



Education Resource Guide for Parents & Caregivers in Ontario

Developed by the Working Women Community Centre



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www.workingwomencc.org

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Parent Ambassador Project - Parents & Caregivers Resource Guide

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About Working Women Community Centre

Working Women Community Centre (WWCC) is a women-focused settlement agency that provides support to newcomers in Toronto. Since 1974, we have been making a difference in the lives of immigrant women and their families.

For over 40 years, we have worked to provide access to programs and services that build healthy communities. These include settlement counselling, community engagement initiatives, economic development programs, English language instruction, and education supports for parents, caregivers, children and youth.

We currently offer three [educational programs](#), our **Parent Ambassador Program (PAP)**, **Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)** which offers early literacy programming for mothers with children ages 3-5, and the **On Your Mark Program (OYM)** which provides tutoring and mentoring for students in grades 1 to 12.



Acknowledgements

The **Parent Ambassador Project (PAP)** would not have been possible without the commitment of Latinx, Black, Indigenous and racialized parents and caregivers dedicated to challenging the status quo, disrupting unjust education practices and advancing equitable opportunities for students in Ontario.

We are sincerely thankful to the Latinx, Black, racialized, immigrant and newcomer parents and caregivers who participated in the parent ambassador training, committed their time and generously shared their experiences during the training project.

Thank you to our volunteers, collaborators, community leaders, sponsors and funders who supported the implementation and execution of this project. We would like to extend a special acknowledgement to the Coalition for Alternatives to Streaming in Education ([CASE](#)) and Parents of Black Children ([PoBC](#)) for their ongoing support of this project.

Lastly, we are grateful for the generosity, invaluable expertise, insights and knowledge sharing from our guest speakers through all of our sessions. In addition to this education resource guide, the Parent Ambassador Project developed a series of equity knowledge-based webinars called “Education Interrupted: Parent Engagement for Liberation”. This is an additional tool for parents, scholars and community leaders to engage in meaningful dialogue and advance an anti-racist model of parent engagement that is inclusive of all families.

The series of webinars for this project were in partnership with:

The Centre for Integrative
Anti-Racism Studies CIARS



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Project Background

Based on the knowledge gained from working with parents and caregivers through the On Your Mark ([OYM](#)) tutoring and mentoring program, Working Women Community Centre's ([WWCC](#)), identified that parents need further information and tools to better navigate the education system and become effective advocates for their children. The Parent Ambassador Project ([PAP](#)) was created as part of the Community Legacy Fund established after the PanAm/Parapan Am Games held in Toronto in 2015. The Community Legacy Initiative invests in projects that profile and provide longer-term economic and/or social infrastructure benefits for Toronto's Latin American, South American, and Caribbean communities.

The three-year program initially launched as the Latinx Parents for Change – Parent Ambassador Project and ran in partnership with the Mennonite New Life Centre ([MLCT](#)), the Toronto District School Board ([TDSB](#)) and the Toronto District Catholic School Board ([TDCSB](#)).

Using a participatory community needs assessment that included interviews, focus groups and a pilot project, the implementation of Latinx Parents for Change PAP program, demonstrated that Latinx parents and caregivers faced multiple systemic barriers when engaging in structural and traditional parent involvement initiatives. The need to create spaces for parents and caregivers to engage meaningfully was clear.

The following qualitative feedback from the Latinx community informed these findings:

- The three most significant barriers to access were related to comprehension of the curricula were 1) language/jargon 2) access to computer/internet and 3) time.
- Latinx parents did not feel informed about options for applied courses vs. academic courses in high school.
- Although most parents value higher education, their lack of understanding of the system limited their chances to support their children in deciding what courses to take.
- Uncertainty and disappointment were expressed from Latinx parents whose children were streamed and they felt unclear of the future impact of their choices.
- Latinx parents/caregivers with economic barriers such as precarious employment and low-income, experienced challenges when engaging in parent involvement activities that required long-term commitments such as participation in the school council. For instance, parents recounted how low-wage jobs meant parents were required to take unplanned shifts to make ends meet, resulting in their availability for participation being unpredictable.

