



MEMORANDUM

January 21, 2025
Regular Board Meeting

TO	Board of Trustees
FROM	Shauna Boyce, Superintendent
ORIGINATOR	Scott Johnston, Associate Superintendent
RESOURCE	Parkland School Division Stakeholders
GOVERNANCE POLICY	Board Policy 1: Division Foundational Statements Board Policy 2: Role of the Board Board Policy 12: Role of the Superintendent
ADDITIONAL REFERENCE	BP 1: Vision, Foundational Statements BP 2: Education Planning and Programming <i>Education Act: 19-23, 33, 196-197</i>
SUBJECT	PARENT ENGAGEMENT FEEDBACK

PURPOSE

For information. No recommendation required.

BACKGROUND

The Board is charged with the responsibility of providing, for its students and their parents, an education system organized and operated in the students' best interests. It exercises this responsibility through setting of local educational policy and the wise use of resources. The Preamble for the *Education Act* notes:

“... education is a shared responsibility and requires collaboration, engagement and empowerment of all partners in the education system to ensure that all students achieve their potential.”

Furthermore, Board Responsibilities (s. 33(1)(c) notes that a board, as a partner in education, has the responsibility to

(c) provide, where appropriate, for the engagement of parents, students, staff and the community, including municipalities and the local business community, in board matters, including the board's plans and the achievement of goals and targets within those plans.

In upholding those responsibilities, the Board of Trustees engages Parkland School Division stakeholders, consisting of Elders, parents, staff, students, community members and local government members to provide insights and wisdom in setting the strategic Education Plan for 2025-2028.

This Parent Engagement Report summarizes the feedback received from stakeholders at the Fall Stakeholder Engagement Event. The annual engagement was hosted at École Broxton Park School, and open to all PSD stakeholders, on November 27, 2024. The feedback is presented thematically, and highlights the major topical areas discussed at the event.

Administration would be pleased to respond to any questions.

SJ:kz



PARENT ENGAGEMENT FEEDBACK JANUARY, 2025

Presented to the Board of Trustees, January 21, 2025
Scott Johnston, Associate Superintendent, Education and System Services
Resources: Lead Team

BACKGROUND

The Board of Trustees held an open engagement on November 27th, 2024. Parents, and other community stakeholders, met with the Board and members of Parkland School Division's administrative leadership team, to discuss education and school culture items specific to learners in grades four through six.

After receiving a greeting from Board Chair, Dr. Lorraine Stewart, participants received a short presentation from Principal Dickson of Woodhaven Middle School, and Principal Cameron of Millgrove School, that was specific to better understanding the grade four through six learners.

Grade 4 to 6 learners, typically aged nine to twelve, are in a pivotal stage of development marked by increasing independence, responsibility, and self-awareness. They experience significant neurological, cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth, transitioning from childhood to early adolescence. This period is characterized by improvements in abstract thinking, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and peer relationships, with a heightened sensitivity to fairness and social norms. Schools play a vital role in fostering a sense of belonging, trust, and resilience, particularly as today's students navigate the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their foundational learning years. Classroom routines, character-building initiatives, and meaningful connections with teachers and parents help students thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, while specialized learning experiences and a focus on individuality nurture their growing identities.

Table facilitation encouraged open communication, and participants engaged in table discussions that were generally focused on three areas:

- What do we know, and what should we know about our grade four through six learners?
- How do we, collectively, promote social skills and appropriate behaviour?
- What should we consider as we plan for a preferred future for our students?

School administration, from across Parkland School Division, facilitated the table conversation and recorded notes. The following report summarizes the opening presentation, as well as conversations and insights revealed throughout the evening.

KEY FACTORS THAT HAVE IMPACTED A SHIFT IN TODAY'S LEARNERS

Impact of the Pandemic

The COVID-19 Pandemic continues to have a profound and lasting impact on students' academic, social, and emotional development. We recognize the result of disruptions to in-person learning, inconsistent routines, and prolonged isolation that were present for our grade four to six learners during their formative years.

