



# It Starts at Home

A family engagement resource  
for Nunavut schools





# Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Background .....	5
Vision .....	6
<i>Sivumut Abluqta</i> and family engagement .....	6
Inuit societal values .....	6
<b>Part 1: What is family engagement?</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Overview .....	7
Effective forms of family engagement .....	7
Research on family engagement and student success .....	9
<b>Part 2: Family engagement tools for schools</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Creating your school's family engagement action plan .....	10
Six steps to create a family engagement action plan .....	11
Checklist for principals .....	16
Sample family engagement survey .....	17
Survey for parents and other caregivers of students at [name] school .....	18
Family engagement action plan template .....	21
Indicators to measure family engagement .....	24
Family engagement tips from Nunavut schools .....	25

<b>Part 3: Information resources for school staff and families . . . . .</b>	<b>31</b>
What is family engagement? . . . . .	32
The benefits of family engagement . . . . .	32
The role of families in students' academic learning. . . . .	33
How parents can get involved . . . . .	34
Who is involved in a child's education? . . . . .	35
About report cards. . . . .	36
About parent-teacher meetings. . . . .	38
The purpose of homework . . . . .	39
Children and television. . . . .	40
About Internet safety. . . . .	41
About cyber-bullying. . . . .	42
About the Coalition of Nunavut District Education Authorities . . . . .	43
<b>Bibliography. . . . .</b>	<b>45</b>

# Introduction

## Background

When people think of academic success, the role of schools in that success often comes to mind. However, there is another important contributor to that success – families. Success starts at home. Parents and other caregivers are children’s first and most constant teachers, there to support and educate them from birth through all their years of schooling. The role that families have in students’ academic success must continue to be recognized and supported.

Research shows that strong connections between parents and schools have a positive impact on students’ school experiences and academic achievement. The Department of Education recognizes the importance of school-family partnerships and believes that increased collaboration between parents and school staff will lead to:

- increased student attendance;
- increased student achievement;
- a mutual understanding of parents’ and teachers’ concerns and perspectives; and
- the support needed to work toward common goals.

**Students who are supported by a community are better set up for success and better positioned to achieve their academic and personal goals.**

*It Starts At Home* was created by the Department of Education in collaboration with the Nunavut Teachers’ Association. The purpose of this guide is to provide schools and families with information and strategies to help increase family engagement in schools throughout Nunavut. The research-based information and strategies in this guide can help schools and families support students to realize their full academic potential.

### ***A note about terms***

Families today take many different forms and this means that the most important adult in a child’s life could be a mother, father, grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling, foster parent or other guardian. Throughout this guide, the use of the terms “parents,” “caregivers,” and “families” is intended to reflect this reality. This guide is intended to support schools to engage with a child’s caregiver, whoever that may be.

## Vision

The Department of Education envisions parents, communities and school staff working together in respectful and culturally-appropriate ways to create a strong foundation of support on which Nunavut students can strive to achieve their full academic and personal potential.

## *Sivumut Abluqta* and family engagement

*Sivumut Abluqta (Stepping Forward Together)* is the Government of Nunavut's vision and action plan for 2014-2018.

As *Sivumut Abluqta* states:

*Our top priority is the development of self-reliance and optimism through quality education and training to prepare Nunavummiut for employment. Education and employment will reduce poverty, improve health outcomes and enhance our ability to look after ourselves, our elders and our children.*

Improved educational outcomes are essential for the future of our territory. The Department of Education is committed to ensuring that Nunavummiut graduate from high school, college, and university with the same levels of academic achievement and skills development as students elsewhere in Canada.

To improve educational outcomes, we must all work together. This includes government departments, schools, teachers and school administration, students, and families. We are all responsible for the well-being and academic success of Nunavut students. We must foster strong partnerships between families and schools.

## Inuit societal values

Inuit societal values are the foundation of *Sivumut Abluqta* and this resource.

- **Inuuqatigiitsiarniq**: Respecting others, relationships and caring for people.
- **Tunnganarniq**: Fostering good spirits by being open, welcoming and inclusive.
- **Pijitsirniq**: Serving and providing for family and/or community.
- **Aajiiqatigiinni**: Decision-making through discussion and consensus.
- **Pilimmaksarniq/Pijariuqsarniq**: Development of skills through observation, mentoring, practice, and effort.
- **Piliriqatigiinni/Ikajuqtigiinni**: Working together for a common cause.
- **Qanuqtuurniq**: Being innovative and resourceful.
- **Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq**: Respect and care for the land, animals and the environment.

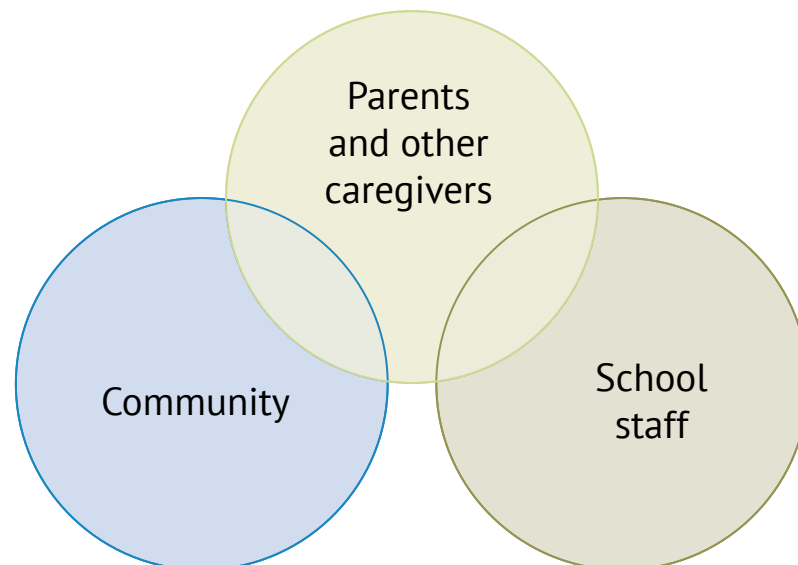
# Part 1: What is family engagement?

## Overview

Family engagement is about **inspiring and supporting families and teachers to work together** to ensure students' well-being and success.

Family engagement is based on the belief that parents and other guardians, families, communities, teachers and schools all play an essential role in the education of Nunavummiut. One of the main goals of a family engagement initiative is to improve relationships between all the people who have a role in a child's education. When these relationships are strong, children feel more supported and secure as learners.

