

Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders



F: School Years

How to Engage in Your Child's Learning at School!

Children do better at school when their families are involved as partners in their education. As a parent of a child with a communication disorder, being involved in your child's educational program is even more important. You can act as an informant, an advocate and a supporter of your child's success throughout your child's school career.

The Fall is a perfect time to engage in your child's learning. Teachers will be evaluating your child's initial progress for this school year and there will be opportunities to work together to understand your child's learning successes and challenges.

Reporting Student Learning and Success

In Ontario there are specific reporting requirements that are set out in legislation.

Kindergarten

In Kindergarten, all parents will receive an *Initial Observations Report* that will be sent home between late October and November. This report will provide an overview of observations of your child's learning since the start of the school year and will describe early evidence of growth in learning in relation to the overall expectations of the Kindergarten Program (2016). In Winter and Spring parents will receive *Communication of Learning Reports* that are organized according to the four parts or "frames" of the Kindergarten program. Around reporting times, many school boards offer meetings where parents can meet with educators. This is an excellent way to begin to be involved with your child's learning.

Elementary

In the Fall, the *Elementary Progress Report Card* is sent to parents between October 20 and November 20 of the school year. The *Elementary Provincial Report Card* is sent twice a year, the first between January 20 and February 20 of the school year and the second towards the end of June. Make sure you check the bottom of the second page to see if your board has a section for you and your child to complete. This is an important part of your child's educational record. Your board may decide to complete this section during a teacher-parent-student conference or a student-led conference.

Communication between parents, students and teachers should occur throughout the school year. These can take the form of parent-teacher or parent-student-teacher conferences, portfolios of student work, student-led conferences, interviews, phone calls, checklists, and informal reports. These types of communication can help teachers understand more about your child outside of school, can help you support learning at home, and encourage your child to set goals for learning.

Secondary

Schools who use a semester system will use the Provincial Report Card, Grades 9–12, for formal written reports to parents two times a semester. Again, parents will be provided with opportunities to meet with teachers during each semester, but communication does not need to be limited to these opportunities. Once you get to know the teachers, they will let you know their preferred way of connecting with their students and their parents. This could be through written communication, emails, phone calls or meetings.

Don't be Shy!

Some parents may feel uncomfortable approaching teachers or administrators at their child's school. It is important to know that teachers highly value a parent's interest and participation in their student's education. Every teacher has different ways of engaging with parents; every school year is a new opportunity to become a partner on your child's team!

Communicating with Your Child's Educators and Team

Your child may have a small or large team of educators and support staff involved in his or her achievement and success. The core school team for your child will be the Principal/Vice Principal, Teacher(s), Early Childhood Educator (Kindergarten) and possibly the Special Education Resource Teacher.

There are many other support staff available to support the needs of students, that may include Speech-Language Pathologists, Social Workers, Child and Youth Counsellors, English Language Learner teachers, and health support personnel such as Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, Psychologists, and Mental Health Workers, to name a few. Services available may vary among school boards. As a parent, it is important to follow through with any requests from a school for the involvement of additional support personnel. It is important to ask questions to make sure that you understand the need for these individuals and to be involved in goal setting for your child.

Who Should I Contact First about a concern or issue?

When a parent has questions or concerns, it is important to follow appropriate lines of communication. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your communication or if your issue is not resolved you could consider moving to the next level.

The following order is suggested:

1. **Classroom Teacher.** The classroom teacher is the first person to communicate with, as he or she knows your child the best. By working together, you may be able to address concerns related to academic progress, social concerns, special needs or challenges, etc.
2. If your concern or question is regarding a service provided by a member of support staff such as a Special Education Resource Teacher, Speech-Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, etc., direct communication with this individual may be best, ensuring that the classroom teacher is aware.
3. **School Principal /Vice Principal.** These individuals may address questions or concerns beyond the classroom level or if the issue or concern has not been resolved by talking with the teacher.
4. If questions or concerns continue after consulting with the school staff and administration, you may wish to contact the appropriate Superintendent in your Board. This may be a Superintendent responsible for Special Education or the Superintendent of Education responsible for your child's school region.

5. If you continue to have an issue or concern that has not been addressed through the individuals described above, you may contact the School Board Trustee for your geographic area.

In each situation, be prepared and clear in describing your concern. Come with examples, what you have tried, what you find works at home, etc. It is helpful to have some suggestions or solutions in mind. Be open to new suggestions or solutions that are provided to you and work together as a team to resolve the concern. Keep a record of who you spoke with, the date and the outcome.

More Tips

- Check your local Board of Education Website and click on the section for parents. You will find a wealth of information about your local Board's policies and programs. In addition, you will have access to information about Special Education Services and the Board's Special Education Plan.
- Many Boards offer tips and suggestions for parents to help them become involved in their child's education and the services offered by the board.
- Attend a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) meeting in your Board. If there is no representative of OAFCCD on your Board's SEAC, consider being the representative. Contact Alison Morse at OAFCCD if you would like more information.
- Join your Board's Parent Involvement Committee (PIC).
- Check out your school's website and newsletters.
- Visit the Ontario Ministry of Education website www.edu.gov.on.ca for information and tips on being involved in education as well as finding out what is available in Ontario schools.

References

Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools 2010
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growSuccess.pdf>

Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12 Policy and Program Requirements 2016
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/os/onschools_2016e.pdf

Communication Tips for Parents (from Ministry of Education's *Parents Matter* document)

An engaged parent is an interested parent. Here are just a few of the ways you can become more involved in your children's education from the early years to Grade 12.

- **Demonstrate interest:** ask what happened at school today and create an ongoing dialogue. This helps set the stage for joint student-parent decision making as your children get older.
 - **Create a place for studying:** encourage a regular homework time with limited distractions. Set appropriate times for phone calls and leisure time on computers and electronic games.
 - **Help with homework:** talk to the teacher to learn more about how you can help your children outside of school. For older students, set priorities for after-school activities, job and chore hours, homework and leisure time.
 - **Attend parent-teacher conferences:** develop a plan with the teacher on how to best support your children's learning needs.
 - **Participate:** get involved in any way that is comfortable – whether it's parent information nights, volunteer activities, arts and sporting events, school council or your board's Parent Involvement Committee.
 - **Stay informed:** find out what is happening in the classroom, the school and the school community.
- Not all of these tips will suit every parent. Get involved in a way that's right for you.*

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