November 23, 2012

Dear Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) Chairs/Co-chairs,

Our government greatly values the contributions of parents in improving our publicly funded education in Ontario. We have seen PICs across the province grow and expand their initiatives in support of student achievement and well-being. My thanks to you and all PIC members for your leadership in providing valuable advice to your school boards and helping us stay focussed on improving student achievement and well-being.

Research tells us that there is a strong connection between parent involvement and student achievement and well-being. A genuine partnership between parents and schools, shared high expectations for our children and youth, and parent involvement that is focused on student learning have the greatest impact on student achievement. In particular, programs that engage families in supporting their children’s learning are linked to higher student grades and higher graduation rates, better social skills, improved behaviour, and regular attendance. The greater the support that families provide for their children’s learning and educational progress, the more likely their children will do well in school and continue in their education.

We continue to support parent involvement through the Ministry of Education’s Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grants. On August 30, the results of this year’s PRO grant cycle were announced. Nearly 2100 projects were approved, including more PIC projects than ever before. This year saw the highest number and percentage of approvals for school council applications since the inception of the program – 97 percent of school council applications were approved, representing all 72 publicly funded school boards. The steady increase in approved PRO grants demonstrates that more and more parents are working to identify barriers to parent involvement and finding local solutions to enhance parent engagement in their children’s learning. This year’s application period of over eight weeks responded to stakeholder feedback, and gave applicants more time to develop their proposals. In addition, a number of customer service improvements have been made to the online grant application, and the PRO grants tools and resources on the ministry’s website have been enhanced. We will notify you when the next PRO grant cycle is launched so you can continue to support the opportunity for outreach initiatives for parents in your area.

We are committed to providing practical, user-friendly tools and resources that support parents, school councils and schools, PICs and boards in their work to engage more parents in their children’s education. To help you share these resource links more widely, and in support of the greening initiative, a page of resource links has been attached.
We will continue to send you information about ministry initiatives to support your committee’s work to engage more parents in their children’s learning. A new parent engagement document has been developed and added to the Capacity Building Series to support school leaders and staffs. Parent Engagement, K to 12: Working with Families / Supporting Student Learning has recently been distributed to boards and schools, and is attached for your information.

With the passing of the Accepting Schools Act, 2012 (Bill 13) and establishment of the comprehensive action plan, our government made it clear that bullying is unacceptable in our schools. We know that a safe, inclusive and accepting school is essential to student achievement and well-being. Research shows that a positive school climate requires a whole school approach which focuses on the school, classroom, individuals and the broader community. Everyone has a role to play in promoting a safe and inclusive learning environment, the acceptance of and respect for others, and the creation of a positive school climate. Ontario’s parent engagement policy recognizes parents as valued and respected partners in their children’s education. Parent engagement in promoting a positive school climate is an important step in continuing the work towards transforming the school system so that all Ontario schools are safe, inclusive and accepting learning environments for all students. We hope you will find the attached brochure Creating Safe and Accepting Schools: Information for Parents about the Accepting Schools Act (Bill 13) useful in your communications with parents and school councils.

The establishment of the Accepting Schools Expert Panel is one component of the comprehensive action plan. Parent engagement is an important contributor to building and sustaining safe, inclusive and accepting schools. The Panel has started consultation with parents by inviting and receiving the input of the four provincial parent groups (Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, Parents partenaires en éducation, People for Education). During this school year, the Panel will also be providing the opportunity for PICs to provide input on resources and practices that focus on a whole school approach, including bullying prevention and intervention.

Thank you again for your determination to reach out to all parents and support their involvement in their children’s learning. Together, we are helping more students succeed.

Yours truly,

Laurel Broten
Minister

c: Directors of Education