Family engagement includes teachers opening their classroom doors to parents and other caregivers. It also includes parents and communities being actively involved in children's academic learning at school, at home, on the land, and through pre-school, after-school, and other community programs.



## Effective forms of family engagement

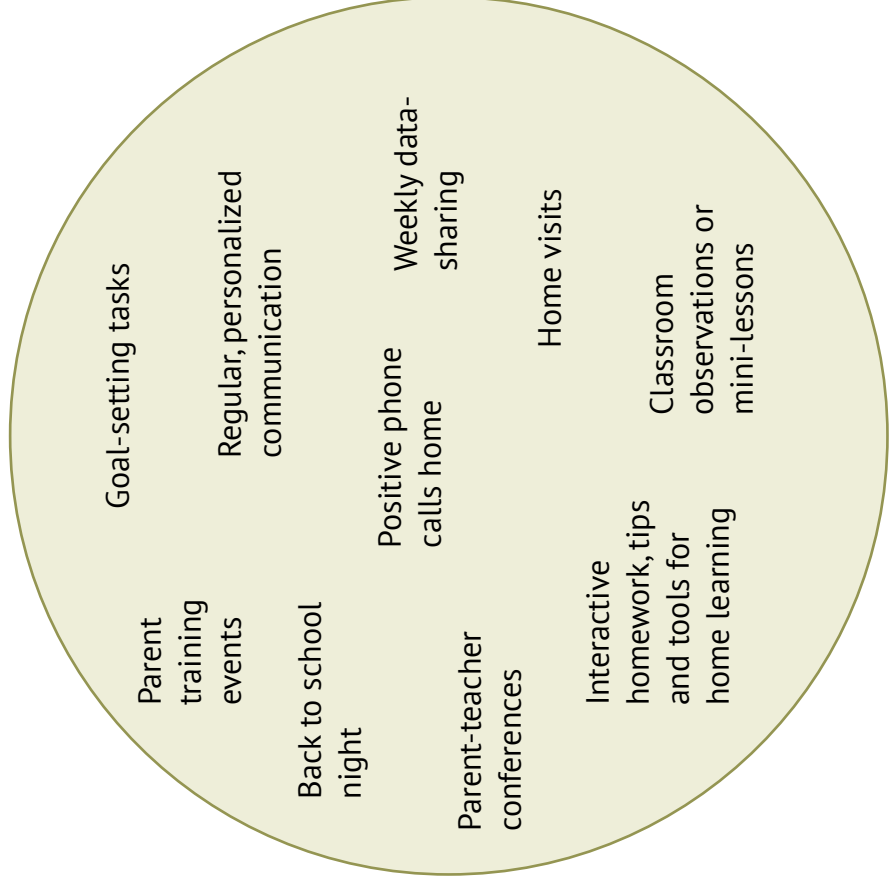
There are many kinds of family engagement activities. The diagram on the next page shows how parents and other caregivers can participate at school. All forms of family engagement are beneficial, but research shows the examples in the circle of the diagram have the greatest impact on student success.

Lower impact on student achievement



Higher impact on student achievement

- Parent coordinators
- Parent volunteering
- Fundraisers
- Parent resource rooms
- Potlucks
- Parent social services
- Student performance
- Generic school newsletters





## Research on family engagement and student success

### ***Benefits of family engagement***

Research has shown that engaging parents and family members in a child's education significantly improves the child's academic achievements, future goals and aspirations.

Some findings from recent research on family engagement have confirmed that:

- Academic achievement increases when parents and families are engaged in their children's education.
- Increased family engagement has a positive impact, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic/racial background, and parents' education levels.
- Students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and complete homework more consistently when their parents are actively engaged in their education.

### ***Common barriers to family engagement***

Research has also shown that educators can further improve benefits when they work with families to overcome common barriers. Single parents, those from low income families, minority groups, newcomers, and others with little formal education or past negative experiences with formal education often face barriers to full involvement in their children's schooling.

Some specific findings from recent research on barriers to family engagement have confirmed that:

- Time constraints, language, discomfort with or lack of knowledge of subject matter, and disabilities can all obstruct family participation in their child's education.
- Some parents may avoid entering schools, helping in classrooms, or speaking with teachers if they feel self-conscious about their level of schooling or are uncomfortable in institutional settings.
- The negative educational experiences that some Inuit families have had, particularly due to the residential school system, affects how parents and other caregivers feel about their child's education.
- Parents may feel intimidated by the school or poorly equipped to help their child with school work.

## Part 2: Family engagement tools for schools

This section provides strategies that can support family-school partnerships. Included here are strategies for:

- creating a family engagement plan;
- monitoring and evaluating progress;
- building relationships with parents; and
- having successful parent-teacher meetings.

### Creating your school's family engagement action plan

#### ***Introduction***

Developing a family engagement plan can be a simple and inspiring process for school staff. One process that can help your school is *The Collaborating for Success Parent Engagement Toolkit* developed by the Michigan Department of Education. This process contains six steps to follow, and the steps have been adapted in this guide for use in Nunavut schools.

#### **Preliminary conversations**

Before you begin to develop a family engagement plan, talk with stakeholders – students, families, DEA, school staff, and the community in general – about the current situation at your school and how everyone would like to proceed with a family engagement plan. You may want to ask them what they think some of the specific challenges are in relation to student well-being and success, and how family engagement could help. You may also want to ask what aspects of family engagement are already working well. A good action plan should take your current strengths into account and build on them.

## Six steps to create a family engagement action plan

Here are six steps the staff of your school can follow to develop a family engagement plan. School staff should engage parents and other community members in each step as much as possible.

Each step is explained in this section and suggested tasks are provided. You may also have your own ways of accomplishing each step.



### **1. Reflect on your school's current family engagement.**

What programs and activities currently support family engagement?

Review the *Effective family engagement activities* diagram on page 8 for ideas.

#### **Tasks**

- Hold a [staff meeting](#) to discuss your school's current level of family engagement. Develop reflection questions ahead of time to guide the conversation with your staff. Consider what is working well, what resources you have to build on, what the team hopes for, and what steps could be taken to achieve the team's vision.
- Develop a [survey for parents and other caregivers](#) with your staff. The survey should help you determine what aspects of engagement your school should work on. Send the survey home at the beginning of the year. A sample survey is included on page 18.
- [Talk with parents informally](#) about their ideas for family engagement. This could be done during an open house, school feast for students' families, or other welcoming event at the beginning of the school year.

