

Guide to Support the Parent Component

Preschool Education for 4-Year-Olds

As a child's first experiences are at home, the family is the root of learning and development. It thus follows that any initiatives geared toward children and families can only have positive effects on both.

CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION

Parent collaboration in the context of kindergarten for 4-year-olds

Parent collaboration is an integral component of the Preschool Education Program for 4-Year-Olds. Families will be supported in their role as children's primary educators by staff at a variety of meetings.

Schools welcome¹ children and their families by being responsive to the diversity of their experiences. Research has shown that the more families participate in their children's development, the greater the children's chances of academic success. It is therefore important to pay particular attention to families so they can be proud of their children and of their role as family. For this reason, teachers and staff will ensure that families are supported and experience a positive initial contact with schools.

Purpose of this guide

This guide is intended for school principals, parent-liaisons, teachers and education consultants. Its purpose is to provide a framework for discussion about the processes and strategies that will contribute to supporting the Parent Component in schools. It is also intended to encourage reflection in order to plan and organize meetings that are adapted to the needs of communities.

Principles for building closer ties between families and schools

A considerable body of research² has identified protective factors that contribute to ensuring complementarity and strengthening relationships between families and schools. The research has revealed these three principles:

1. Recognize that all families care about their children's well-being and success, and that they are doing their best to support their children's development.
2. Implement collaborative practices with families and all stakeholders concerned with children's development.
3. Plan and organize activities that are stimulating, meaningful and interactive to ensure families are supported.

Based on these principles, communities and schools are urged to adopt practices that meet the needs and characteristics of families. Suggestions for applying each of these principles are outlined below.

¹ In this document, *welcome* means "to make children and their families feel safe or secure."

² The bibliography provides several references.

Implementing the Parent Component

	In place	Improve	Implement
Encourage children and their families to care about school, and encourage schools to care about children’s families.			
Recognize the complex nature of working with families in vulnerable situations. ³			
Designate a parent-liaison to promote continuity.			
Promote an approach that focuses on the active participation of families, including parent-child activities.			
Specify the role of the primary stakeholders.			
Plan meetings throughout the year, starting at the beginning of each school year.			
Establish procedures for organizing meetings.			
Establish regular communication with families.			
Find a space to hold meetings.			
List community resources and understand their mission.			
Assess the quality of the services provided to families. (Low meeting participation rates may require working together to modify strategies.)			

What do we need to implement here?

³ Lacharité, C., F. de Montigny, J.M. Miron, A. Devault, H. Larouche, S. Desmet, et al.

A few factors for consideration

- Parent-liaisons:
 - have a thorough knowledge of the context (families, school, community)
 - establish and maintain contact with various community resources to learn about their mission, and help connect those resources with families who need support
 - are comfortable working with adults
 - are able to work with families in vulnerable situations (e.g. understand the principles of attachment)
 - are committed to enriching their practice through professional development and training

- The ten meetings planned:
 - are held between September and June
 - are organized based on the needs of families (childcare, transportation, interpretation service, etc.)
 - are held in a welcoming place for families
 - are evaluated based on different aspects (i.e. the number of participants at the meeting should not be the only criterion considered)

- Appendix I sets out the role of the main stakeholders: school principals, parent-liaisons, teachers and education consultants.

FIRST PRINCIPLE

Recognize that all families care about their children’s well-being and success, and that they are doing their best to support their children’s development.

	In place	Improve	Implement
Adopt positive attitudes and various means to reach all families and establish a collaborative relationship with them.			
Be sensitive to the needs of families, including those with low literacy levels, low levels of education, limited language proficiency or negative school experiences.			
Value families’ experience and abilities.			

Suggestions for applying this principle

- Make contact:
 - Participate in welcome meetings (May or June, and August).
 - Take the time to personally call and invite every parent to meetings.
 - Create opportunities for parents to become acquainted with the parent-liaison (e.g. the parent-liaison might be in the schoolyard when parents bring their children to school in the morning).
- Value the role of families:
 - Acknowledge what families are doing well, on a daily basis, to foster their children’s development.
 - Give families the opportunity to express their reservations or fears about school without feeling judged, and help them find solutions.
 - Help families recognize and use their strengths.
 - Plan for open discussions with families about supportive ways to interact with their children.
 - Acknowledge the importance and the value of what families have to say.
 - Emphasize the importance of working **with** families rather than **for** them.
- Offer individualized support to families who need it.