Academic Year												
20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	26-27	27-28	28-29	29-30	30-31	31-32	32-33
Grades												
K-1-2	1-2-3	2-3-4	3-4-5	4-5-6	5-6-7	6-7-8	7-8-9	8-9-10	9-10-11	10-11-12	11-12	12

Certainly, these disruptions continue to shape how our Grade 4 to 6 learners approach education and peer interactions. Educators and parents both recognize that many students face gaps in foundational skills; that these gaps are particularly evident in the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy. Socially, reduced interaction during critical developmental periods has visibly impacted conflict resolution and peer relationship skills. As reported by educators, and experienced by parents in parent-child conversations, inappropriate behaviours are now more prevalent, and are upsetting the classroom organization and the balance of learning that teachers and students previously enjoyed. From an academic perspective, educators continue to implement targeted supports, such as small-group interventions and social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, to help bridge the gaps. Years from now, we will be able to look back and determine how the interventions, currently implemented, had an effect on improving the life and learning of our students.

Increased Technology Use and the Impact of Screen Time

The Pandemic accelerated the adoption of technology in education, leading to both opportunities and challenges. While digital tools have enhanced access to learning, stakeholders shared a recognition that excessive screen time has a detrimental impact on students' attention spans. Essentially, there are few breaks from technology use as students use technology for completing school tasks, for entertainment, and for communication. Interpersonal communication, including the development of face-to-face communication skills, is developmentally impaired. Technology has few regulating factors and, as such, children are exposed to content maturity that is often beyond their ability to constructively perceive the content they are viewing.

Social media influencers also have a significant impact on shaping children's world view. At home, unmonitored exposure to mature content on social media and streaming platforms can outpace students' cognitive readiness, influencing behaviors and social interactions. Schools and parents must collaborate to teach digital literacy skills so that children can learn to set their own boundaries for screen use. Parents and schools should significantly encourage alternative, "technology-free," activities that support holistic development.

Educational research on excessive screen time demonstrates a link to challenges such as reduced attention spans, difficulty with face-to-face communication, and disrupted sleep patterns.¹ Balancing screen use with purposeful educational technology and clear boundaries at home can

¹ Betteridge, Chen, Hazels and Simone (2023): [How does technology affect the attention spans of different groups](#). | Ponti (2023): [Screen time in preschool children: Promoting health and development in a digital world](#). |

mitigate these issues. Stakeholders expressed recognition for the fact that schools and families can, and should, work together to educate students about responsible screen usage, emphasizing balance and mindful consumption. Feedback on the newly implemented cell phone policy suggests minimal change at this grade level, as many schools already limited phone usage during the school day.

Concerns about screen time persist, particularly regarding the use of Chromebooks during "free time" after task completion. Parents shared that they have encouraged schools to explore alternative activities that foster creativity, social interaction, or physical movement during these moments. Proactively managing screen time aligns with broader efforts to support healthy development and engagement.

Cultural and Societal Changes

Broader societal changes, including increased diversity across Parkland School Division, shifting cultural norms, and the normalization of online interactions, are shaping how students develop social skills and identity. Stakeholders captured the importance of exposure to varied perspectives, and the necessity to offer valuable learning opportunities, in order to assist students to develop the ability to navigate differences respectfully. Some expressed the importance of schools in prioritizing inclusivity and equity, providing safe spaces where students feel seen and valued while fostering an understanding of diversity among peers. Others noted the challenge of responding effectively to student conduct that is deemed to have a detrimental impact on the culture of the classroom.

Challenging Family Dynamics

Economic pressures, parental stress, and shifting family roles have intensified the challenges many families face. These dynamics directly affect our students' emotional stability and readiness to learn; particularly for those who view school as a "safe place." Our stakeholders shared that our parents' ability to engage with their child's education can vary widely, influenced by time constraints, socioeconomic factors, or differing values about education. Some stakeholders expressed that schools can provide workshops, resources, and outreach efforts to better support families and create inclusive environments that account for these diverse circumstances.