### **2. Develop a statement of purpose.**

After reflecting on your school's current family engagement strengths and needs, develop a statement of purpose. The statement of purpose should describe your school's vision for family engagement.

#### **Tasks**

- Collect and examine data from parent surveys. Reflect on and summarize ideas gathered from staff meetings and conversations with families.
- Develop a statement of purpose that reflects the vision and commitment your school has for its family engagement plan.

### ***Ideas from Joyce Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement***

The following ideas may help to inspire your statement of purpose. They are taken from Joyce Epstein's *Framework of Six Types of Involvement*.

- **Parenting:** Help families build home environments that support children. Examples of this include providing parents information on health, nutrition and other relevant services.
- **Communicating:** Design effective ways to communicate across the family-school partnership. For example, maintain regular communication with family members through useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters and conference meetings.
- **Volunteering:** Develop ways to increase family help and support in your school. This could include a survey to identify family availability, talents and ideas for volunteering.
- **Learning at home:** Come up with useful ideas that will help families engage with students in their homework, as well as empower families and students to get involved in curriculum decisions and planning. For example, involve families in setting annual student goals and in planning for post-secondary schooling or work.
- **Decision-making:** Include families in school decisions where possible.
- **Collaborating with the community:** Identify and integrate resources and services from the community. Choose those that can help strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

### ***3. Identify goals and steps.***

The next step is to develop specific goals and objectives to achieve the vision in your statement of purpose.

#### **Tasks**

- Review the results from Step 1. Identify common concerns and interests of parents and teachers.
- Select three major goals based on these needs and interests.
- Make sure your goals are measurable. Identify a baseline measurement.
- With school staff, identify steps that can be taken to help your school achieve each goal.

### ***4. Make your family engagement action plan.***

Make an action plan based on the activities the school staff have agreed on for each of your top three family engagement goals. Your action plan should list the specific activities, who will be responsible for each activity, when the activity will be organized and completed, and how often the participants will meet. A clear action plan will help your school stay on track. An action plan template is included on page 21.

#### **Tasks**

- Create an action plan for the school year to achieve your top three family engagement goals.
- Make sure the action plan lists specific steps and activities, identifies the staff responsible for each step and activity, and includes dates.
- Have staff members meet throughout the year to help them plan together, stay on track, and maintain momentum.

### ***5. Review progress regularly.***

It is important to regularly review your family engagement plan and whether you are completing the activities. You should collect feedback from internal sources (teachers and other staff) and external sources (families and community). Scheduling meetings with staff first, followed by meetings with parents, is one way you could review and evaluate the level of family engagement in your school.

#### **Tasks**

- Build a progress review into your action plan.
- Ways you can check the impact of your action plan and activities:
  - Counting the number of participants in the activities.
  - Collecting qualitative feedback from participants about their experiences in the activities.
  - Checking in with school staff and DEA members about their perceptions.
  - Recording attendance and achievement rates throughout the year. You can also compare attendance and achievements rates at the beginning and end of the school year.

### ***6. Evaluate your plan at the end of the school year.***

Analyze students' attendance and achievement rates to determine what **overall impacts** your family engagement activities had. Use the results of your evaluation to modify your family engagement plan for the next school year.

#### **Tasks**

- Schedule a staff meeting to discuss and compare levels of student achievement at the beginning and end of the school year.
- Send home a short questionnaire asking parents for feedback on the year's family engagement activities.
- Send a newsletter to families about their children's accomplishments throughout the year and at the end of the school year.

## Checklist for principals

### *Beginning of the school year*

- [Create a family engagement action plan](#) with your staff. Review the *It Starts At Home* guide for tips.
- [Identify and articulate three family engagement goals](#) for the school. If possible, integrate these into the school improvement goals.
- [Share these goals](#) with your staff and key stakeholders: DEA, families, and students.
- [Implement the school's family engagement action plan](#).
- [Identify indicators of family engagement and collect data](#) to establish a baseline. This will later help you measure whether the school is meeting its family engagement goals.

### *Mid-year*

- [Review](#) the effectiveness of the family engagement action plan activities. You could do this by collecting new data to measure against the baseline data you collected at the beginning of the school year.
- [Adjust the action plan](#) based on the mid-year review.

### *Year-end*

- [Evaluate](#) the overall effectiveness of the family engagement action plan activities. You could do this by giving families a feedback survey and by counting the number of parents at family engagement events.
- [Record and share the outcomes](#) of the family engagement initiative with stakeholders, including parents, school staff, DEA and the Department of Education.
- [Adjust the action plan](#) for the following school year based on the evaluation results.
- [Celebrate achievements](#) with students, parents and school staff!



## Sample family engagement survey

This introductory letter and survey has been adapted from *The School Administrator's Guide to Parent Engagement in Ontario*. School leaders may want to use it to become more familiar with their school communities. It could also be useful for a new principal coming into a school or teachers who want to learn what they need to focus on to increase family engagement.

This survey should help establish and sustain a positive learning culture and welcoming school environment. It can help schools implement strategies to remove discriminatory barriers and better support parents, students and teachers.

*Permission to reprint/share this article was received by the Ontario Principals' Council, June 2014.*

Dear parents and other caregivers:

Our school is making an action plan to help us work together more with students' families. Parents and other caregivers are the most important teachers in children's lives. We want to welcome parents and caregivers into the school more. We want to support parents, students, and school staff to strengthen their relationships.

This survey will help us plan our activities for the year. Please complete this survey to tell us about your concerns, needs, and interests for our school, your child's education, and your involvement. We will use this information to organize family events and school projects with families this year.

Please call **[name]** at **[phone number]** for more information about this survey. If you want to answer this survey orally, we will arrange a time.

Thank you for your time!