- Latinx parents expressed experiences of frustration when engaged in volunteer activities at the school. The tasks they were given did not allow them to showcase their talents or demonstrate their skills in action. Volunteer opportunities were limited to serving snacks, food preparation and cleaning after school programs resulting in the feeling that their engagement with the school was meaningless.
- Some Latinx parents shared lived experiences of racism and discrimination and felt this extended to their children. They perceived their children as being judged solely based on assumptions, bias or prejudice, their intersectionalities such as race, identity and ethnicity, often being denied. Individual cases of discrimination in the classroom were shared among parents and there were reported incidents of racist statements made to students by school administration.

With significant foundational learnings from the Latinx Parents for Change PAP project, WWCC expanded the PAP project to include additional communities facing systemic barriers to participation. In 2021, WWCC created a seven-week, 21 hour training program for parents and families of school-aged children who are immigrants, newcomers, Black, Indigenous and racialized. The program invites parents, caregivers and community leaders as guest speakers to exchange knowledge and experiences, and share practices of action towards a more inclusive and accessible school system.

Program Goals

- To provide parents, caregivers, and guardians with an in-depth understanding of the public education system in Ontario;
- to foster the development of local, formal and informal networks of parents and caregivers;
- to learn about existing formal and/or informal parent coalitions and collectives working locally and provincially in public education advocacy;
- to challenge and encourage critical reflection about traditional models of parent involvement in Ontario's public education system; and
- to provide tools and resources for newcomers, Black, Indigenous, racialized, and immigrant parents, caregivers, and guardians to navigate the public education system in Ontario.

About this Resource Guide

WWCC created this guide as a complementary resource to the PAP training; it includes the information and resources shared throughout training sessions. This guide is not meant to replace official education documents provided by provincial or municipal education policymakers, stakeholders or partners.

This guide is designed to create learning spaces for parents and caregivers to reflect on their own experiences with the public education system, to exchange knowledge, and to foster the development of local and informal parent-based networks that can support other parents in doing this work. We encourage parents and caregivers to use and share this resource with their respective school councils. We also encourage educators and school administrators to benefit from the reflections in this guide and use them to further collaboration with parents, caregivers and families.

Making the Best Use of this Guide

- This resource guide responds to the concerns expressed by parents and caregivers about the difficulties they have faced navigating their children's education and it was developed in collaboration with parents and caregivers committed to public education
- This resource guide will support parents and caregivers to critically reflect on current realities, develop transferable skills, exchange knowledge and experiences, and share practices of action and solidarity towards an equitable school system. It focuses on enhancing the leadership skills of caregivers and parents while strengthening their understanding of Ontario's education system.
- This resource guide offers learning tools to explore topics such as school governance, parent and caregiver engagement, special education, anti-racism, anti-Black racism, equity, and social justice within schooling.
- This resource guide includes hyperlinked resources and references where possible. Each section includes an interactive slide deck that can be used in combination with the guide or as a stand-alone tool.
- Facilitators using this resource guide are encouraged to adapt any of these elements according to the needs of participants, program delivery, or the facilitators' own experiences.

Who is this Guide for?

- Any parent, caregiver and guardian who has a child within the Ontario public education system and has an interest in learning more about school governance, parent and caregiver engagement, special education, anti-racism, anti-Black racism, equity, and social justice within schooling.
- Parents, caregivers and guardians of children who are immigrants and newcomers, Black, Indigenous and racialized in Ontario's public education system
- School councils of elementary and secondary schools within the Ontario public education system
- Coalitions and collectives working locally and provincially in Ontario public education advocacy
- Community organizations, community leaders, agencies and workers who support parents, caregivers, and families of Black, Indigenous, racialized, immigrant and newcomers
- Educators and school administrators who have an interest in learning more about parent and caregiver engagement, anti-racism, anti-Black racism, equity, and social justice within schooling
- Parents, caregivers and guardians of children with special educational needs in Ontario's public education system

Section Content

Section	Learning Objectives
Section 1 Understanding the Education System in Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand different components of the education system in Ontario • Discover key partners and the roles they play within Ontario's education system • Identify the different types of school boards and programs offered within Ontario • Understand how funding is allocated to school boards in Ontario
Section 2 Understanding the Education System in Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the roles and responsibilities of various types of school governance bodies • Learn how to vote for a school trustee and how to become a school trustee • Identify opportunities to participate in school decision-making processes • Understand how school board and council meetings operate
Section 3 From Parent Involvement to Parent Engagement that Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an understanding of dominant and alternative parent engagement models • Identify strategies for parents to effectively communicate with school staff, teachers, principals, board staff, trustees and other parent communities • Strengthen parent capacity to navigate the education system and advocate for their child/children • Learn about what delegations are and how they function

