

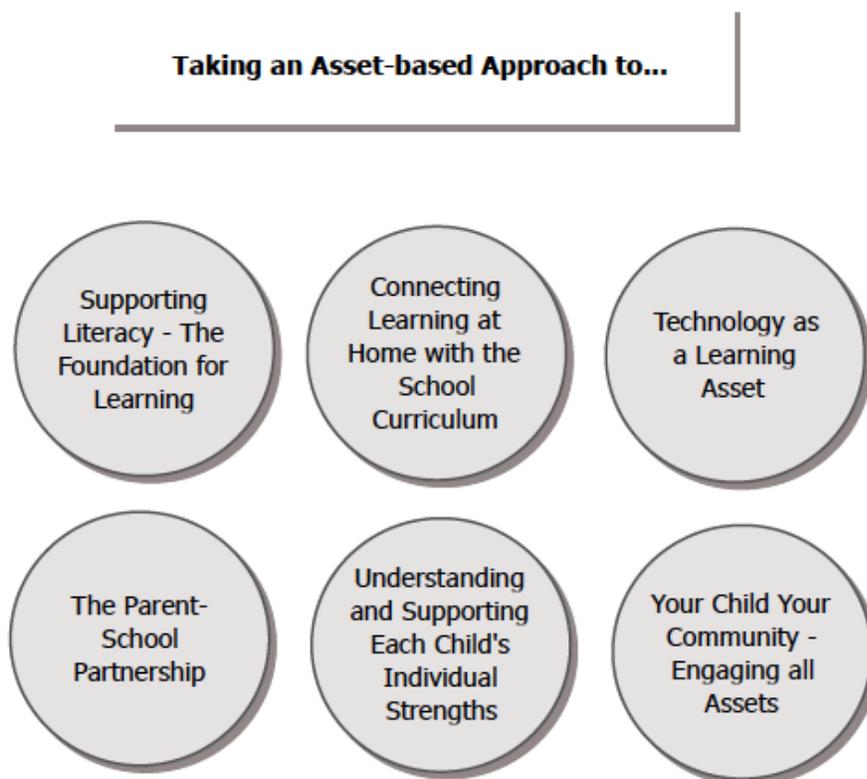
# The Parent-School Partnership



## Facilitator notes

### ***1. What does Parent Café offer?***

Parent Café is organized along a number of strength based themes that are known to impact learning. Parent Café provides thought provoking conversation starters, background information and accompanying resources in an easy to follow guide. The intent of creating conversation around these topics is to create a space where parents can share, learn and work with one another.



A number of further modules are currently being developed by Café including: supporting numeracy, early years, green strengths; environmental literacy, etc. The Café is Institute is open to suggestions and conversations around future topics and encourages feedback from participants and conversation leaders.

Parents who have an interest in leading conversations should be encouraged to take a leadership role, find out more about the resources and speak with Café representatives and current Café leaders. Orientation and mentoring is available for future conversation hosts and hostesses!

## ***2. What brought you here today?***

As a facilitator, it is important to recognize that parents have many different motivations for taking the time to come together and to find support and community. For some parents, it is a step that requires courage and leaving their comfort zone to attend a parenting session. Therefore, it is important that the tone and the climate that is set at the first Café is open and welcoming so that parents feel comfortable enough to share, learn and return.

Asking parents what their motivation for coming to the session serves to open the dialogue and:

- validates the personal experiences of parents that have led them to participate.
- acknowledges the commitment they are showing to their child by taking this step.
- lets them know that we are here to learn together and to have fun – create a relaxed atmosphere.

### **Suggestions:**

Begin with any activity that provides introductions, i.e. sharing of something personal (talents), ages of children, etc. Check out this free online resource with different ice-breaker activities for small groups. They may be appropriate for your group or give you ideas of activities that can be adapted to your group.

[http://insight.typepad.co.uk/40\\_icebreakers\\_for\\_small\\_groups.pdf](http://insight.typepad.co.uk/40_icebreakers_for_small_groups.pdf)

### **3. Why come together in conversation?**

A guided conversation format offers an opportunity for parents to come together around a shared interest – their child’s learning. In this approach, community leaders and educators aim to:

- Create a space for parents to share their own experiences, local knowledge and resources.
- Highlight and build on the successes of parents in supporting learning.
- Validate parent’s role as their child’s first teacher and in doing so build knowledge and confidence for them to be proactive in their role of supporting their child’s education.
- Help parents create networks and relationships among themselves to increase the social capital that is known to positively impact learning outcomes.