\_\_\_\_\_, Principal

## Survey for parents and other caregivers of students at [name] school

**1. I have children in (check all that apply):**

- Kindergarten    Grade 1    Grade 2    Grade 3    Grade 4  
 Grade 5    Grade 6    Grade 7    Grade 8    Grade 9  
 Grade 10    Grade 11    Grade 12

**2. I currently participate at the school by (check all that apply):**

- Volunteering with my child's classroom/library/land trips  
 Attending class trips/events  
 Helping with school events  
 Coaching or helping with a school team  
 Sitting on a school committee  
 Helping with fundraising  
 Participating in other activities (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Not involved

**3. I attend District Education Authority (DEA) meetings:**

- Yes    No

**4. If you answered "no" to question 3, please indicate why you do not attend DEA meetings (check all that apply):**

- I need childcare  
 I have difficulty understanding the language of the meetings  
 I am uncomfortable in the education environment  
 I do not feel welcome at the school  
 The meeting times do not fit my schedule  
 The DEA in my community does not meet my needs  
 I think parent groups are too political  
 I am not interested in being involved at this time  
 Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**5. If you answered "yes" to question 3, please indicate why you attend DEA meetings (check all that apply):**

- To support the school community  
 To be informed  
 Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Please indicate the most effective ways for us to communicate with you.  
Rank each one from 1 to 4.**

**4 – Very effective    3 – Effective    2 – Somewhat effective    1 – Least effective**

- Letters sent home with your child
- Letters mailed home
- Email
- Phone call
- Radio announcement
- Face-to-face meeting
- Classroom website
- School website
- Public signboard
- Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Please indicate your level of involvement in the following activities.  
Rank each activity from 1 to 4.**

**4 – Always    3 – Sometimes    2 – Rarely    1 – Never**

- Participate in DEA meetings
- Participate in DEA/school fundraising activities
- Volunteer in the classroom
- Read to my child
- Discuss the school day with my child
- Supervise my child when they are doing homework
- Play games with my child
- Watch educational television shows with my child
- Use the Internet for research with my child
- Take my child to the library
- Talk with other parents about school and education
- Talk to teachers on a regular basis
- Talk to teachers if I am concerned about my child's progress
- Attend parent/teacher interviews
- Talk to the principal
- Read school communication
- Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**8. I would like to attend parent information sessions on the following topics:**

- Homework
- Reading and writing
- Math skills
- Bullying
- Computer skills
- Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**9. What would be the best time of the day to offer parent information sessions:**

- Morning
- Lunch
- Afternoon
- Evening
- Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Any other concerns or ideas you want to share?**

*Thank you for your time!*

# Family engagement action plan template

Name of school \_\_\_\_\_

Year \_\_\_\_\_

**Family engagement goal #1** \_\_\_\_\_

Activity	Tasks	Timeline	Staff responsible for task
<p>Details:</p> <p>Date of activity:</p> <p>How you will measure the impact of activity:</p>			

**Family engagement goal #2** \_\_\_\_\_

Activity	Tasks	Timeline	Staff responsible for task
<p>Details:</p> <p>Date of activity:</p> <p>How you will measure the impact of activity:</p>			

**Family engagement goal #3** \_\_\_\_\_

Activity	Tasks	Timeline	Staff responsible for task
<p>Details:</p> <p>Date of activity:</p> <p>How you will measure the impact of activity:</p>			

Date to review this plan \_\_\_\_\_

## Indicators to measure family engagement

Monitoring and evaluating progress is essential for long-term success. Effective monitoring and evaluation will help you modify your action plan during the school year and revise your action plan for the next school year.

Here are some indicators that you could use to measure the impacts of your family engagement activities:

- Parents from diverse community groups participate in meaningful school activities.
- A diverse representation of parents (age, gender, various community groups, etc.) participate in school/DEA meetings.
- A greater number of parents participate at school/DEA meetings.
- Teachers create innovative opportunities for parents to engage in their child's learning at home and at school.
- Parents consult with teachers on school initiatives, activities, and homework.
- Parents participate in parent/teacher interviews.
- Parents attend school learning activities such as cultural days, land trips, Christmas concerts.
- Parents give feedback by answering school surveys or other information sheets sent home with students.
- The school's culture is dynamic and interactive and focuses on student learning, achievement, and well-being.
- The school suspension rate is lower than previous years.
- The attendance rate is higher than in previous years.
- Parents and teachers have conversations more often.
- Parents help teachers understand family circumstances and provide suggestions for how to best work with their child at school.
- The school informs parents about school events and individual student progress.
- Parents contact the school when they need information or want to inform the school about their child.
- Parents respond to school communications.
- Parents make themselves available to talk with school staff when dropping off or picking up their children.



## Family engagement tips from Nunavut schools

This section offers best practices for collaborating with students' families, based on the experiences of Nunavut school staff. These best practices were identified by school staff from communities across Nunavut, including classroom support assistants, teachers, and school administrators. The Department of Education is grateful to everyone who contributed.

These best practices have been sorted into two categories – suggestions for building relationships with parents, and suggestions for having meetings with parents.

### ***Suggestions for building relationships with parents***

#### **Have a feast or other gathering for students' families at the start of the school year.**

Start the school year with a country foods feast or other gathering at the school for students' families. Have all school staff participate. Organize games and other ways for families and school staff to have fun together and get to know each other. Provide tours of the school so parents and other family members can see their child's classroom and learn more about their daily routines. Ensure that parents and other guardians have an opportunity to meet their child's teacher.

#### **Have open houses throughout the year.**

Invite students' families to open houses throughout the year. During the open houses, celebrate students' achievements and show families what students have been learning about. If feasible, engage students and parents in planning the open houses.

#### **Visit students' homes.**

At the beginning of the school year, have teachers visit each student's home. Families will appreciate the effort. After a home visit, parents and teachers usually feel more comfortable communicating throughout the school year. During home visits, teachers also learn more about each student.

Teachers should visit their students' homes with a coworker, such as another teacher, classroom support assistant, or the school counsellor. Teachers should not visit students' homes alone.

Give families time to prepare for home visits. Schedule each visit a few days in advance and provide the family with several options for dates and times. This gives the family more control over the visit and time to prepare. This is especially important when the teacher and family are meeting for the first time.

Have an Inuktitut speaker present. Teachers who do not speak Inuktitut should partner with an Inuktitut-speaking coworker to provide translation and guidance as needed.

Check with the District Education Authority and the community for local policies and preferences about home visits.

### **Listen more, talk less.**

Families are the experts about their children. It is essential that teachers listen fully to what parents and other caregivers know about their children. When school staff listen more and talk less, they learn important things from families about their children. And when parents sense that they have been heard, they will want to engage with the school more openly.

Some parents may feel nervous when meeting with their child's teacher or unsure about how to start the conversation. Teachers can support parents to feel more comfortable by preparing a few questions ahead of time. If desired, the school counsellor could also be included in the conversation (but check with the parent first about this).

### **Get to know students' siblings and close friends.**

When you do this, parents see that you are well informed about their child. They appreciate learning things they might not be aware of.