What do we need to implement in our schools?

SECOND PRINCIPLE

Implement collaborative practices with families and all stakeholders concerned with children’s development.

	In place	Improve	Implement
Establish and maintain a relationship of trust with families.			
Value families’ contributions.			
Ensure effective collaboration between teachers and parent-liaisons.			
Diversify and facilitate discussion and sharing among all partners.			
Foster involvement and the sharing of responsibilities while respecting each person’s strengths.			
Establish and maintain partnerships with community members, especially those who work with families in vulnerable situations.			
Offer professional development to partners who provide care and support to families.			

Suggestions for applying this principle

- With families:
 - Encourage initiatives led by the families and support them in their implementation.
 - Respond to families’ requests based on their needs (e.g. topics of discussion, individual meetings or telephone calls).
 - Respect the pace of the group, families’ need to talk to each other and different ways of contributing to the group.
 - In collaboration with transition agents, help families build ties with the community, organizations, and other families to develop a feeling of belonging and solidarity.
 - Encourage families to use community resources that could be beneficial to them (e.g. hold a meeting at a community family centre, library, or community kitchen).
 - Give families the opportunity to attend meetings with a stakeholder who is assisting them.

- With partners:
 - Make connections (e.g. share information about the community family centre and activities offered by the public library).
 - Recognize each partner’s role and how they complement one another.
 - Provide an opportunity for more formal discussions during meetings with the preschool education for 4-year-olds team (principals, parent-liaisons, teachers, resource persons) to better support children and their families.

What do we need to implement in our schools?

THIRD PRINCIPLE

Plan and organize activities that are stimulating, meaningful and interactive to ensure families are supported.

	In place	Improve	Implement
Take into account the Preschool Education Program and overall child development when organizing meetings.			
Organize meetings in such a way that as many families as possible can take part.			
Offer activities that meet the needs of families and children while ensuring the accuracy of the information provided.			
Get feedback from parents to use when planning future meetings.			

Suggestions for applying this principle

- Organizing meetings:
 - Use the first meeting to welcome families, to initiate contact with the school and to propose meeting logistics.
 - Remind parents of the date and time of the next meeting by telephone, email, or the children’s communication folders.
 - Organize activities involving children as much as possible (e.g. have them take part in preparing and presenting an activity).
 - Set aside time to evaluate families’ appreciation of the meetings (e.g. a simple questionnaire).

- Facilitating meetings:
 - Use a variety of facilitation techniques to establish an atmosphere that fosters listening and interaction (e.g. reiterate a parent’s question to the group, use accessible language, ask participants to sit in a circle, get up to greet families when they arrive).
 - Offer a variety of activities that are adapted to the needs and interests of families and that foster their active participation.
 - Offer concrete activities that are easy to replicate at home (e.g. activities involving the whole family).
 - Adapt to differences in families’ circumstances (e.g. meeting schedule, different communication methods such as telephone, email, etc.).

What do we need to implement in our schools?

Appendix I

Role of the Main Stakeholders

Families, schools and communities all have a role to play to support children in their development.

Here is an overview of the role that each of these partners is required to play.

School principal

- ◆ Greet families and 4-year-olds to make them feel welcome.
- ◆ Promote awareness among school staff of the benefits of parent collaboration and the importance of recognizing families' abilities.
- ◆ Foster the integration of the parent-liaison by establishing collaborative relationships.
- ◆ Present the Parent Component to the governing board (parent collaboration could be integrated into the school's educational project).
- ◆ Provide venues and materials for meetings with families.
- ◆ Participate in meetings with the parent-liaison, if applicable.
- ◆ Etc.

Parent-liaison

- ◆ Welcome families and be open and flexible in meeting their needs.
- ◆ Implement strategies that foster family involvement with the school (e.g. partner with community stakeholders who already know the families).
- ◆ Value the involvement of families, recognize their role, and support their abilities.
- ◆ Adapt intervention methods to the needs of the families.
- ◆ Plan, organize and facilitate meetings, and ensure regular follow-up to encourage family participation and strengthen relationships.
- ◆ Provide materials for meetings: children's books, motor-skills games, hands-on games, etc.
- ◆ Evaluate families' participation and satisfaction level.
- ◆ Develop a relationship with teachers.
- ◆ Seek collaboration from the community.
- ◆ In partnership with the transition agent, inform families of the various services and resources available in the community.
- ◆ Etc.