Increased Awareness of Mental Health

Recent and emerging societal changes have heightened awareness of mental health, leading to an increased willingness for some families to seek support; however, there are lingering stigmas that may continue to hinder access to services for many families. Stakeholders noted that some families may be concerned that support services may pry too deeply into family matters, or place blame for behaviour challenges on the parenting that the child received.

Students are navigating stressors such as academic pressures, social challenges, and societal expectations, including those shaped by social media. Schools play a crucial role in normalizing conversations about mental health, providing counseling resources, and fostering resilience through social-emotional learning. Proactive communication with parents about available supports can bridge gaps and build trust in addressing these needs.

Educational System Shifts

Recent shifts in the Alberta educational landscape reflect efforts to adapt to modern challenges. These shifts include changing societal views of social media access at school and a recognized need to promote resilience in our learners.

In response to societal demands, Alberta Education introduced provincial legislation that restricts social media access and cellphone use at school. Notably, at four months from coming into force, these restrictions seem to be well-received by both parents and educators; though it is still too early to fully understand the impact that this legislation will have in changing the educational landscape for our learners. The full implementation requires ongoing communication to align expectations between schools and families. Additionally, initiatives like differentiated instruction and educational choice address the growing diversity of student needs but require sustained teacher training and support to succeed.

Decline in Physical Activity

Stakeholders shared the perspective that decreased physical activity continues to be a growing concern. The perception is that this decline is strongly linked to increased screen time and reduced emphasis on outdoor play. The decline of physical activity for children and adolescents is well-reviewed in research literature. A study spanning 146 countries and 1.6 million students noted “the majority of adolescents do not meet current physical activity guidelines. Urgent scaling up of implementation of known effective policies and programmes (sic) is needed to increase activity in adolescents.”² The decline in physical activity affects not only physical health but also cognitive function and emotional well-being.

Staff and stakeholders support plans that improve physical activity in schools. Essentially, the perspective shared is that schools should continue to promote movement through daily physical activity, extracurricular programs, and integration of kinesthetic learning strategies. Partnerships with parents to encourage active family routines can amplify these efforts, and schools and parents can work together to establish lifelong healthy habits.

Establishing lifelong healthy habits requires coordinated efforts between schools and parents. Schools can provide nutritious meal options, incorporate food literacy into the curriculum, and offer daily physical activity through diverse programs like intramurals or movement breaks. Parents can reinforce these habits at home by involving children in meal preparation and prioritizing active family time. Joint campaigns, such as school-wide fitness challenges or healthy recipe exchanges, help bridge the school-home connection, making wellness a shared goal.

Greater Diversity of Needs

Students today present a wider range of academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs; requiring schools to adopt increasingly individualized approaches. Factors such as learning gaps from the pandemic, mental health concerns, and socioeconomic disparities highlight the necessity of differentiated instruction and equitable resource allocation. Stakeholders shared that schools should continue to invest in universal supports, such as educational psychology assessments, and targeted interventions for students requiring additional help.

² [Global trends in insufficient physical activity among adolescents](#). Guthold, Regina et al. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, Volume 4, Issue 1, 23 – 35.

Some stakeholders spoke to the value of promoting awareness of available resources and also of a need for efforts to reduce stigma around diagnoses, as these strategies will be essential in meeting the growing diversity of needs.

By addressing these interconnected influences with intentional strategies and collaborative efforts, schools and families can create environments where all students are empowered to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

The Promotion of Social Skills and Appropriate Behaviour

The development of social skills and appropriate behavior, during grades four through six, plays a pivotal role in shaping students' academic achievements, interpersonal relationships, and emotional well-being. These formative years present opportunities for children to learn how to navigate diverse social settings, advocate for themselves, and build meaningful connections with peers and adults. Schools, as structured environments, provide an ideal platform for fostering resilience, empathy, and self-regulation; our schools equip students with the tools they need to thrive both within and beyond the classroom.

Stakeholders noted that an endeavor to improve social skills and behaviour requires a collaborative approach, where educators, parents, and communities work in unison to teach, and reinforce these critical life skills. The engagement participants perceived that through the intentional promotion of social development, schools contribute not only to individual success but also to the cultivation of respectful and inclusive communities.