### **Contact families regularly about school and classroom activities.**

Tell parents about weekly/monthly themes and special events. Remember that not every home has a telephone. Send short newsletters home with students. Stay in touch with parents through home visits when necessary.

### **Send reinforcement work home.**

Send flashcards, booklets, crayons, and stickers home to reinforce learning goals. Send home one simple activity at a time and include clear instructions. This will make it easier for parents to work with their child.

### **Write notes home with a friendly tone.**

Use friendly, informal language. Attach colourful stickers with messages onto envelopes. Be very careful to avoid being formal or threatening.

### **Call before sending letters home.**

Call parents before you send a letter home, so the parents know to expect the letter. When sending letters out to all parents, make an announcement on community radio.

### **Write the dates on documents that need to be returned.**

When sending documents home that parents need to fill out and return, mark the envelope with the following information: the date you sent the document home, the date you need it returned, and the reason you are sending it.

### **Use parent-teacher communication books.**

Teachers and parents can communicate with each other by writing messages in a communication book, such as an agenda. Have the student bring the book home and back to school regularly.

### **Greet parents around town.**

A nod, smile, and simple conversation with parents outside of school helps build strong relationships. Take time to say hello and check in with them about how they are doing.

### **Be an active community member.**

Participate in community events, such as games and community feasts. This gives parents and teachers opportunities to get to know each other in a comfortable environment.

### **Ask other school staff before contacting families.**

Get as much information as you can from other school staff before contacting parents about a concern. This extra information will help you better understand what is impacting the student.

### **Call home with good news, too!**

Call home with good news as often as you call with concerns about a student. Contact parents with good news at the beginning of the school year. This way you have developed a rapport with parents if you have to call with concerns later. Parents really appreciate hearing positive things about their children.

### **Be positive.**

Parents appreciate teachers who are positive, upbeat and have a sense of humour. A negative or overly serious teacher can add to an already stressful situation.

### ***Suggestions for parent-teacher team meetings***

#### **Discuss important issues in person, rather than over the phone.**

Sometimes teachers call parents to invite them to a parent-teacher meeting and then start talking about the child during the phone call. Resist the urge to start the meeting on the phone. Wait until the face-to-face meeting. This will give parents time to prepare and think about the issues to be discussed.

#### **Be positive when arranging a parent-teacher team meeting.**

This will make parents feel more comfortable about scheduling and preparing for the meeting.

### **Have parents choose the date and time.**

When scheduling a team meeting, call parents at least a week in advance and ask them which day and time they would prefer.

### **Send a reminder about the meeting two days before.**

Two days before the meeting, call parents to remind them of the meeting time. Remind them who will be at the meeting and what will be discussed so they are not surprised when they arrive.

### **Prepare an agenda and guidelines for the meeting.**

Have an agenda and guidelines for conduct available. Review the agenda and guidelines at the beginning of the meeting. The guidelines should include an agreement to listen fully to each other so everyone feels confident they will be heard.

### **Begin with a small meeting.**

Before inviting parents to meetings that involve the whole school team, invite them to a meeting with just the classroom teacher and student support teacher. This allows parents to get comfortable before meeting with a larger school team.

### **Invite parents to bring other family members to the meeting.**

Parents should feel welcome to bring along other family members or supportive friends to the meeting.

### **Prepare fun activities for younger students and their siblings to do.**

Young students can't usually participate in the parent-teacher team meeting. Also, many parents may have to bring other children to the meeting. Have fun activities prepared to occupy the student and other children.

### **Have students create written invitations.**

Have students create invitations for parents to attend the parent-teacher team meetings. This helps involve the child in something that affects them directly.

### **Give relevant documents to parents before the meeting.**

Give parents any relevant documents before the meeting so they have time to review them. Meetings will go more smoothly and quickly when parents have this opportunity. For example, involve parents early in developing a child's Individual Student Support Plan (ISSP). When parents are engaged early on, they understand the ISSP better and will feel more comfortable participating in meetings.

### **Tell parents about the learning goals and plans you have for their child.**

It is very important to talk with parents about the skills you are helping their child improve. Share openly with the parent about the learning goals the child's school team is focusing on.

### **Discuss potential problems early on.**

Open and supportive conversations early on can prevent problems from becoming too difficult to address. With early warning and open discussions, parents and teachers can work together confidently to support the child's development.

### **Offer refreshments during the meeting.**

Make parents feel welcomed and valued by offering refreshments. Having a cup of tea together will help parents and teachers get settled and feel comfortable with each other before talking about the student.

### **Be well prepared.**

Make meetings efficient by being well prepared. Parents will be grateful for a short meeting. By doing as much preparation as you can, you will have more time to dedicate to the parent and to any specific tasks that need to be accomplished, such as finalizing an ISSP or setting goals together for the next year.

### **Begin on a positive note.**

Begin the meeting by discussing the student's successes and strengths. Then, discuss the student's needs and possible future outcomes. Avoid complaining about what the student does wrong. Focus on the ultimate goal, especially if your concerns are related to classroom behaviour.

### **Be welcoming.**

When the person leading the meeting has a positive demeanour, everyone else at the meeting will feel more comfortable, including the parents. Be aware of non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions, posture, and hand movements. Also, be aware of cultural nuances in communications to avoid expressing negativity unintentionally.

### **Close the meeting with reflection and sharing.**

Close the meeting with sharing. Invite each person at the meeting to say how the meeting went for them and how they are feeling. This will strengthen the team and ensure that everyone feels heard and understood. It will also help everyone move forward together.

**Don't rush the meeting. Go at a natural pace.**

It's easy to worry about time during a meeting. But, the meeting is about getting information that will best help the team accomplish its goals for the child. Give parents time to share. Allow silence and don't interrupt. Pause sometimes to invite parents to ask questions and check in with them to see if they understand and have any feedback. Don't end the meeting if the parents are not satisfied yet. Schedule a follow-up meeting if needed, rather than rushing.

**Arrange large meetings in a circle.**

For large meetings, arrange chairs in a circle. This will help everyone work together as equals. A circle shows that everyone at the meeting is respected and has an important role.

**Sit beside the parent in small meetings.**

Avoid sitting directly across from parents, as this sometimes feels confrontational. Sit beside the parent or at an angle to them. This position shows that you and the parent are working together.

**Always offer an interpreter if you do not speak the parent's first language.**

Even parents who speak English may still prefer Inuktitut interpretation. Most people feel more comfortable in their first language when talking about important or emotional issues in their lives. Even if it seems unnecessary, have an interpreter available if you do not speak the parent's first language.