<p>Section 4</p> <p>Navigating Systemic Barriers to Education: An Anti-Racism Approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn, identify and define systemic oppression and barriers • Understand and identify racism and other forms of discrimination • Develop strategies to work with other parents and community members to address racism in schooling
<p>Section 5</p> <p>Understanding and Identifying Challenges Faced by Racialized Students Part I</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify common challenges experienced by racialized students • Understand special education programs and Individual Education Plans (IEP's) • Understand academic streaming and impact on students' success • Learn about suspensions, expulsions and how to appeal them • Gain strategies to support student's success
<p>Section 6</p> <p>Understanding and Identifying Challenges Faced by Racialized Students Part II</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn about the right to access education for students with precarious immigration status • Understand bullying, its impacts and how to report it • Strengthen knowledge of alternative conflict resolution models and restorative justice practices
<p>Section 7</p> <p>Collective Care: A Parent Ambassador Model of Solidarity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the Ambassador Model, its principles and how to be an effective parent ambassador • Develop skills and strategies for effective public speaking • Gain insight into the principles of community organizing • Learn how to build successful coalitions • Understand the importance of solidarity • Understand how COVID19 has impacted the education system

SECTION 2

Understanding School Governance Bodies

Learning objectives:

1. Understand the roles and responsibilities of various types of school governance bodies
2. Learn how to vote for a school trustee and how to become a school trustee
3. Identify opportunities to participate in school decision-making processes
4. Understand how school board and council meetings operate



[Interactive Learning Link for Section 2](#)

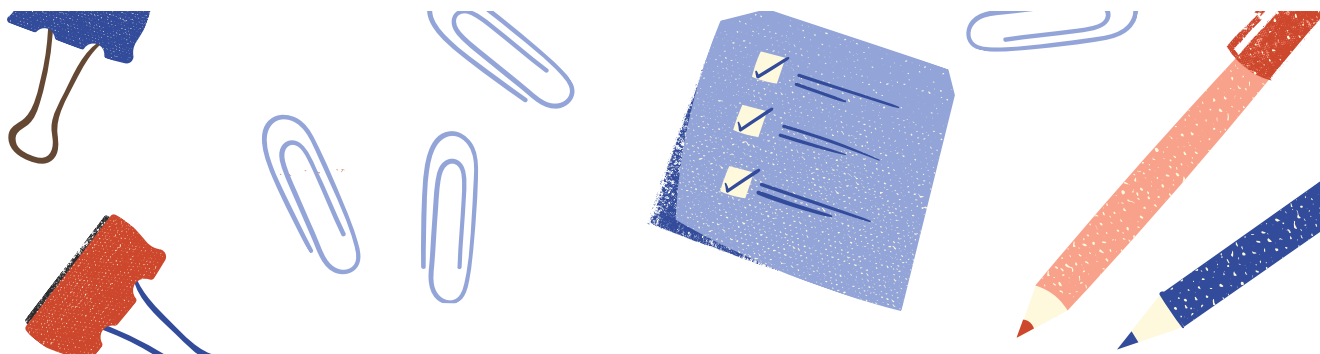
School Governance Bodies

Navigating the education system can be complex. It is important for parents and caregivers to know the multiple structures and governance bodies that influence decision-making in their children's education. When parents and caregivers engage with the education system at various levels, it ensures that these structures are held accountable and supports the needs of students.

Directors

- The Director of Education (DOE) is, in essence, the Chief Executive Officer of the school board.
- They report directly to the board of trustees and are accountable to the Minister of Education.
- The DOE must meet the rules and objectives set out by the Ministry.
- All school board staff report either directly or indirectly to the DOE.
- Some of the DOE's responsibilities include advising the board on operational matters; implementing board policies, and establishing the board's priorities.
- The DOE has a significant influence on the board by allocating resources, managing staff and making sure advice and information is properly delivered to trustees to ensure they have the information they need to make decisions.
- DOE have their own advisory council.

The Council of Ontario Directors of Education/Conseil ontarien des directions de l'éducation ([CODE](#)) is a professional organization, an advisory and consultative organization composed of CEO's of each of the 72 school boards in Ontario.





Did you know?

In 2020, [Bill 197](#) was passed to remove the requirement that a DOE must be a former teacher and supervisory officer.