#### ***Why focus on supporting relationship building among parents?***

*... "school learning is influenced by not only what happens in school and at home, but also by social networks, norms, and trust in the school and in the wider community."*

*(Putman, D. 2000, Bowling Alone)*

The Parent Cafe approach is a shift from a lecture style learning environment to create a very open and shared learning environment. A conversation approach incorporates the following elements and underlying principles:

- Each family and community has a unique combination of strengths and assets that can be mobilized to achieve educational goals.
- Each individual has strengths and experiences to be shared with others.
- Thinking together can lead to working together
- The collective wisdom of the group is greater than that of the individual.
- Conversation highlights issues that people care about, inspiring them to take action.

*What do parents hope to take away from the session?*

examples:

- Knowing where to find resources
- Meeting other parents, finding out what they are doing
- Learning more about the education system

By asking this question each parent is heard and acknowledged, allowing facilitator to be more aware of the needs of the participants.

#### **Further Reading on Social Capital and Education:**

Putman,(2000) Bowling Alone, <http://bowlingalone.com/>

#### **4. How can we make the most from these conversations?**

What makes a 'great conversation?' Discuss and share with parents their ideas along with some of these tips for having a productive and engaging conversation. Creating a safe and respectful environment will allow participants to share and collaborate in meaningful ways.

- respect diverse opinions
- acknowledge one another as equals
- speak with your heart and mind
- honor the flow of the conversation
- provide an opportunity for all members to contribute
- be aware of judgments
- listen to understand
- slow down and allow time for reflection
- listen for deeper insights and questions
- adapt to what is important to the group
- share personal experiences and stories
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Have parents share their thoughts and ideas on building a warm and hospitable environment. Discussing options for room set up, food and refreshment opportunities, or childcare arrangements can ensure collective solutions and the best possible atmosphere.

The facilitator plays a key role in keeping the conversation moving along and productive by:

- Ensuring all participants feel comfortable to speak with heart and mind.
- Ensuring all participants have chance to be heard and understood.
- Encouraging an ongoing sharing of stories, knowledge, experience and skills.
- Encouragement for the things that are working and the knowledge and experience the group brings.
- Following up whenever possible builds capacity:
  - *How can we build on this?*
  - *Where can we access resources needed?*
  - Always provide an opportunity for parents to leave with a goal or action step in mind. *What will they try to do differently?*
- Maintain a positive orientation within groups when parents come together. Parents can often feel overwhelmed or experience high degrees of frustration related to their child's learning and schooling. The facilitator can be influential in establishing a forum where voices can be heard while promoting a positive and productive learning environment. It may be important to emphasize that what is shared in conversation will remain in confidence within group.
- Many parents that attend will have younger or older children as well. Have parents relate their learning of the day to the stage of learning and situation of their other children. *How does what we spoke about today apply to younger siblings? To older siblings*

## ***5. What are your hopes and dreams for your child's education?***

People tend to get involved in the things they care deeply about – what are they passionate about? The majority of parents care deeply about their child's future and are the constant force of care throughout their schooling. Schools are full of caring adults, principals, teachers, staff and volunteers. The full capacity lies in building relationships among parents and throughout the extended school so that the untapped resources, talents and assets can be pulled together in collective efforts.

Learning conversations can highlight this passion or caring that spurs people to take action in one way or another. For parents, this can result in personal steps at home; i.e. starting a routine of nightly reading with their child, or bigger collective steps; i.e. organizing a school wide event around something of concern.

Whatever the scope of the change or action, these become successful steps from which to build and move forward. Having the opportunity to highlight and engage strengths and talents builds efficacy, confidence and skills. Capacity is build within a community as success is experienced and leveraged toward the next opportunity.



Recognizing hopes and dreams may be the spark that ignites a parents desire to act.

### **Further reading:**

Read more about 'Caring leading to action': Green, M. (2006) When people care enough to act.

Nel Noddings is renowned for her research around building caring communities in schools. Nel Noddings, Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy

## ***6. How were your parents involved with your schooling? What is your role in making these dreams for your child a reality?***

Many parents will recount that their own parents had very little involvement in their schooling. Traditionally, learning that took place at school remained separate from the home. Even today, many parents who received schooling within or outside of Canada often share this experience. A parent's own experience growing up may strongly influence how they see their role in supporting their child. However, new learning about education now brings attention to the critical role of the parents in supporting and connecting learning at home and in the school community.

