

Ministry of Education

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MEMORANDUM TO: School Council Chairs

FROM: Kit Rankin
Director, Field Services Branch

Marie-France LeFort
Manager, Parent Engagement Office

DATE: March 3, 2006

SUBJECT: **Implementation of the Ontario Parent Involvement Policy**

Greater parent involvement in education is one of the key strategies of the Ministry of Education to improve student achievement.

On December 1, 2005, the Minister released the Ontario Parent Involvement Policy (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/partnership/developing.html>). This policy statement recognizes that parents play a vital role in the education of their children and in the success of schools, and that together with parents, the Minister of Education, the Ministry, school boards, schools and their staff have a role in “setting the table” for parents to participate more fully.

Parent involvement vehicles and specifically school councils are central to the government’s vision for enhanced partnership with parents. Through new grant programs, school councils will be able to plan and implement strategy to involve more parents at the school level, and ensure that diverse parent voices are heard.

Since the release of the policy, the Minister has asked the members of the Parent Voice in Education Project (PVEP) to serve on an interim basis to provide advice on matters such as the selection mechanism for a new Provincial Parent Board. The new board members are expected to be selected before the end of 2006.

Among the other measures announced, a strong focus has been put on the investments, communication tools and training that will have a positive impact on parent involvement. Effective parent involvement performance measures will be developed to assess our progress towards successful outcomes.

Investments to support enhanced parent involvement

As the success of this policy relies on the timely injection of resources in the initial implementation stages, effective in 2005-06, the government will be investing \$5.2 million annually, of which \$4.8M will be directed to school boards, provincial schools and school authorities to allocate to parent-driven initiatives at the local and regional levels. In a separate memorandum from Dominic Giroux, Assistant Deputy Minister, school board Directors of Education have been asked to provide support to school councils as they make decisions on new measures and initiatives to enhance parent involvement.

Starting in 2006-07, the school and board-based allocations will be included with the Grants for Students Needs (GSN) school boards receive every year.¹ The application-based grants² announced by the government in December 2005 will be allocated by the Ministry based on set criteria.

New base mobilization and outreach budget – \$2.4 million (\$500 per school, provincial school and school authority)

The school council is the local body accountable for supporting enhanced parent involvement with the assistance of funds provided by the ministry. This allocation allows school councils to support local communication with parents and engagement efforts. Boards are expected to allocate this funding at the school level, on top of any existing allocation to school councils.

School councils will approve expenditures for mobilization and outreach activities funded with this allocation. They are also expected to seek out the advice and ideas of other parents and partners as they plan and implement strategies to involve more parents at the school level.

Typical activities and initiatives that may be funded as part of this allocation include:

- Broadening the number of school events that include parents and the number of parents who attend;
- Diversification of communication tools (e.g. translation of existing materials) to meet the varied needs of parents.

New base funding to support the work of the parent involvement committee to be established at the board level - \$0.7 million (\$5,000 per school board + \$0.17 per student)

The Ontario Parent Involvement Policy outlines the requirement for the establishment of board-level Parent Involvement Committees with a direct link to the Director of Education and trustees.

¹ Base mobilization and outreach budget for school councils (\$2.4M/\$500 per school); and funding to support the work of the board-level Parent Involvement Committee (\$5000 + \$0.17 per student)

² Grant for school-based initiatives to reach parents who may find involvement more challenging due to language, recent immigration, poverty, newness to the system, or other factors (\$1M); and provincial fund to support provincial and regional projects aimed at enhancing parent involvement (\$0.75M)

This investment supports the school board in establishing and working collaboratively with a Parent Involvement Committee, particularly with district meetings and inter-school communications. The Ministry expects that the committee will be chaired by a parent and that the membership will include a majority of parents, as well as trustee representatives and the Director of Education. In the longer term, parent representatives will be selected by their peers. We also recognize that school boards may have approached parent involvement at the board level in different ways. School boards that currently have a parent committee structure supporting and enhancing meaningful parent involvement at the regional level are encouraged to invite additional members to participate, if necessary to ensure the appropriate linkages between parents, the Director of Education and trustees.

Parent Involvement Committees of school boards will approve expenditures for activities funded with this allocation. They are also expected to seek out the advice and ideas of school councils, other parents and partners as they plan and implement strategies to involve more parents at the regional level.

iii) New application-based grant program being made available to school councils for school-based initiatives to reach parents who may find involvement more challenging due to language, recent immigration, poverty, newness to the system, or other factors (\$1M) and a new provincial fund to support provincial and regional projects aimed at enhancing parent involvement (\$0.75M)

The Minister will ask members of the Interim Provincial Parent Board to review the selection criteria for this application-based program, effective in 2006-07.

For 2005-06, the Ministry will not solicit grant proposals from school councils. Rather, it will transfer to each board an allocation based on a formula that supports policy goals identified in the Ontario Parent Involvement Policy.

In light of the grant objectives outlined in the policy document, school boards will work with school councils and principals to direct funds from this allocation according to their best assessment of need and the quality of proposed initiatives. Where feasible, the Ministry expects that board Parent Involvement Committees will be consulted on the strategy for using the funds to reach out to parents who find involvement more challenging.

Typical activities and initiatives that may be funded as part of this allocation include:

- Development of volunteer recruitment and management strategies
- Support for parents who want to help with homework;
- Activities or programs that help build parenting and/or family literacy skills;
- Training for school council members on linking school councils with specific parent groups within the school community;

The new provincial fund to support provincial and regional projects aimed at enhancing parent involvement (\$0.75M) has also been reallocated to school boards, for 2005-06 only, to help build school board and school council capacity to reach out to a diverse group of parents. For example, boards may use these funds to engage, on temporary basis, the specific expertise and resources required to support schools and school councils as they plan their strategies to identify and involve parents who find involvement more challenging.

In operation since January 3rd, the new Parent Engagement Office intends to ground its work in research and successful practices for engaging parents. Its manager, Marie-France LeFort, and her team can be reached at 1-800-361-6483 or by e-mail at parent.participation@edu.gov.on.ca

Specific questions on funding allocations should be directed to the Ministry's regional offices. To locate the regional office in your area please go to the following link on the Ministry of Education's web site: <<http://esip.edu.gov.on.ca/english/districtOffice/>>.

The various components of the Ontario Parent Involvement Policy will support change at the local, regional and provincial levels of the education sector. The scope of the policy requires all elements of the sector to work collaboratively to define and achieve our "effective parent engagement" and "sector responsiveness" outcomes. We are looking forward to support you in this important work, as we aim together to improve student achievement and increase public confidence in the education system.

Sincerely,

Kit Rankin
Director, Field Services Branch

Marie-France LeFort
Manager, Parent Engagement Office

Enclosures

C.c. Principals
Supervisory Officers
Directors of Education
Regional Managers
Senior Business Officials
PVEP/Interim Parent Involvement Advisory Board Members
Executive Directors, Provincial Education Organizations