A DOE who is not a certified teacher will not be subject to the authority of the [Ontario College of Teachers](#), or bound by the College's Ethical Standards or Standards of Practice.

In other words, any CEO on Bay street can become the DOE and manage education as a business, which puts our public education system at risk of privatization-like structures. Knowing who your current DOE is and their qualifications can be used as an important advocacy tool for influencing decision making processes.

School Board Trustees

Trustees are elected every four years to the school board during municipal elections.

- They represent the interest of parents, caregivers and students in their area (ward)
- They sit on committees regarding expelling students and make decisions about the school board budget
- Trustees are members of the school board. As members of the board, they provide an important link between local communities and the school board, bringing the issues and concerns of their constituents to board discussions and decision-making
- Boards of trustees join their own advisory associations, either the [Ontario Public School Boards' Association](#) or the [Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association](#).

To find out who your trustee is, check your district school board website or ask your school administration for their contact information.

Who can vote for school trustee?

If you are a resident of a municipality, you are eligible to vote for school trustees. This includes if you are the owner or tenant (or spouse of an owner or tenant) of a residential property in a municipality.

Trustee Election



Note: School boards can cover large areas of the province and include many municipalities. You are only allowed to vote for the trustee specific to the school board you are registered to support (see definition for “supporter” below).

Below are the voter eligibility requirements for trustee selection based on each board:

- 1. English-language public school board.** This is the default - unless you are qualified to vote for a Catholic or French board, you will vote for the English public school board trustee in your area.
- 2. English-language Catholic school board.** You must be a Roman Catholic, and you must be a separate school board supporter or the spouse of a separate school board supporter to vote for the English Language Catholic school board trustee. If your spouse is a Roman Catholic and you are not, you are not eligible.
- 3. French-language public school board.** You must be a French-language rights holder, and you must be a supporter (or the spouse of a supporter) of the French-language public school board to vote for the French-language public school board trustee.
- 4. French-language Catholic school board.** You must be a Roman Catholic and a French-language rights holder, and you must be a supporter (or the spouse of a supporter) of the French Catholic school board to vote for the French-language Catholic school board trustee. If your spouse is a Roman Catholic and you are not, you are not eligible.

“Supporter” refers to which school board the school portion of your property taxes goes to. The default is the public school system. In order to be a Catholic school supporter you must direct your taxes to the Catholic school system. Contact the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (1-866-296-MPAC {6722}) for more information.

“French-language rights holder” is set out in section [23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#), and refers to the right of citizens whose first language is French to receive educational instruction in French.



Who can become a school trustee?

Any parent or caregiver can be nominated as a school trustee. If you are qualified to vote in a school board election and you are a resident of a school district, then you are qualified to be elected. Trustee candidates do not need to have a background in education. However, understanding governance policies, bylaws and educational structures are important assets for candidates. Much of this knowledge can be learned in the process.



Did you know!

Trustees' campaigns are a great platform for those interested in pursuing political careers.

Thinking of running?

Municipal elections are held every four years, nominations are held between May & July.



Remember!

Any parent/caregiver can put their name on the ballot and run for school trustee in their ward.

Because Mayors and Councillors are elected at the same time as school trustees during municipal elections, trustee elections are overshadowed making it hard for school trustee candidates to get noticed. As a result, incumbents, and people with a lot of name recognition may get more easily elected over challengers. School trustees often campaign in small networks of parents and caregivers connected to particular schools they have strong relationships with.

Most trustees use social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to communicate with their constituents. Follow yours so you can get a better idea of their political views and how they support your school community.

By law, trustees are paid a small honourarium and as a result, may have another job. This may result in trustees having a limited amount of time to review materials, conduct any independent research or discuss issues with each other or other people. As a result, they are dependent on staff for information and advice. This may also mean trustees may have difficulties keeping up with the demands from their constituents in the limited time they have available. As a parent, in order to receive a response from your trustee, **following up might be necessary!**



Remember!

Get to know your school trustee by visiting your school website or calling the school.

When municipal elections are called, find out who the candidates are and consider: do they prioritize issues of equity? What is their commitment to communities? Have they been supportive and responsive to your requests in the past?



Did you know!

To help parents of Black children stay informed, the advocacy organization Parents of Black Children ([PoBC](#)) created a tracking tool to track trustees from school boards across the province with the [Ontario trustee tracker](#).