**Don't use educational jargon.**

Use clear, everyday language in conversations with parents and in letters home. This will prevent misunderstandings due to language differences. Parents will feel much more comfortable when they can easily understand what school staff are talking about. Take time to explain technical terms when you need to use them. Check in with parents to make sure they understand.

**Use Inuktitut as much as possible when meeting with parents who are more comfortable speaking Inuktitut.**

Even if you do not speak Inuktitut, use as much Inuktitut as you are able to. This shows that you value and respect parents and the community. This can help put parents at ease.

## Part 3: Information resources for school staff and families

This section provides information that school staff can use in their family engagement activities. The information should be adapted to fit the activities, interests, and goals of each school, teacher, and family.

The information could be used to develop resource sheets, workshops, and posters. It could also be used to support family engagement planning activities and conversations.

### *Topics*

- **What is family engagement?**
- **The benefits of family engagement**
- **The role of families in students' academic learning**
- **How parents can get involved**
- **Who is involved in a child's education?**
- **About report cards**
- **About parent-teacher meetings**
- **The purpose of homework**
- **Children and television**
- **About Internet safety**
- **About cyber-bullying**
- **About the Coalition of Nunavut District Education Authorities**

## What is family engagement?

Family engagement encourages teamwork and support between students, their families, school staff, and the community to help children succeed throughout school.

Positive, caring relationships between these important people will help children feel supported and secure while creating a healthy learning environment.

Students who are supported by the whole community are better set up for success and better positioned to achieve their academic and personal goals.

Some things to consider:

- Families are their children's first and most constant teachers.
- All children have the right to the opportunity to reach their full potential.
- Good schools become better schools when parents are involved.
- All families and schools want the best for their children.
- Effective schools provide a nurturing and supportive learning environment.

## The benefits of family engagement

Parents are their children's first teachers. They play an essential role in their child's life-long learning. To create a strong foundation for children's academic achievement, there must be strong partnerships between families, students, teachers, school administration, and community members.

### ***Proven benefits***

- Students have higher grades and better attendance.
- Students complete homework more consistently.
- Students have higher graduation rates and greater enrollment rates in post-secondary education.
- Educators hold higher expectations of students whose parents collaborate with teachers.
- Children from diverse cultural backgrounds perform better when parents and professionals collaborate. Collaboration helps bridge any gaps between the culture at home and the culture at school.
- Student alcohol use, violence, and antisocial behaviour decrease as parent involvement increases.
- Parents help motivate better academic performance if they participate in school events, develop relationships with educators, and keep up with what's happening at their children's school.
- High school students make better transitions, maintain their work quality, and develop realistic future plans if their parents remain involved in their schooling.



## The role of families in students' academic learning

Learning happens in all areas of students' lives, including at school and at home. Research has proven that children whose families are engaged in their education are more successful in school and have higher academic goals.

Engagement includes participating in a child's school fundraiser or attending his or her performances and athletic events. It also means partnering with the child's school to support learning at home.

### ***What can parents do?***

Parents can create a home environment that encourages learning. This includes:

- a warm, safe environment;
- food and shelter;
- a good night's sleep;
- a quiet place to work and study;
- time to talk with their child about his or her day; and
- an open and accepting environment for questions and concerns.

Parents can also communicate high, but reasonable, expectations for their child.

They can:

- praise successes and not dwell on mistakes.
- help their child understand the importance of education and the opportunities it provides.

Parents can also get involved in their child's education at school and in the community.

- See the section *How parents can get involved* for ideas.

## How parents can get involved

Parents often want to get involved in their children's schooling, but they don't know where to begin. It is important to keep in mind that parents can be engaged at many different levels. Simple activities like reading a book together, helping with homework, and emphasizing the importance of school and academic success can and does make a difference! This section offers some suggestions that school staff can share with parents on how they can get involved.

### *How parents can get involved*

- Take your child to school on the first day of the school year.
- Let your child know school is important. Set up a quiet place for your child to work at home. Ask your child questions about the day's homework.
- Show your child that you are well informed about their school. Read everything that is sent home from school. This includes report cards, homework assignments, school lunch plans, and vacation and bus schedules.
- Get to know your child's teachers and school principal by attending school meetings and parent-teacher conferences.
- Ask for copies of school policies (such as attendance and discipline policies). Ask questions if there is something you do not understand.
- Volunteer to help with school activities. Attend sports events, assist with fundraisers, or volunteer to work in the school office.
- Visit your child's classroom when class is in session, not just at parent-teacher conferences. Set this up in advance with the school office and the teacher.
- Talk to other parents. If there is a parent organization, join it. Think about starting a parent organization if there isn't one currently at the school. You can start by finding two or three other parents who are interested.
- Encourage your child to read at home. Visit local libraries, school libraries, or book fairs to pick out books together. Talk together about the books you choose.
- Invite people who care for your child to participate in school activities. It is important for step-parents, grandparents, and other adults who care for a child to be involved in the child's education.

Your actions, not just your words, make an impression that will last a lifetime!

## Who is involved in a child's education?

Parents and families need a clear sense of the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in their child's education. The following information can help them know who the different players are and who to contact if they have a concern about their child's education.

**Parents** play the most important role in their child's education. Parents are their children's learning role models. Families' attitudes about education can inspire their children and keep their educational progress on track.

**Teachers** are one of the first people parents should go to with a concern about their child. They work with children on a daily basis and can often offer insight into issues that come up. Parents should talk to teachers about their children; the more they know the more they can help.

**Principals** are responsible for supervising the whole school and helping teachers and other staff do a better job. Parents should talk to principals about issues teachers can't resolve.

**Student Support Teachers (SSTs)** create programming and accommodations for students who need extra support or enrichment. They work closely with the SSAs to ensure programs get carried out. They work to ensure classrooms and schools are inclusive.

**Student Support Assistants (SSAs)** work directly with students who have exceptional needs and/or in classrooms where there is a need for extra support. They work closely with the SST and the classroom teacher to carry out student program plans.

**School Counsellors/Inuksiutilirijiit** support students who may have social, emotional, or behavioural problems. School counsellors act as a connection between the students, the school, and the community to help students achieve their fullest potential.

Other helpful school staff include: secretaries, custodians, and bus drivers.

