

**ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TEACHERS**  
**DEPUTATION - May 30, 2019**

Thank you for allowing me to make a deputation before you today. I am here to ask the Ontario College of Teachers to consider accrediting courses in family engagement as a part of the necessary qualifications for teachers in Ontario. As well, I am asking that the College develop, provide and accredit educational programs leading to Additional Qualifications in family engagement.

Five decades of scholarly research indicate that family engagement has a marked, positive impact, which the OECD found "...can translate into long-lasting benefits for children from early childhood through adult life." <sup>1</sup> The benefits increase, they wrote in 2012, when "schools can create an environment of co-operation and partnerships, and teachers can have better tools and more fluid communication to enlist parent's partnerships when problems arise."<sup>2</sup> At a time when the realities of diverse classrooms are putting increasing demands on our teachers, we should be looking to embed family engagement into our curriculum and our schools. It will help our students, encourage public confidence in our system, and ensure our teachers have the advantage of being part of a larger team.

I am sure you are aware of the benefits of engaging families in their the children's education - improved student academic performance, reduced

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<sup>1</sup> OECD "Education GPS"

<sup>2</sup> PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SELECTED PISA COUNTRIES AND ECONOMIES OECD Education Working Paper number 73 (pg 54)

absenteeism, parental support for the school, teacher retention. An introduction to the Council of Ontario Directors of Education online “Parent Engagement Guidebook” states “students improve, classrooms improve, schools improve and the entire community benefits.” The Ontario Teacher’s Federation’s Parent Engagement website offers that “teachers, educators, parents and guardians should work in concert toward a shared goal – the best interests of students”. I would respectfully argue that while the sentiments are correct the resources offered scratch only the surface of effective practice, reference out-dated scholarship, and do little to make family engagement systemic in our schools.

Family engagement is not an activity. It is a pedagogy. As such, it is incumbent upon the College and Faculties of Education to incorporate this subject area and practice into the pre-service programme. Therefore, it requires the College of Teachers recognize a curriculum of family engagement as a necessary component for teacher certification. Our educators need the skills, knowledge and experience only available through training in authentic practice.

Researchers and practitioners alike recognize the need for pre-service training. Professor Soo Hong writes, “Beyond an arsenal of universal strategies for engaging families, teacher candidates often fail to understand the various stances that underlie those strategies. Without knowledge, experience, or practical insight...teachers and schools are left with age-old, traditional views on parent involvement.”<sup>3</sup> In 2011, The Harvard Family

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<sup>3</sup> Hong, Slo “A Cord of Three Strands” Cambridge, Harvard Education Press, 2012

Research Project and PTA called for accreditation standards that would demonstrate the necessity of family engagement, as well as give teachers the understanding and tools to partner with families.<sup>4</sup> The authors urged that training “promote curriculum and coursework innovation”<sup>5</sup>, work to build the capabilities of teachers for collaboration, encourage ongoing professional development opportunities and include research and evaluation<sup>6</sup>. It is clear that pre-service teachers should be receiving meaningful instruction, based on research, that provides them with skills, procedures, and tools.

Training in our Faculties of Education is not enough, however. Professional development opportunities must continue through Additional Qualification Courses. Teachers currently in the system will learn how to align their practice with current scholarship in engagement, moving them from “random acts” of engagement to systemic practice. It will provide them with strategies to build meaningful partnerships with their increasingly diverse communities. For all educators, deepening their understanding and skills will boost student achievement, lessening the effects of the achievement and opportunity gaps.

The Ministry of Education’s website states that “good schools become even better schools when parents are involved”. Their Parent Engagement Policy “aims to ensure that parent engagement is recognized, valued, collectively understood and practiced through-out the province.” (p 17)

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<sup>4</sup> Caspe, Lopez, Chu, Weiss “Teaching the Teachers: Preparing Educators to Engage Families for Student Achievement”, Issue Brief May 2011

<sup>5</sup>Ibid

<sup>6</sup>Ibid

However, a quick survey of Faculty course outlines reveals only five university courses alluding to parents- York University's "Independent School Focus" course (parent relations and fundraising); Queen's "Math through the Arts"; Brock's Special Education AQ courses II and III" (students, parents and community); and Lakehead's Co-Op AQ course. It would seem that our Faculties of Education do not see a role in realizing the Ministry's aims for family engagement.

Family engagement is not attendance at school concerts, fundraising events or even most parent-teacher conferences. That is what I call "contact". Rather, effective, meaningful, authentic engagement occurs when, what is learned in the classroom is reinforced in the livingroom. It occurs when teachers build the capabilities of families to support learning, use two-way communication to inform their practice, and encourage families to guide, motivate and advocate for their children. It's about changing our practice, rather than adding to it.

Strategies in family engagement may be integrated into everything from STEM to STEAM, from literacy to numeracy, from JK to 12. Pre-service teachers need this integration in their courses but they also require exposure to direct, informed family engagement pedagogy and field practice. Current teachers must have Additional Qualification courses available to them that accomplish the same things. I conclude with advice from The Peabody Family Involvement Initiative: "Preparing teachers and offering them continuing professional development on effective family engagement practices can have an enormous influence on how they feel about engaging and working with families, and what they do as practicing

educators.”<sup>7</sup> I am asking the College of Teachers to send a signal that family engagement is a vital part of education in this province by accrediting appropriate programs for pre-service teachers and AQ courses as an important component of professional development.

Nancy Angevine-Sands, OCT

*With Equal Step*

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<sup>7</sup> Katz, L., & Bauch, J. P. (1999). The Peabody Family Involvement Initiative: Preparing preservice teachers for family/school collaboration. *School Community Journal*, 9(1), 49–69