



Family Engagement:

Listening, Learning and Leading

A report prepared by the
Parent and Family Engagement Review Committee



Family Engagement: Listening, Learning and Leading

To Our Community

The Thames Valley District School Board values the work that our school communities do to promote and enhance parent and family engagement each and every day. As a system it is our hope that this report will be used as a resource to assist and inform schools, families and community groups when planning to support family engagement in their individual school communities.

Introduction

In the winter of 2017, the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) Parent Engagement Review Committee was created with the intention of strengthening the connection between families and schools and increasing family engagement throughout the district. The committee is comprised of a diverse stakeholder group, including students, school board staff, principals, Trustees, parents, and community members.

Background

In May 2017, TVDSB's Research and Assessment Services conducted a survey for families who have children attending TVDSB schools. The Parent and Family Engagement Survey was voluntary, anonymous and accessible. Families were able to access the survey online or in a printable format that was translated into five of the most common languages spoken in Thames Valley. The survey results allowed the committee to identify areas of opportunity for growth in the connection between families and schools.

Acknowledgements

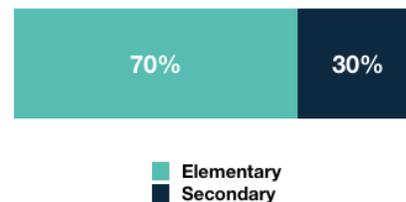
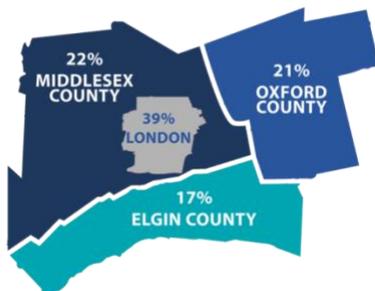
Thank you to parents, families, care givers, and staff who shared their stories and perspectives through discussion groups and the online survey. We would like to recognize the work done by members of the Parent Engagement Review Committee, Research and Assessment Services and Communications Department.





Who did we hear from?

Families from across Thames Valley responded to the Parent and Family Engagement Survey. A total of 1279 surveys were completed and used for analysis. Seventy percent of respondents have children in elementary school and thirty percent of respondents have children in secondary school.



Moving From “Parent Involvement” to “Family Engagement”

In recent years, *parent involvement* has evolved to include the important role that caregivers and all members of the family have in a child’s education. *Family engagement* is crucial to a child’s academic development and achievement.

"Family engagement is the authentic and meaningful place and voice of parents in their children's teaching, learning, and development." ⁽²²⁾

"Family engagement is any way that a child's adult caretaker (biological parents, foster parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.) effectively supports learning and healthy development." ⁽¹¹⁾

Why is family engagement important?

Fifty years of research ^(4,10,23) illustrates that family engagement leads to:

- Improved attendance
- Positive attitudes about school
- Fewer disciplinary problems
- Improved achievement scores

Communicating



What the Research Tells Us

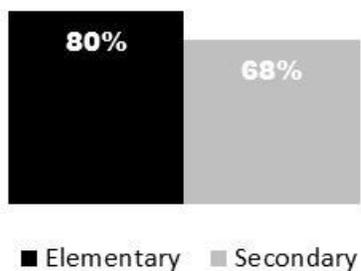
Positive communication is key to enhancing family engagement. Research shows that families value multiple channels of proactive, two-way communication, as it reaffirms the important role they have in their child's learning and development. By welcoming, respecting and valuing their voice in the school community, families are acknowledged as partners in their child's education.

"The goal of family engagement is not to serve clients but to gain partners." (5)

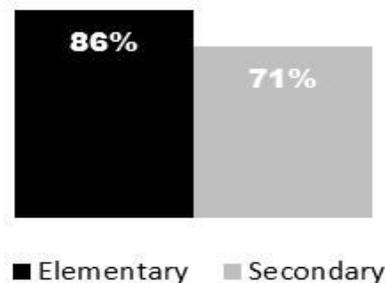
What We Heard:

▶ Families shared that they are receiving **clear messages** and know how to contact the school if they have questions.

"I agree that messages from the school are easy to read and understand."



"I know how to contact the school when I have questions."