Teacher

- ◆ Collaborate with the various partners and with the families.
- ◆ Develop a relationship of exchange with the parent-liaison.
- ◆ Participate in meetings with the parent-liaison if necessary.
- ◆ Seek professional development and training to better welcome and support children and their families.
- ◆ Etc.

Education consultant

- ◆ Meet with the principal, teacher and parent-liaison to get a comprehensive perspective.
- ◆ Establish professional learning communities or communities of practice.
- ◆ Be available to support principals, parent-liaisons and teachers.
- ◆ Work in partnership with the transition agent.
- ◆ Ensure strategic monitoring of the Preschool Education Program.
- ◆ Etc.

Transition facilitator

- ◆ Oversee coordination.
- ◆ Oversee the development and implementation of transition practices.
- ◆ Contribute to the planning, facilitation and documentation of initiatives related to activities and practices to support the first school transition.
- ◆ Support Passe-Partout workers.
- ◆ Adapt to the diversity of needs in different environments.
- ◆ Demonstrate a wide range of knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- ◆ Etc.

Appendix II

Methods

Meetings are intended to support families in their role as the primary educators of their children. Here are a few methods that can be used to encourage all families to attend and participate in meetings:

Organization techniques
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Upon registration, inform families that it is important for them to attend meetings.• Make contact by telephone in August.• If school facilities are limited, request a copy of the schedule for specialty courses (visual arts, music, etc.) and reserve those rooms.• At the start of the year, consult families to learn about their needs, to find out what their interests are (schedules, topics for discussion, means of communication, etc.), and to encourage them to get involved.• Offer free childcare in collaboration with school daycare services. A project with the “big kids” at a school can be proposed so that older students can assist daycare educators.• Provide a snack during the meeting, and mention it in the invitation letter (the offer of a snack or a meal encourages families to come to meetings).• Offer families a transportation service.• Call families to follow up (follow-up sheets may not be returned to the school, or their contents not fully understood).• Some families may need to be called and reminded of meetings.• Include a reply form with invitations, to be presented as follows:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ I will attend the meeting. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>○ I need childcare. <input type="checkbox"/> Age of the child or the children _____○ I need transportation to get to the meeting. <input type="checkbox"/>• Etc.
Type of meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As early as August, organize a meeting for parents and children in the classroom to ease the transition and to provide support to the children and their parents.• Choose to hold parent-child meetings, for example with the children present for part of the meeting and without them afterward so that parents can meet with the parent-liaison to talk about a particular topic or about something they have experienced with the children.• Offer parents several meeting options (e.g. portfolio evenings, a Christmas show, breakfast meetings, pyjama storytime, cooking workshops).• Organize father-child meetings, which help increase the impact of fathers in the eyes of their children.• Organize meetings that provide information about resources in the community.• Etc.

Facilitation of meetings

- Adopt rules of conduct for the group at the first meeting.
- Collaborate with parents to organize and run the meeting so that they feel competent (e.g. organizing a game, preparing the room and making coffee, distributing information sheets).
- Show the children's work (using photos, a video, etc.) to allow parents to see what their children are doing and to prompt discussion.
- Use materials that parents can take home (e.g. pictograms of routines, books, modelling clay made during the parent-child segment).
- Take the time to make parents feel secure, so that they feel accepted for who they are; reassure them and encourage them to take their place in the group and play a part.
- Use the meetings to share tips and techniques.
- Put the parents in small groups because they are often more comfortable communicating in this way.
- Etc.

Making a connection between families and the parent-liaison

- Make sure to extend a friendly welcome to parents: shake hands, meet them at the school entrance to direct them to the room, offer them coffee, etc.
- Make sure that the parent-liaison visits classrooms a few times to become better acquainted with the children, and thereby connect with the parents.
- Reach out in different ways to parents who find it more difficult to engage (e.g. try to establish contact with them outside of meetings, such as when they arrive at school in the morning or after school; make a personal phone call; offer support for childcare and transportation).
- In exceptional cases, call on extended family members to improve participation at meetings.
- Use humour and create a friendly atmosphere when facilitating meetings so that parents feel comfortable and want to come back.
- Propose individual meetings with parents who find it difficult to come to group meetings.
- Encourage the teacher and principal to attend meetings if possible.
- Involve the children in creating meeting invitations.
- Etc.

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