**Parent Committees** are volunteer committees run by parents. They help schools run events and programs such as fundraising and breakfast programs. These committees seek advice and ideas from other parents and community members and bring these forward to school administration. In this way, they improve and strengthen communication between schools and parents.

**District Education Authorities** consist of elected community members. They represent parents, students and the community to the Department of Education and schools. DEAs exist by law under the Nunavut *Education Act*.

**Commission scolaire francophone du Nunavut (CSFN)** is responsible for public education in French in Nunavut for those who have the right to that education. It has the same authority and duties as a DEA, plus additional responsibilities that flow from the *Charter* right to minority language education. CSFN oversees École des Trois-Soleils in Iqaluit. The CSFN is run by a Director General and elected members.

The **Coalition of Nunavut District Education Authorities (CNDEA)** is a non-government organization that receives funding from various sources, including member District Education Authorities. It acts as a supporting organization to DEAs and represents the voice of parents alongside the Minister of Education and educators represented by the Nunavut Teachers' Association.

**Regional School Operations (RSOs)** include Qikiqtani, Kivalliq and Kitikmeot School Operations. The RSOs oversee all schools in their specific region. They are each run by an Executive Director with Superintendents of Schools responsible for specific schools. They implement decisions made by the Department of Education.

The **Department of Education** is responsible for providing Kindergarten to Grade 12 education across Nunavut. The School Services division provides overall direction, coordination and administration for curriculum and program development, production and implementation, and teaching and learning material development.

The **Nunavut Teachers' Association** represents its union members on issues with their employer, the Department of Education. They represent members regarding salary, benefits, and working conditions such as class size, professional development, and school safety. They provide information and programs to improve schools and advocate for high-quality teachers, high standards, and quality curriculum.

## About report cards

### ***About the report card system and design***

All schools in Nunavut use an information management program called Maplewood Student Information System (SIS). Teachers enter student information into the system so that student progress, attendance and marks can be tracked. The system produces report cards, validation statements, and transcripts.

### ***About grades***

High schools in Nunavut use percentage grades.

Nunavut elementary schools and junior high schools use a letter grading system.

This is the letter grading system in most Nunavut elementary and junior high schools:

- A** The student consistently demonstrates thorough understanding and in-depth application of concepts and skills.
- B** The student demonstrates good understanding and in-depth application of concepts and skills.
- C** The student demonstrates basic understanding and some application of concepts and skills.
- D** The student demonstrates limited understanding and minimal application of concepts and skills.
- E** The student does not demonstrate the required understanding and application of concepts and skills.

**Note:** Almost all schools in the territory use a common report card design; however, some schools have customized the letter grading system by adding “+” and “-” marks to the letters. A standardized grading system is currently being implemented across Nunavut, so every school in Nunavut will soon use a consistent letter grading system.

***Tips for parents about reading report cards***

- Make sure you understand all sections of the report card. Ask your child’s teacher to explain any section that you don’t understand.
- When you review report cards, don’t jump ahead to read lower grades. This is a common habit. First, focus on good grades and offer positive reinforcement to your child. Highlight your child’s successes and encourage your child to feel happy about good effort.
- After focusing on the good grades, you should have a safe, supportive conversation with your child about the areas in which your child’s achievement was lower. For example, you could start by saying, “Tell me how things have been going in science lately.” Begin by asking for your child’s perspective.
- After reading your child’s report card, make a plan with your child for how to help them in areas that are hard for them. For example, you could help your child by reviewing what textbooks they should bring home and finding educational websites that are related to the skills they need to develop. You could also contact your child’s teacher to tell them that you want to help your child and ask them for suggestions.
- Always remember that your child is more than their report card! When parents focus too much on grades, children may experience increased anxiety. Remind your child that they are special and very important to you.

Parents can find additional information on report cards at:

[www.scholastic.com/resources/article/what-the-report-card-really-means/](http://www.scholastic.com/resources/article/what-the-report-card-really-means/)

## About parent-teacher meetings

Parents and teachers need to communicate well to best support the student's well-being and academic achievement. Parents have a lot of information to share with teachers and teachers have a lot of information to share with parents. Parents and teachers should both feel at ease to ask each other questions.

Teachers should encourage parents to write their questions and concerns before the parent-teacher meeting. Parents can reflect on their child's school work throughout the school year to help formulate questions.

Finally, teachers should welcome and encourage parents to contact them throughout the school year, not just at report card meetings.

Sample questions for parents to ask teachers:

- Is my child performing at his or her grade level?
- What are my child's strengths and needs in reading, writing, math, and science?
- How much time should my child spend on homework?
- Are my child's assignments completed accurately?
- Does the school have special programs to meet my child's needs and gifts?
- Does my child have special learning needs? If so, what resources are available? Do you keep a folder of my child's work? If yes, could you review it with me?
- Does my child have close friends? How well does my child get along with others?
- What can we do at home to support classroom learning?
- What is the best way to keep in touch with you?

Additional questions for parents to ask middle and high school teachers:

- How can I help my child work independently and make the best use of time?
- How can I help my child prepare for high school?
- What can you tell me about peer pressure and how I can help my child handle difficult situations, such as drugs, alcohol, and sex?
- What courses should my child take to satisfy graduation requirements?
- Are there career planning sessions for my child to take? How can I participate?
- Do you have a list of courses my child should take to enter post-secondary programs, such as college, university, and trades?
- If my child plans to pursue post-secondary education, how will the school help with the application process? How will the school help my child find out about financial aid?

## The purpose of homework

Homework is an important part of a child's learning experience. Homework provides opportunities for students to:

- Strengthen their understanding of what was covered in class.
- Practice research skills by finding information independently.
- Learn about deadlines and develop self-discipline and a sense of responsibility.

### ***Homework tips for parents***

To help children complete homework successfully, parents can:

- Get to know the child's teacher and learn more about the types of homework the teacher assigns.
- Attend parent-teacher conferences and ask questions about the teacher's homework policies.
- Set up a homework area in the home. Make sure the child has a well-lit, comfortable, and quiet space.
- Schedule regular homework time. Some children work better in the afternoon after a snack and other children work better after supper.
- Help the child make a homework plan. Sometimes children feel overwhelmed by homework. Help the child make a plan by breaking up the work into small steps. Be sure to include breaks. Minimize distractions. Turn the TV off. Have your child avoid phone calls and texting until homework is completed.
- Support the child's growing independence by letting them do their own work. Children can't learn if they don't try things themselves and make their own mistakes.
- Help your child by making suggestions. Be a motivator and a monitor. Ask about assignments and quizzes. Encourage them, check completed homework, and be available for questions and concerns.
- Praise the child for good effort. Post their work on the fridge. Mention achievements to relatives.
- If the child has difficulties with homework that you can't solve, ask for help. Teachers can help determine the problem and come up with solutions.