Communication Matters!

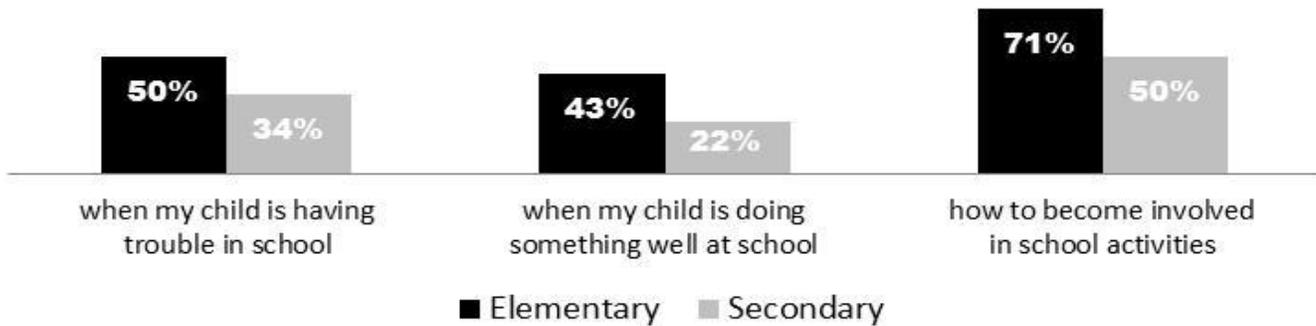
Families told us how much communication matters to them.

- 47% of the comments for elementary
- 41% of the comments for secondary



Families shared *when and why* they want to hear from schools.

The school lets me know...



What School Communities Can Do:

- Ensure communications regarding upcoming events and volunteer opportunities are delivered regularly and with advanced notice.
- Survey families in the school community to discover their preferred communication tools.

“I like when teachers provide digital resources. I can connect with content and it keeps me informed about my child’s activities.”

Families asked us to:

Update content and information on classroom and school websites consistently

Distribute information, schedules, calendars and newsletters in a timely manner

Regularly update parents on student progress and learning

Research-Based Tips and Strategies:

Regularly advertise events using different media formats (radio, community newspapers, websites, posters, services or agencies that are frequented by families).⁽¹⁵⁾

Develop communication plan that outlines specific dates for key messages to parents and families.⁽¹³⁾

Clearly message to parents and families key assessment milestones (e.g., report cards, progress reports, Individual Education Plans).⁽¹³⁾

Use effective communication methods:

Elementary: Communication Apps, Email, Student Agenda/Planner, School Newsletter

Secondary: Email, School Website, School Newsletter, Phone Conversations

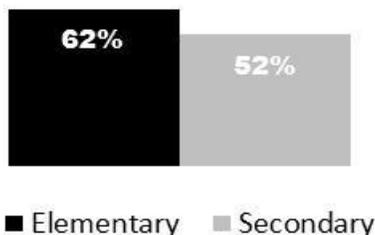
Determine what channels families would prefer to use when they communicate with the school or receive important messages.⁽¹⁵⁾

Translate school communications and information packages into languages that are spoken by families in the school community.⁽²⁴⁾



▶ Families shared that they would like more information on **how schools can support** their children.

I would like information on supports to help my child at school



“It’s important for information to come home from school so that I can help my child.”

What School Communities Can Do:

- Communicate to parents and families information about supports and services that are available in the school and community.

Families said they would like to know more about:

- Academic support (e.g., tutors, study groups, language, and homework)
- Course selection and career planning support
- In-class accommodations and supports available to students

- Mental health and well-being supports
- Supports for students with different abilities
- Supports provided by community partners and agencies

Research-Based Tips and Strategies:

Develop and provide orientation packages for parents and families that include both school supports and information on local community supports and services.⁽²⁴⁾

Partner with community agencies and services to develop information packages for parents and families.^(2,12)

Connecting



What the Research Tells Us

Research indicates that schools become stronger when they engage families and community partners. Schools should reflect the needs of families within the community and offer opportunities to build capacity through parent-to-parent connections and community resources.