School Superintendents

- School superintendents are hired by and report to the school board as staff responsible for groups of schools within each school board.
- They might be involved in suspension appeals, special education meetings, and requests to attend a school other than the home school.
- They oversee board wide-programs.
- You can contact your school superintendent if you cannot get the help you need from the school principal.

Principals

- Principals are responsible for the management of individual schools including hiring, and supervising teachers and other staff.
- They oversee the teaching and curriculum in their respective school and make decisions about the school improvement plan.
- Other functions of the principal include:
 - student admission and placement;
 - working with the school council to encourage parent involvement, assist in decisions about fundraising and develop new policies;
 - ensuring report cards are sent to parents;
 - making recommendations to the school board on the appointment, promotion, demotion and dismissal of teachers; and
 - selecting textbooks and other learning materials from the approved ministry of education list, with the support of teachers.



Teachers

- In the Ontario public education system, teachers must have a recognized teaching certificate in order to teach students.
- They must be a member in good standing with the Ontario Teachers' Federation ([OTF](#))
- They prepare lessons, teach classes, and evaluate students' progress



Did you know!

All teachers are required by law to belong to the Ontario Teachers' Federation [OTF](#) as a condition of teaching in the publicly funded schools of Ontario. Unlike the unions, OTF does not negotiate teacher salaries. However, [OTF](#) does take positions to support teachers' ability to offer the best professional service and speaks out on general educational policy issues.

There are four teacher unions that are affiliates of OTF: l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens ([AEFO](#)), the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario ([ETFO](#)), the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association ([OECTA](#)), and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation ([OSSTF](#)).



Remember!

While unions engage in collective bargaining and advocate for their members, they are also committed to mobilizing against the privatization and commercialization of public education.

Regulatory Bodies

There are formal regulatory bodies in the education system in Ontario that are set up to ensure that school boards are following mandated regulations. This involves creating requirements, setting the standard for activities, and making sure they are followed.

The Ontario College of Teachers ([OCT](#)) regulates the teaching profession. They have a number of responsibilities including establishing the requirements for a teaching certificate, setting standards for teacher training programs and investigating complaints against teachers.

The Education Quality and Accountability Office ([EQAO](#)) is an independent government body that oversees the province-wide standardized testing in grades 3, 6, 9 and 10. They are responsible for developing and administering tests in reading, writing and mathematics.



Formal Parent Involvement Structures in Schools in Ontario

The Ministry of Education in Ontario acknowledges the importance of involving parents in the education system. Allocation of funding and establishing formal structures in school boards are mandated by the Ministry to support these efforts.

Ontario's Parent Engagement Policy

Ontario's Parent Engagement Policy acknowledges the important role that parents play in ensuring success both for their own children and for Ontario's public education system as a whole.

The policy takes into consideration the following elements:

- Recognizes and supports the important role parents have in contributing to their children's learning at home and at school
- Recognizes, encourages and supports many forms of parent engagement
- Identifies strategies to remove barriers to parent involvement (e.g. communications and language)
- Supports parents to acquire skills and knowledge they need to be engaged and involved in their child's learning
- Provides a parent voice at the local level (e.g. parent involvement committees and school councils as well as individual parents talking to teachers and principals)

The Ministry of Education mandates that each board must have the following statutory committees:

- **Parent Involvement Committee (PIC):** PICs are formed by parents, caregivers, community representatives, the director of education, a school board trustee and school staff members. The co-chairs of the committee are parent representatives.
- **Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC):** In accordance with [Reg. 464/97](#) in the *Education Act, 1990*: "Every district school board shall establish a special education advisory committee."

This section will breakdown the formal ways in which parents and caregivers can participate that are standard across the province.

Parent Involvement Committees (PIC) in Ontario

In Ontario, every school board is required to establish a PIC. The Ministry provides funding to support the work of this committee. It is important to note that while school councils represent only one school, PICs represent all the schools of a public board.

PICs are an advisory body to local school boards and a vehicle for parent and caregiver participation at the board level. Their purpose is to support, encourage and enhance meaningful parent involvement to improve student achievement and well-being throughout the board and its schools.



PICs are parent-led committees; the chair/co-chairs and the majority of members are parents. The DOE, a trustee of the board and up to three community representatives are members of the PIC. Subject to board by-laws, a PIC can include a principal, teacher and/or support staff.



Did you know!