Parents may see their potential role within the school as very limited, i.e. only as a volunteer on field trips or as a driver for special events. However, there is a wide range of ways in which parents can become involved; beginning at home with encouragement and clear expectations, through to volunteering for school events and holding key roles in school governance. Having parents share some of their ideas about these potential roles begins to highlight the scope of opportunities for parents to be involved in supporting their child's school experience.

Alberta Education considers parents to be partners with the school in their child's education, and values the rights of parents to be engaged in education (see [Role of Parents](#)). [Section 11.1 of the Human Rights Act](#) protects the rights of parents to be notified when subject matter deals explicitly with religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation. Not without controversy, this bill ensures parents have the right to request that their child be exempted from that instruction without academic penalty. Parents can refer to this document for further clarification and contact their school or school board with further questions.

Parents will need to inquire about policies and guidelines that are relevant for their school. [My Student and the Calgary Board of Education](#) provides a guide that outlines expectations and opportunities for the role of parents at the school level; however, this may vary among school boards, individual schools and classrooms. The school or teachers' individual approach may influence the expectations of parents in each school. For example, some teachers are comfortable with ongoing involvement of parents whereas others may limit this to certain occasions.

### **Suggestion:**

Encourage parents to make inquiries and determine opportunities for getting involved that may be a fit for both themselves and their school community.

Teachers can take the opportunity to clarify how they will communicate their comfort level or expectations toward involving parents.

## **7. Why is it important for parents to get involved in their child's school community?**

Dr. Joyce Epstein et al at the Centre on Family, School and Community Partnerships have consolidated research that shows when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, **children** tend to:

- do better in school
- stay in school longer, have better social skills
- show improved behavior
- adapt well to school
- have higher graduation rates of graduate and participation in postsecondary education.

Not only does getting involved benefit the student and the school community, but Dr. Epstein notes the **benefits experienced by parents** that become more involved in the school community:

- building networks and greater understanding of the local school environment
- feelings of safety by getting to know their child's' friends and families
- identifying opportunities to support their child
- modeling positive relationships and citizenship for their child
- learning new skills and developing new friends and connections
- observing their child in the school environment
- building a positive working partnership with their child's teacher
- contributing in a meaningful way to the extended school community

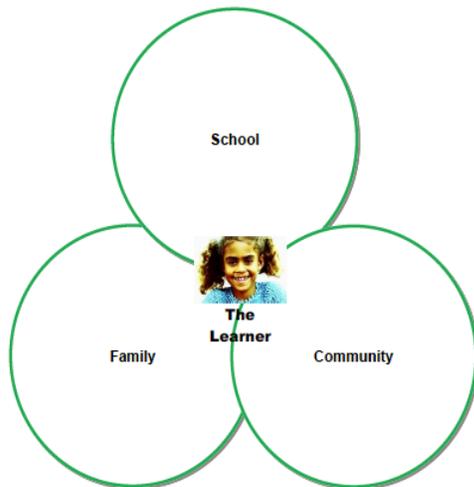
Having an engaged parent community also provides significant **benefits to teachers and the school community:**

- supports the work of teachers and school staff
- contributes to building a strong public education system with overall benefits to larger society.
- provides valuable learning opportunities and links with the wider community.

Much of this research is summarized in articles, book chapters, and books by Dr. Joyce Epstein et al, researchers at [\*the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University and the National Network of Partnership Schools\*](#). A series of [\*success stories around partnership building\*](#) are also featured and offer applied examples of initiatives that may result when parents and the school community become purposeful about working together to enhance learning. Readings and references also include applied practices for educators in building system wide partnership programs.

**Suggestion:** \* Have parents review this short video clip and discuss as a group.– [\*The Positive Link between Parental Involvement and Children\*](#), Heritage Foundation.

## **8. Building strong connections between home, school and community – how can you get further involved with your child's learning.**



*When parents, teachers, students and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins it 's work ".*

Dr. Nel Noddings

Increasing the overlap among these key areas of influence is known to have an impact on learning. Dr. Joyce Epstein et al indicate 6 key ways in which parents can intentionally become engaged in their child's education and increase the overlapping spheres of influence on a child's life; family, school and community.

- 1. Parenting**
- 2. Communicating**
- 3. Volunteering**
- 4. Home Learning**
- 5. Decision Making**
- 6. Collaborating with Community**

Much of Dr. Epstein's work involves supporting school districts dedicated to establishing formalized partnership programs to ensure schools are ready and open for parents to fully participate in each of these areas. *Why wait?* In the absence of system wide reforms or programs, considering each of these types of involvement can provide a guiding framework for parents, teachers and principals to be purposeful about their own engagement. These categories can be used to guide the discussions around parent involvement (\*print handout: Six types of involvement). Examining each of the areas of potential involvement will help parents to recognize the range of ways to be engaged.