"Schools should... collaborate with community members and organizations to connect students and families to expanded learning opportunities, community services and civic participation." (9)

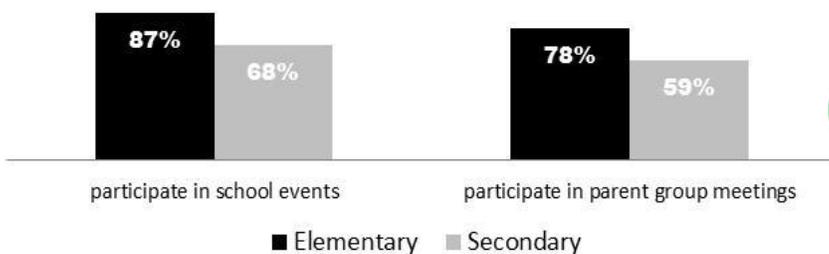
"When schools build partnerships with families that respond to their concerns and honor their contributions, they are successful in sustaining connections that are aimed at improving student achievement." (7)

What We Heard:



Families shared that they are **regularly being invited** to participate in school events and meetings.

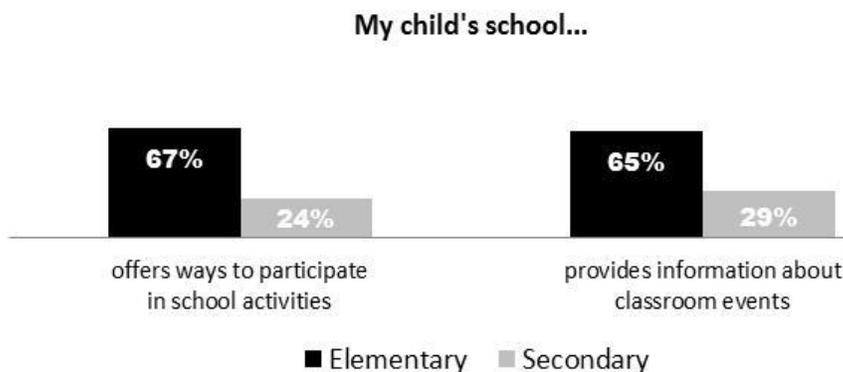
My child's school invites me to...



"It would be nice if parents were invited to attend activities, presentations or field trips. We would have an opportunity to see our children's progress and how they interact with their teachers and peers."



▶ Families would like more information about **engagement opportunities**.



“Have activities and presentations that the youth do for certain classes and invite the parents to see how things are going and how their children/youth interact with their teachers and peers.”

- What School Communities Can Do:**
- Connect with community groups that reflect the diversity of the student population.
 - Create events that offer meaningful opportunities for families to engage with and support their children.



Families said they would like to see **more opportunities to:**

- Share their expertise and knowledge
- Connect with teachers to share experiences

- Engage in school events when their child is participating
- Attend and participate in extra-curricular activities

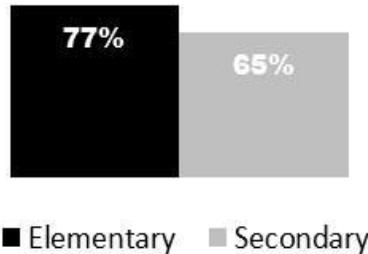
Research-Based Tips and Strategies:

- Seek out the expertise of parents, grandparents and family members in your school community and invite them to be guest speakers.⁽²¹⁾
- Develop networks to draw on the skills of others and link families of diverse backgrounds to community resources.⁽¹⁹⁾
- Create a student-hosted event, such as an open house where students demonstrate their knowledge of the curriculum or display projects and assignments.⁽²¹⁾
- Introduce interactive assignments so that families can work together on tasks that have real-life applications, such as brainstorming, interviewing, collaborating and finding materials.⁽¹⁷⁾

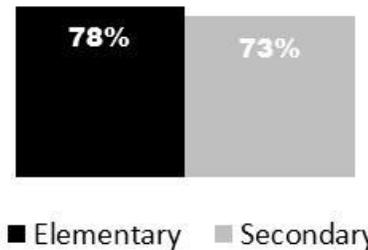


▶ Most families shared that they are experiencing *welcoming and inclusive* school communities.