Regulation [612/00](#) gives clear direction on the purpose of these committees and outlines their composition, mandate and function.

The regulation reinforces the important link between parents and a board's DOE and trustees. It is an important part of the government's commitment to improving student achievement and well-being, closing the gap in student achievement, and building public confidence in publicly funded education.

The Ministry of Education has created resources to support PICs including a [Fact Sheet, Tips for Running Effective](#) PIC Meetings and a Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) [Handbook](#).

What do Parent Involvement Committees (PIC) do?

While school councils are school-based advisory structures, PICs focus on matters that affect more than one school. The PIC provides information and advice to the board on effective parent engagement strategies and practices. PICs also communicate with and support school councils, and undertake activities to help parents support their children's learning at home and at school.

Regulation [612/00](#) also states that the Ministry may solicit the advice of PICs on matters that relate to student achievement and well-being. PICs can assist school boards by identifying strategies to increase parent engagement, including outreach to parents who find involvement more challenging due to language, recent immigration, poverty, newness to the system or other factors.

PICs can promote the initiatives of school councils, encourage dialogue on relevant board policies and help share effective practices that support parent engagement. They can also help identify parent and school council training needs within a district and contribute to the development of workshops, forums and conferences to address these needs.

Additional Advisory Community Advisory Committees

In addition to the Ministry mandated committees, school boards can establish advisory councils or committees according to the programs they offer and the communities that each board serves. For example, the TDSB has the following [community advisory committees](#):

Alternative Schools (ASCAC),
Black Student Achievement (BSACAC),
Community Use of Schools (CUSCAC),
Early Years (EYCAC),
Environmental Sustainability (ESCAC),
Equity Policy (EPCAC),
French as a Second Language (FSLCAC),
Inner City (ICCAC),
Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Trans-Sexual, Queer, 2-Spirited (LGBTQ2S),
and Urban Indigenous (UICAC).