Positive Social Skills and Behavioural Developments

Generally, within the full context of child development, parents and school staff report noticing increased empathy, cooperation, and the ability to work collaboratively in Grade 4 to 6 students. Many children at this stage demonstrate heightened awareness of fairness and an eagerness to contribute to group activities, reflecting growing maturity and a sense of responsibility. These positive developments are often linked to intentional efforts by educators to model and teach social-emotional skills in structured and supportive environments.

Parents and schools have observed that some behaviors, typically associated with older students, are now manifesting at younger ages. Additionally, there are perceived severe behaviours that were once deemed abnormal or infrequent and that are now evidently increasing. This increase raises questions about developmental readiness and environmental influences. Parents noted challenges in their children's ability to navigate conflict and adversity, and that children often struggle to take accountability, or to resolve issues, within their social circles without adult intervention.

A contributing factor, mentioned earlier, may be the exposure to mature content through social media and entertainment. This content often presents situations requiring maturity that exceeds their cognitive readiness, potentially influencing behavior and social interactions. Collaborative discussions between schools and parents can explore strategies to guide students toward healthier media consumption and build coping skills for interpersonal challenges.

Rising Behavioural Challenges: Shared Perspectives

One parent shared the perspective that parents need to recognize, generally, that schools are educational spaces, and not daycare providers. By setting boundaries and emphasizing the importance of academic priorities, schools can foster shared accountability. Structured

communication, such as daily agendas (even beyond Grade 4), may help bridge gaps and ensure that key messages are received and acted upon. Schools should acknowledge the diverse values and commitments of families, such as extracurricular activities like hockey, while helping parents strike a balance that prioritizes schoolwork. Joint goal-setting and clearly communicated expectations can help align efforts.

Parents and schools may perceive behavioral challenges differently based on context and expectations. Schools often see trends in group dynamics and classroom behaviors, while parents may focus on individual struggles at home. This difference in perception means that an open dialogue is, therefore, essential to align perceptions and develop consistent strategies. Collaborative efforts, informed by data and student-centered approaches, can address behavioral challenges holistically.

Parents reported mixed experiences regarding their involvement and communication with schools. Positive feedback highlighted consistent communication from teachers and principals, such as weekly emails and timely responses to inquiries. However, some noted inconsistencies in tools like PowerSchool, which impacted their ability to track their child's progress. Parents appreciated proactive updates from teachers, which provided insight into classroom activities and expectations.

Parent Participation in School Activities

One method to reduce perceived differences in perspective is through parent volunteering in schools. However, while many parents expressed a desire to volunteer in schools, they noted that opportunities were sometimes limited by the lack of requests from teachers. Schools could bridge this gap by creating a structured system for coordinating parent involvement, ensuring their skills and time are utilized effectively to support school initiatives.

Parent participation is an integral aspect of shared responsibility in education. Collaborative efforts between schools and families enhance student engagement, foster stronger home-school connections, and reinforce the importance of education in the child's life. Encouraging volunteerism, open communication, and inclusive events helps to build an educational community, where parents feel empowered to contribute meaningfully to their child's learning journey. However, it is difficult to capture the perceived systemic dichotomy that exists for educators, when dealing with speaking to parents about child behaviours. With increasing frequency, educators are often chastised, on one hand, for an inability to deal with behaviour, while simultaneously noting that other parents are upset that discipline is perceived as too punitive. In other words, teachers feel the pressure of doing too much, and not doing enough, at the same time. Those parents who spend time in schools have a better perception that our educators are taking a balanced approach – meting out discipline as required, and with an intention for the child to improve behaviour.

Parents note that personal emails, or calls from administrators inviting participation, yield higher engagement, particularly among parents who may feel disconnected. Proactive communication—including newsletters, workshops, and personalized invitations—can foster a stronger parent-school partnership; though stakeholders recognize the need for educators to balance responsiveness with the demands of their own personal lives.