Dr. U. Bronfenbrenner articulated the [ecological systems theory](#), which reinforces the critical need to develop positive working relationships across the systems of influence in a child's life (home, family, school, workplace, faith institutions, etc.) to support positive development.

### **Suggestions:**

\*Share the following short video clip [Parent involvement in school community Part 1 / Part 2](#) : discusses the six different ways for parents to be involved through the child's perspective.

\*Alberta Education [Information for Parents](#)

## J. Epstein's Six Ways of being involved in education

(adapted from School, family and community partnerships: Your Handbook for Action )

<b>Type of Involvement</b> Examples:	<b>Things I am doing...</b>	<b>What else can be done?</b>
<b>Parenting</b> Participating in parent education workshops.... Creating a safe and caring home environment for learning.... Utilizing all available supports and resources ...		
<b>Learning at Home</b> Helping with homework, daily reading without taking over. Being aware of the curriculum and make connections whenever possible. Sharing my passions, gifts and talents with my child. Make learning an enjoyable adventure.		
<b>Communication</b> Make the most of parent teacher conferences. Make introductions to teachers and staff early in the year. Participating in regular parent-teacher conferences		
<b>Volunteering</b> Assist teachers in class, assist with school functions and events. Share expertise on a particular career, theme, skill, interest Serve as a mentor to an individual child. i.e. become a Calgary Reads volunteer Attend and support school-wide events and fundraisers.		
<b>Decision Making</b> Attend parent council meetings and events Take a leadership position on the school council Participate in provincial opportunities to provide parent feedback to Alberta Education.		
<b>Community Collaborations</b> Make possible connections with community programs, resources or support services – act as a 'connector" if needed. Volunteer with community organizations and service providers that are supporting the school Support school and student-led community initiatives		

## ***9. What are your gifts and talents? How can you share these gifts and talents with the school community?***

Remember that parents bring pieces to the puzzle for supporting positive child development and learning. Parents gifts and assets can be highlighted throughout the conversations and include:

- Stories
- Individuals capacities, talents, gifts (gifts of the hands, head and heart)
- Links with groups, associations and social networks
- Links or experience with local institutions (support, resources, and expertise)
- Physical assets and resources
- Financial assets
- Cultural knowledge and assets

Parents can be unaware of the assets and talents they have to offer their child or school community. This conversation provides an important opportunity to highlight assets and talents as an important first step. However, the forming of relationships is key to engaging assets. When connections among parents, with school and the greater community are made, it becomes easier for parents to take steps in supporting their child's learning or taking collective action in support of the school community.

### ***Suggestions:***

Have parents brainstorm their talents of the head, hands and heart. These include the knowledge, skills and passions that parents bring to their role. (see activities: *Gifts I can give my child and community*). Have parents note one idea per sticky note and add to wall chart. Note the

Asking how these gifts can be shared with the school community provides an avenue for action.

- *How might these amazing assets be engaged, shared and valued to support individual learning?*
- *Within the school community?*
- *Within the extended community?*

## **10. Parents as Partners:**

### **Decision Makers: What is the role of the school council?**

A school council is a collective association of parents, teachers, secondary students, principal, staff and community representative (s) whose purpose is to advise the principal and work together with the school to support student learning. School Councils are part of the Government of Alberta School Act: Section 17 of the School Act that recognizes the right of parents and the school community to have meaningful involvement in their child's education. School councils are responsible to the parents and the community they serve. School councils provide advice to the principal on school-related issues, such as policies, program priorities, budget, special needs, school climate and event planning. School councils often raise funds for supplemental school programs and resources, plan fun school events and contribute to the development of a common vision for the school.

School councils do not manage the day-to-day operations of the school. Other school council functions may include:

- consulting with the principal so he or she can ensure students have opportunities to meet Ministry standards, fiscal management is sound and the community's expectations are taken into consideration during school-based planning
- being involved in school-based planning
- sharing ideas and information with school community and other school councils and provincial organizations
- setting policies that relate to school council functions, such as meeting format, financial policy, council development, communication and fundraising.
- Individual School boards have guiding documents with further information, i.e. Calgary Board of Education's [Resources for School Councils](#)

#### **Suggestion:**

\*\*Invite a member of the School Council to join in this part of the discussion.