I feel welcome at my child's school



I feel that my child's school respects all cultures



“Take field trips to places where families come together or ask parents to be guest speakers in the classroom. This would expand student learning and give them some real-world experiences.”

What School Communities Can Do:

- Foster and sustain a welcoming and inclusive school climate.
- Collect information from parents, families and care givers to identify school community needs.

Families suggested the following:

Make clear efforts to address and remove barriers in order to allow all families to become engaged in meaningful and productive ways

Provide an inviting and welcoming school environment

Encourage staff to interact with families in a caring and supporting way

Foster respectful and supportive relationships within the school community

Follow-up and reply to questions that families ask

Research-Based Tips and Strategies:

Identify and remove barriers to family engagement using the following strategies:

- Adjust the times activities are offered
- Provide child care, transportation, and translation services at events and activities. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Be visible and accessible by greeting families and students before and after school and at school events. ⁽²⁵⁾

Seek out the views and needs of families through surveys, discussions, and/or one-on-one conversations. ⁽¹⁸⁾

Conduct forums, town hall meetings, and group sessions to seek feedback and input from parents and families. ^(15,24)



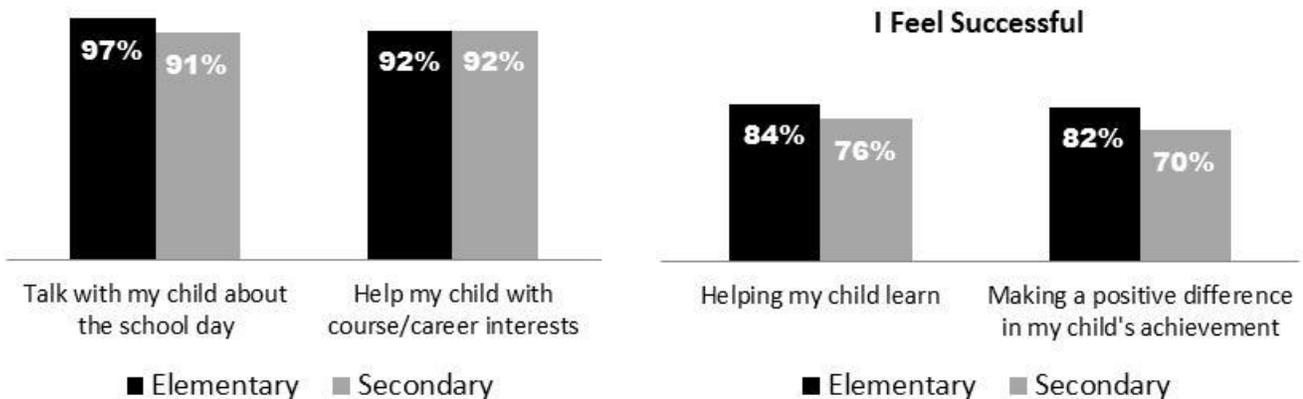
What the Research Tells Us

Research indicates that having families engaged in their child's education at home is the primary way to enhance learning at school. Student achievement improves when families are valued as partners in their child's education and provided with the necessary information and supports to help their children meet learning goals and expectations.

“Among the types of involvement, parental involvement that creates an understanding about the purposes, goals, and meaning of academic performance; communicates expectations about involvement; and provides strategies that students can effectively use (i.e., academic socialization) has the strongest positive relation with achievement.”⁽⁸⁾

What We Heard:

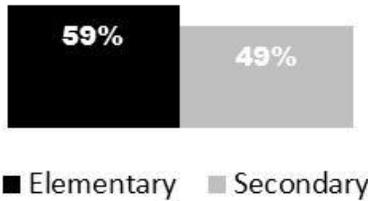
▶ Families shared that they are **connecting** with their children about school and **feeling successful** in helping their children learn.





▶ Families shared they would like more **support on how they can help** their children at home.

I would like support on how to help my child at home



“I am struggling to help my child with her homework because I don’t know what she is being taught.”

What School Communities Can Do:

- Provide professional development to increase family engagement knowledge amongst school staff.
- Provide information to families around community supports and services that can help support family life at home.