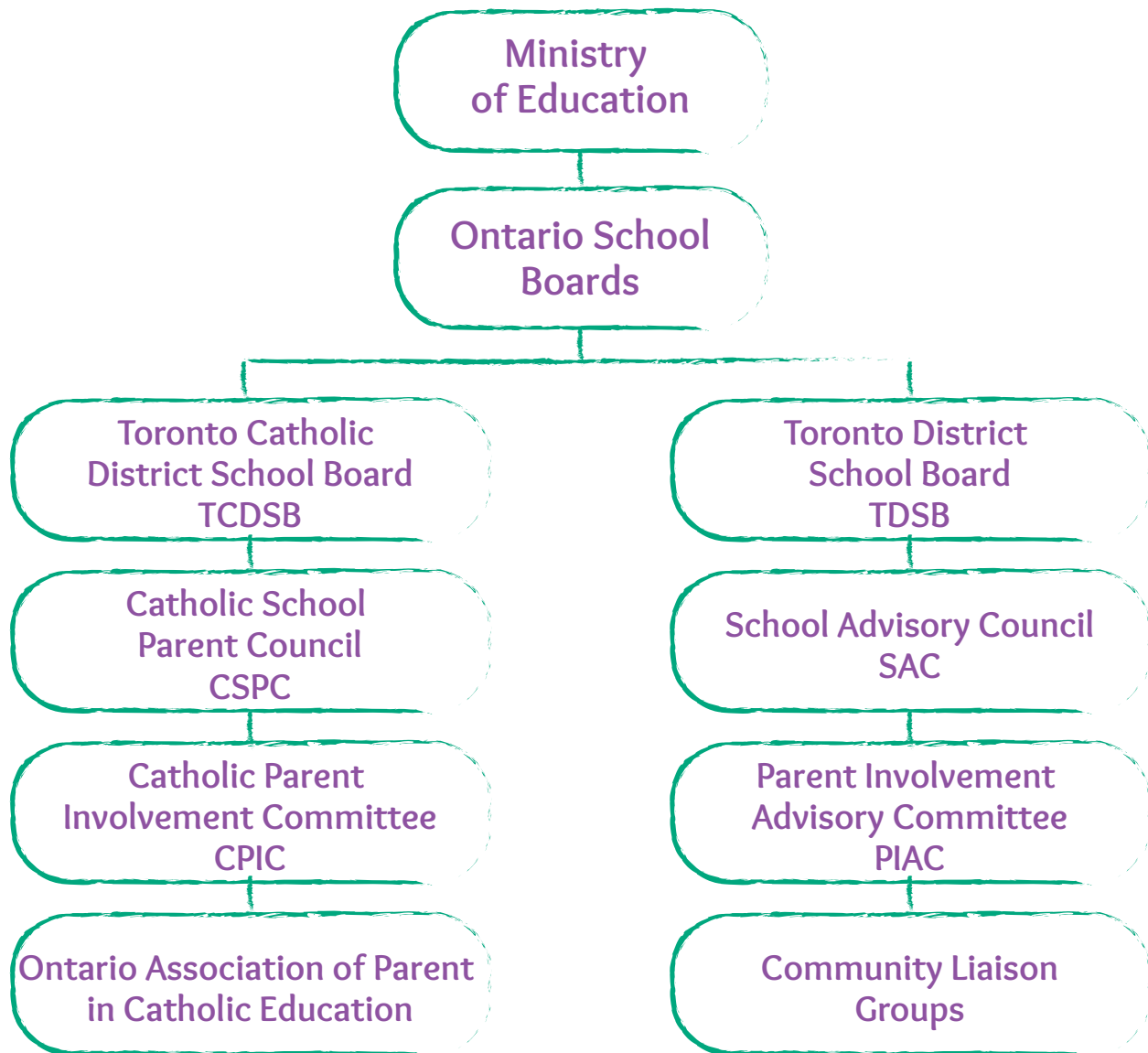




Remember!

Ontario schools are mandated to implement a parent engagement policy and establish formal structures for parent involvement at a board level. Although these formal governance spaces may seem unwelcoming or intimidating, they offer an opportunity for parents to influence decisions impacting their children's education.

The chart below presents an example of the structural approach to parent involvement. It features two Toronto boards and illustrates structures at a local and provincial level.



School Councils

What is the purpose of School Councils?

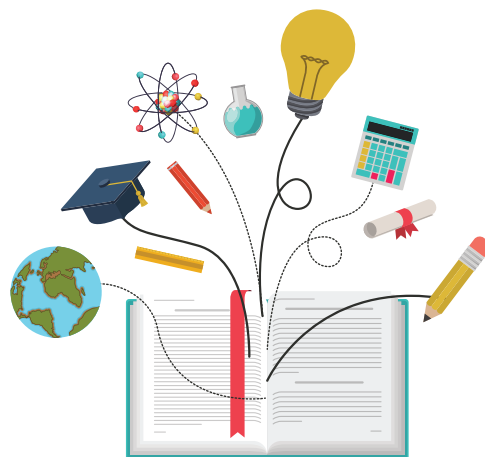
The purpose of school councils is to improve student achievement and to enhance the accountability of the education system through the active participation of parents.

School councils provide an avenue for consultation, advice, and information sharing among all members of the school community. School councils are encouraged to represent and share the views of their community and to establish open, inclusive practices that invite participation. School councils may provide advice on any matter to the school principal and, where appropriate, to the school board. School boards and principals are obligated to consider and respond to each recommendation made by a school council.

School councils may advise the principal or the school board on:

- school year calendars;
- codes of students behaviour;
- curriculum priorities (not curriculum content as this is set by the Ministry);
- programs and strategies to improve school performance on provincial and school board tests;
- safe arrival program (elementary school);
- communications to parents and the school community;
- community use of the school;
- community programs and services provided at the school through school community partnerships;
- school board policies that will affect the school;
- and the selection of principals.

To assist members of the [school council](#), the Ministry of Education has published a guide to school councils.



How are school councils formed?

According to the Education Act, 1990 ([amendment 612/00](#)), school council elections must be held annually, within the first thirty (30) calendar days of the start of the school year. Any parent or caregiver who is interested in the school council election process or participating as a member on the school council has the opportunity to do so. Elections are held at the beginning of the school year to ensure that even parents and caregivers who are new to the school community will be able to participate in the election of their representative.

Every school must have a school council. Members include:

- parents
- the principal
- a teacher
- a student (in high schools)
- a non-teaching member
- a community representative

Many school councils are also actively involved in organizing social events for the school community and fundraising.



Remember!

Any parent/caregiver can be involved in the school council!

You can nominate yourself to be a voting member or you can attend meetings and have a say without being a voting member.

School meetings are usually held periodically (4-8 weeks depending on schools). Being part of your child/children's school council is another way to be informed about what happens in their school community.