For more information on homework visit:

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/learning/homework.html>

## Children and television

Parents may have questions or need information on how television affects their children. Here are some facts about television that teachers may want to share with families.

### *The good*

- Television can be educational!
- Studies show television can increase children's vocabulary.
- Television provides opportunities for children to learn about a great variety of topics, such as nature, technology, science and art.
- Television is one of the easiest ways to make people aware of current issues, such as pollution and homelessness.

### *The bad*

- Children who watch violent TV shows may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others.
- They may become more fearful of the world around them.
- They may be more likely to behave in a violent or aggressive manner.

### *Tips for parents*

- Monitor how much television your child watches.
- Choose appropriate programs. Allow your child to watch shows that he or she will enjoy, but that are also age appropriate.
- Talk with your child about the programs. Ask them about the difference between reality and make-believe. Talk about anything that may have scared your child.
- Do other activities with your child that you both enjoy, such as going for walks or out on the land, telling stories, reading books, playing a sport, and playing with friends.

For more information on television visit:

<http://childdevelopmentinfo.com/family-living/kids-media-safety/television/>



## About Internet safety

The Internet is a wonderful resource that children can use to learn, play games, and talk with friends. But the Internet can make children vulnerable to dangers. Here are some facts about the Internet that teachers may want to share with families.

### *The good*

- The Internet gives children access to information on any topic they want to learn about.
- Social networking (Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc.) enables young people to keep in touch with friends and family members who are living far away.

### *The bad*

- Spending too many hours on the computer can cause physical health problems, including eye strain, wrist strain and poor posture.
- Spending too many hours on the computer can be addictive.
- Children may be exposed to cyber-bullying (bullying through the Internet).

### *Tips for parents*

- Parents should learn everything they can about the Internet.
- Parents should set standards for what their children may and may not do online.
- Parents should talk with their children about the importance of keeping personal information private.
- Parents should make sure their children know they can turn to them for help at any time.

## About cyber-bullying

Teachers should share information with parents about cyber-bullying, as all young people using the Internet could experience cyber-bullying.

Cyber-bullying is the use of Internet technology to purposely, aggressively, and repeatedly hurt others.

Examples of cyber-bullying include:

- Ongoing mean text messages or emails.
- Rumours sent by email or posted on social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter.
- Embarrassing pictures, videos, websites, and fake social media profiles.

Cyber-bullying can happen at any time of day, on any day of the week, so it is difficult for children to escape.

Children who are cyber-bullied are also often bullied in person.

For more information on cyber-bullying visit:

<http://www.thedoorthatsnotlocked.ca>

<http://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/index.html>

## About the Coalition of Nunavut District Education Authorities

The following content was contributed by the Coalition of Nunavut District Education Authorities (CNDEA). Parents and other caregivers should know about this important organization. District Education Authorities (DEAs) strongly influence schools in Nunavut. There are many opportunities for parents and other caregivers to contribute to the work of CNDEA and their local DEA.

### ***Coalition of Nunavut District Education Authorities***

#### **What can DEAs do to help parents get involved in education?**

The most important thing DEAs can do for parents is to start a discussion in the community about education.

The beginning of the school year is a great time for DEAs to lead a community discussion about success in education. DEAs can do this by holding a public meeting or a call-in radio show to speak with parents about which education goals are important for the community, how these goals can be achieved, and what parents' expectations are of the education their children should receive. Once DEAs have heard from parents, this information can be helpful to DEAs in discussing the School Program with the Principal.

DEAs serve an important role in meeting with school officials at the beginning of the school year to discuss expectations for student success, based on what they have heard from parents. At these meetings DEAs can discuss the School Program with the Principal. As defined in Section 8 of the Nunavut *Education Act*, "the School Program consists of the delivery of the curriculum established by the Minister as modified by any local program developed by the district education authority." Before the end of the school year, DEAs should review with Principals the results of the school year including how schools met the goals of the School Program based on evaluations of the School Program that Principals conduct on a continual basis.

Principals also have a responsibility to encourage parent and community involvement in the School Program. Section 7(5) of the Nunavut *Education Act* directs the Principal to work "in co-operation with the district education authority... to develop and implement programs and procedures for parent and community involvement in the School Program."

DEAs can also be an important voice in the community, encouraging parents to talk with their children about the importance of success in education. There are important decisions that must be made as a child progresses through school. Parents need to understand these choices (e.g., which academic stream to choose in high school, or what extra help a student should receive), and discuss with their children the expectations for each stage of their education journey. DEAs are very important voices for encouraging community support for education goals.

Section 7(4) of the Nunavut *Education Act* explains that as elected representatives of the community, DEAs also serve a role in ensuring that the School Program “is delivered in accordance with Inuit societal values and the principles and concepts of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and respect for Inuit cultural identity.”

### **What can DEAs do to ensure that the School Program is delivered in accordance with Inuit societal values?**

DEAs can encourage parents to share their knowledge of Inuktitut and the Inuit culture with students, teachers and school officials. Parents serve an important role in passing on the values of Inuit culture, and DEAs can encourage parents to share this knowledge with students and teachers.

There are also activities that DEAs could encourage school officials to include in the School Program to promote parent involvement in education. These could include:

- school/parent planning nights;
- school/parent orientation in September;
- in-school parent support services for issues that arise with students;
- an *Introduction to the School Program* night to seek the input of the DEA and parents;
- parent volunteer programs designed to encourage parents to contribute their knowledge of the Inuktitut language and culture;
- hosting Elders’ discussions;
- developing a family handbook with parents and the DEA, which includes information specifically designed for parents;
- a joint school/DEA letter given to each parent welcoming students to the school and inviting parents to contact their child’s teachers, principal and other school staff;
- developing a school-parent communication handbook, including what parents can expect in the course of a school year, what to do when a student has to miss school, what to do if you suspect your child is being bullied, etc.; and
- using social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to communicate key school dates, events and news.

The aim of these activities is to promote a sense of partnership between parents and the school and a sense of ownership in decisions.

For more information or assistance, please contact the CNDEA office at (867) 979-5396, [coalition1@northwestel.net](mailto:coalition1@northwestel.net).

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