal selection.	Local policies (school & district) Optional: Parents may establish school councils for their school.	Majority of members must be parents of students attending the school. The school council determines additional regulations or procedures.

Province	Parent Engagement Body	School-Level Role	Governed By	Membership
Saskatchewan	School Community Councils	Develop, recommend: Advises the education board and school staff on policies and school programming; develops and recommends to the school board a school-level plan on improving student outcomes.	Provincial legislation Mandatory: The Education Board shall establish a school community council for each school in its division.	5-9 elected and appointed members,* with regulated composition: Principal Teachers Students First Nations representatives (if on-reserve) * Community members can be appointed at the discretion of the SCC.
Newfoundland and Labrador	School Councils Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils (NLFSC)	Develop, recommend: Authorized to develop policies that enhance quality in school programming, advise the board on a school development plan, raise concerns of the school community, and monitor the school performance report.	Provincial legislation Mandatory: The principal shall establish a school council for the school.	8-15 elected/ appointed members, with regulated composition: Principal Teachers Parents Community members Secondary students
Nova Scotia	School Advisory Councils (SAC) Nova Scotia Federation of Home and School Associations (NSFHSA)	Develop, recommend: Authorized to advise principals and regional centres for education through non-binding recommendations on matters related to school improvement, policy development and student success, and the overall education system.	Provincial legislation Mandatory: Principals must establish a school advisory council.	5-18 elected/ appointed members with regulated composition: Principal Teacher Parents Community members Secondary students

Province	Parent Engagement Body	School-Level Role	Governed By	Membership
Ontario	School Councils Parent Involvement Committees (district-level)	Review, modify, approve: Reviews and provides recommendations on any matter of school-wide relevance to the principal and school board, who in turn are obligated to consult with the bodies.	Provincial legislation Mandatory: Every school board must establish a school council for each school and must oversee its operation.	Flexible number of members allowed in accordance with regulated composition: Principal, Teachers, home/independent school representative Parents Secondary students Community members
Quebec	Governing Boards (school-level)* Parents' committees (district-level) English Parents' Committee Association (EPCA) La Fédération des comités de parents du Québec (FCPQ) * Schools may also establish a parent participation organization.	Review, modify, approve: Governing boards, which require parent representation, advise the school board on matters ensuring better organization of services and implementation of education projects, and consult on various school issues, including principal selection. Parent committees see to the interests of parents at the district-level.	Provincial legislation Mandatory: Governing boards are the primary decision-making and oversight bodies for schools.	No more than 20 members, with regulated composition: Principal Parents (at least 4 with one Chair) School representatives: teachers, staff, secondary students Community members

Province	Parent Engagement Body	School-Level Role	Governed By	Membership
Yukon	School Councils Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards & Committees (AYSCBC)	Review, modify, approve: Councils review, modify and approve the school annual plan and course priorities, attendance strategies and learning improvement plans. Schools councils recommend to the superintendent for approval budgetary plans, and actively-participate in the selection of a school principal.	Provincial legislation Mandatory: The Minister, with the support of no less than ten persons living in the school attendance area, shall establish a school council for that school.	Councils require no fewer than three members and no more than seven members. Any person who is qualified as an elector in the education area is eligible for membership on a school council. Councils must guarantee representation for Aboriginal people on Councils in partnership with each Yukon First Nation.

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