Sometimes school councils may not seem very welcoming, this makes being involved even more important as we need to work towards building spaces where people feel represented and welcome.

How does a meeting run?

- Traditionally the chair and co-chair set the meeting agenda based on input from the community.
- Anyone can submit an item to the agenda, including families, administration, students, teachers, and sometimes community members by sending an email to the chairs.
- Sub-committees of the council may have time on the agenda to report on their initiatives. A subcommittee is a group of people who want to work on a particular common goal. Examples of sub-committees include Equity and Social Justice Committee, Health & Wellness Committee, Caring and Safety Committee, Community Engagement Committee etc. A subcommittee can be created by any interested group as long as at least one person has a voting position on the council.
- There are often standing agenda items that are always included such as the administration's report.
- The timing of the meetings depends on the school, but are held approximately monthly or bi/monthly throughout the school year.
- School administration usually provide dates and times to upcoming meetings by email.



Did you know!

In Ontario, the majority of school advisory council and board committee meetings run using Robert's Rules of Order. As any parent knows, without rules, things can get out of hand really quickly.

Robert's Rules of Order set out guidelines for behaviour—called parliamentary procedure—for organizations that discuss and decide issues as a group. It is widely viewed as a way to run meetings fairly and efficiently. Robert's rules were written in 1876 by Major Henry M. Robert, to this day, it is used by the United Nations, Unions, and U.S. Congress, among others.

While useful and popular, Roberts Rules of Order are a Eurocentric form of meeting management that stems from colonial origins. School councils can opt for decolonized methods for conducting meetings that are more friendly and welcoming to those who may not be familiar with Eurocentric procedures.

Decoding school council meetings

Most school councils rely on rules of order to help operate effectively. School councils can establish rules of order according to their needs and culture, however sometimes the language used can be complex and not accessible. Becoming familiar with the terms may make it easier to navigate and participate in school council meetings. Below are some of the commonly used terms from Robert's Rules of Order for meetings.

Glossary of most commonly used terms in council meetings

Adjourn: to hold a meeting over until a later date

Adopt minutes: minutes are 'adopted' when accepted by members and signed up by the chair

Advisory: providing advice or suggestion, not taking action

Administration: school administrators carry out different administrative tasks that keep a school running smoothly, such as school operations, safety and budget. School administration is typically led by a Principal and Vice-Principal

Agenda: a schedule of items drawn up for discussion at a meeting

Attendance list: during in-person meetings, a list is passed round to be signed as a record of attendance

By-laws: rules regulating the council's activities

Casting vote: by convention, in some cases, the chairs may use a 'casting vote' to reach a decision if votes are equally divided

Collective Responsibility: a convention by which all committee members agree to abide by a majority decision

Committee: a group of people usually elected or appointed who meet to conduct agreed collective decisions on a given issue (i.e. health and safety committee)



Consensus: agreement by general consent with no formal vote being taken

Constitution: a set of rules governing activities of a school council

Convene: to call a meeting

Decision: resolution minutes are sometimes called 'decision minutes'

Eject: remove someone (by force if necessary) from a meeting

Executive: leadership that has the power to act upon taken decisions

Meeting Chair: leader or person given authority to conduct a meeting

Minutes: the written record of a meeting

Motion: the name given to a 'proposal' when it is being discussed at a meeting

Mover: a person who speaks on behalf of a motion

Opposer: one who speaks against a motion

Other business: either items leftover from a previous meeting, or items discussed after the main business of a meeting

Proposal: the name given to a submitted item for discussion (usually written) before a meeting takes place

Quorum: the number of people needed to be in attendance for a meeting to be legitimate and to commence

Refer back: to pass an item back for further consideration

Resolution: the name given to a 'motion' which has been passed or carried; used after the decision has been reached

Seconded: one who supports the 'proposer' of a motion or proposal by 'seconding' it (i.e. Chair says: Could I get a motion to approve last week's minutes? Council member A says "Moved!" and the secretary notes that you moved to approve last week's minutes. Council member B says "Seconded!" and they are recorded as seconding the motion)

Secretary: committee official responsible for the internal and external administration of a committee

Shelve: to drop a motion which has no support

Table: to introduce a paper or schedule for noting

Taken as read: to save time, it is assumed the members have already read the minutes

Treasurer: committee official responsible for its financial records and transactions

Unanimous: all being in favour