What Families would like to see:

The lessons that are being taught and the learning expectations to be sent home

Homework, tests, and worksheets, assignments and learning activities to be sent home

Opportunities to learn about supports for their child

Research-Based Tips and Strategies:

List all of the activities and learning goals that you have for students over the entire school year and provide activities that families can do at home to support those learning goals. ⁽¹⁰⁾

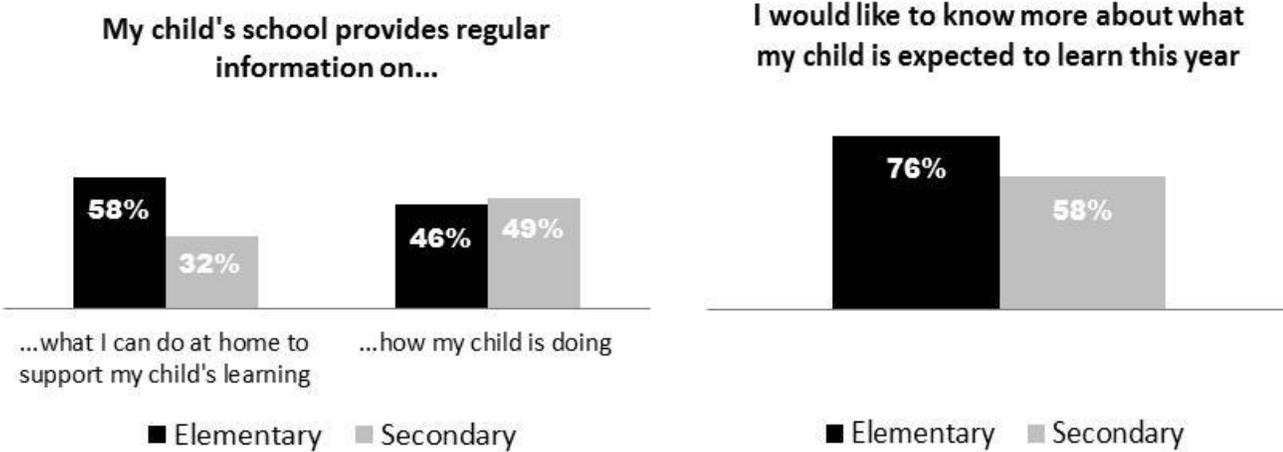
Collaborate with community partners and parent leaders to provide services at the school, such as conflict resolution training, mental health services, and substance abuse prevention. ⁽²⁵⁾



“It’s much easier for parents to keep track of their child’s need and learning progress when teachers make homework, assignments and grades accessible on their websites.”



Families shared that they would like **more information** on their children’s learning expectations and progress.



What School Communities Can Do:

- Find a variety of ways to effectively interact with families to notify them of student academic and social-emotional progress.
- Communicate with families to help them understand the learning expectations for their child.

Families would like:

Frequent and consistent information regarding academic progress and social and emotional status of their child

Timely notification if their child needs additional support and strategies on how they can best support them at home

Research-Based Tips and Strategies:

Lead discussion groups with families on relationships, dealing with conflict, time management and learning strategies. ⁽³⁾

Provide workshops on health & well-being, focusing on sleep, screen time, behaviour and emotional challenges, careers and post-secondary education. ⁽¹¹⁾

Host demonstrations on how to use communication apps, social media and the school website. ⁽¹³⁾

Inform families about what their children will be learning, how to understand report cards or how to support and encourage their children with homework. ⁽¹⁾

Encourage a broad understanding of what it means for families to “help” their child learn at home – listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, discussing and, most importantly, asking questions that lead to conversations. ⁽¹⁷⁾



Where do we go from here?

Consider:

- *Why is this important?*
- *What does this mean for your school community?*
- *What are the next steps that you will take?*

The Thames Valley District School Board is committed to working closely with school communities and school leaders to build and share best practices across the district. Future work will include assisting schools in enhancing their family engagement strategies in order to build capacity between schools and families. Our school communities will continue to collect feedback and input in order to help guide the wide variety of support and practices necessary to meet the needs of families and their children.

To learn more about how 'Family Engagement' may be enhanced within your own school community please contact your school Principal. If you would like additional information regarding this report please contact Research and Assessment Services at the Thames Valley District School Board.

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