\*\* Watch with parents and discuss this short video: [Why get involved with parent council?](#)  
*Parks Middle School, Atlanta Georgia: Annie E. Casey Foundation*

**Note:** Beyond school council there are opportunities to contribute to the school board and provincial government level. ie.. \* Calgary Association of Parent School Councils [CAPSC](#), often provides opportunities and forums to contribute to discussions around various issues of importance for education. Alberta Education receives inquiries at:

<http://alberta.ca/contact.cfm> - AlbertaConnects

Dr. J. Epstein's action team approach offers a framework for administrators, parents, teachers and community to come together and contribute to developing and implementing collective efforts around specific school wide goals. [School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action](#), third edition

# Role of Parents

## Listing of Accompanying Resources



### ***Introducing Conversation Café's***

Insight UK's 40 Icebreakers for small groups

[http://insight.typepad.co.uk/40\\_icebreakers\\_for\\_small\\_groups.pdf](http://insight.typepad.co.uk/40_icebreakers_for_small_groups.pdf)

Putman,(2000) Bowling Alone, <http://bowlingalone.com/>

Green, M. (2006), [When People Care enough to act,](#)

### ***Connections between home, school and community***

\* Grasslands School Division's [Newcomers Guide to Elementary Education in Alberta](#) (available in 18 languages)

\* [Parent involvement in school community Part 1 / Part 2](#)

\*Alberta Education [Information for Parents](#)

\* Dr. U. Bronfenbrenner's articulated [ecological systems theory](#)

\*[Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement](#) – Resources for Parents

\*[Centre on School, Family, and Community Partnerships](#)

National Network of Partnership Schools, John Hopkins University

\* [Harvard Family Research Project](#)

### ***Parenting***

\*Parenting Programs see [Inform Alberta](#); search *Parenting Education* by area code for local programs.

### ***Communicating***

\*Alberta Education offers a summary of tips for parents: [How can I get the most from Parent-Teacher Conferences:](#)

\*Harvard Family Research Project's: [Parent-Teacher Conference Tip Sheets for Principals, Teachers, and Parents](#)

### ***Learning at Home***

\*[Alberta Education's Learning Resource Centre](#) has a number of resources available for free and for purchase on line including: [The Parent Advantage: Helping Students Become Successful Learners at Home and School for Grades 1-9, Parents Guide](#)

\* See Alberta Education's resources for parents: ["How Can I Encourage Good Study Habits"](#) ["What about homework?"](#)

### ***Volunteering***

\*The Centre for School Change lists [50 Ways Parents can help schools](#)

\*The Community Toolbox: [Tips for Recruiting, retaining and recognizing volunteers](#)

\**PBS Documentary – A Tale of Two Schools Discussion guides:*

[The busy parents guide to involvement in schools](#)

[100 Ways for a Parent to be Involved](#)

## **Decision Making**

\*Alberta Home and School Council's Association's [School Council Handbook](#)

## **Community Collaborations**

[Centre on School, Family, and Community Partnerships](#)

[National Network of Partnership Schools, John Hopkins University](#)

## **Further Readings for Facilitators**

Barbour, C. , N. Barbour, P. Scully, (2011), Families, Schools, and Communities, Building Partnerships for Educating Children, Pearson, ISBN 10: 0-13-703546-2, ISBN-13: 978-0-13-703552-6

Epstein, J., et al. School, Family and Community Partnerships, Your Handbook for Action (2009) 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Corwin Press, ISBN: 978-0-8133-4447-8

Henderson, A., Mapp, K., Johnson, V. Davies, D. Beyond the Bake Sale, The New Press, ISBN: 978-1-56584-888-7

Nel Noddings, Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy  
Berkeley : University of California Press, ©1984. Reviewd at:  
[http://books.google.ca/books?id=hB-unTe3S7UC&printsec=frontcover&dq=inauthor:"Nel+Noddings"&hl=en&sa=X&ei=AWPGUPabEqXv0gHO\\_oGwDg&ved=0CFAQ6AEwCA-v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.ca/books?id=hB-unTe3S7UC&printsec=frontcover&dq=inauthor:)

Patrikakou, E., Weissberg, R. Redding, S. Walberg, H. (Eds) (2005) School-Family Partnerships for Children's Success, ISBN: 0-8077-4600-2

Harvard Family Research Project's:

[Parental Involvement in Homework: A Review of Current Research and Its Implications for Teachers, After School Program Staff, and Parent Leaders](#)

Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Parents' social networks and beliefs as predictors of parent involvement. *Elementary School Journal*, 102(4), 301-316.  
<http://schools.cbe.ab.ca/b826/pdfs/VolunteerHandbook.pdf>