Promoting the Value of Sleep and Healthy Activities

Parents reiterated the importance of sleep for learning readiness and encouraged schools to promote awareness about sleep hygiene through workshops, newsletters, or student-led campaigns. Sleep is foundational to learning readiness and overall well-being. Further, some stakeholders expressed the need for schools to ensure that discussions that focus on the importance of rest will periodically happen with students. Perhaps, by using creative approaches, such as student-led campaigns or digital tools, schools could make the message resonate with both students and parents.

Similarly, collaborative efforts to instill healthy eating habits and encourage physical activity—both at school and home—can set the foundation for lifelong wellness.

Through these discussions, stakeholders highlighted the importance of maintaining open communication, aligning priorities, and fostering collaboration between schools and families to support the holistic development of Grade 4 to 6 learners.

Supporting Emotional Intelligence, Resilience, and Conflict Resolution

Building emotional intelligence (EQ) equips students with the skills to navigate social complexities and manage emotions effectively. Programs emphasizing mindfulness, empathy, and self-regulation can be integrated into daily routines. Teaching conflict resolution through role-play, peer mediation, and restorative practices not only addresses immediate behavioral concerns but also prepares students for long-term interpersonal success.

As mentioned earlier, stigmas surrounding diagnoses and parental resistance to assessments can hinder progress. Schools might consider discreet resources, such as informational pamphlets available in offices, to educate families about services.

Social media amplifies unrealistic standards of perfection, which can discourage students from trying new things. Schools can mitigate this by fostering an environment that celebrates effort and individual success, teaching students to develop a healthy internal dialogue.

Increasing Confidence and Leadership in Children

Schools can foster confidence and leadership by providing students with opportunities to take ownership of their learning and participate in decision-making processes. Leadership roles in clubs, councils, and projects empower students, while celebrating individual strengths and achievements builds self-esteem. Parental reinforcement of these efforts at home creates a cohesive environment for growth.

Parents emphasized the importance of maintaining a balanced focus on both literacy and numeracy, expressing hope that trends in assessment data do not lead to overemphasis on one area at the expense of another. The discussion clarified that writing is an ongoing developmental process, and PSD has systems in place to ensure continuous improvement in literacy skills, including writing.

Homework practices varied significantly across grades, with observations that Grade 7 workloads could be overwhelming, while younger grades had less consistent expectations. Positive outcomes arose from collaborative problem-solving between parents and schools, such as setting time limits for homework and encouraging students to balance academic and personal time.

Parents also raised questions about how PSD supports high-achieving students who may require additional challenges to stay engaged. Schools can consider enhancing differentiation strategies, extracurricular enrichment opportunities, and tailored supports to meet the needs of advanced learners.

Perceptions of Homework

Parents noted that homework aids in developing repetition, structure, and accountability—skills critical for future success. Some view it as an extension of core academic learning, particularly in light of time constraints caused by non-curricular activities during the school day. Notably, though, the perception on the amount of homework is mixed. Some stakeholders expressed that there is not enough homework – notably that the Google classroom is not beneficial as it can be difficult for parents to find the homework.

Others appreciate a lighter workload, emphasizing that students need downtime at home. Incentivizing in-school productivity to minimize homework is a popular strategy, as is clear communication about expectations so parents can effectively support their children.

Role of Educators

Teachers play a critical role in guiding students through interpersonal challenges, advocating for themselves, and setting boundaries. Effective behavior management structures, widely praised in PSD, set the stage for a safe and productive learning environment. Parents identified that they appreciate when their children present positive messages to them about their teacher and their learning. Overall, the stakeholders present at the engagement shared an appreciation for the work that teachers are doing to build social skills and improve students' academic performance.

Parents noted appreciation for the many supports that exist for students to move. For instance, the use of wiggle seats was shared as particularly effective. Generally, well-organized classroom structures are helpful, and teachers who have behaviour management strategies well in place are positive factors in improving performance and behaviour.

One suggestion raised is that teachers could share awareness about the availability of counsellors more frequently and clearly.

Parental Role

Parents can reinforce children's civility at home by modeling respect, encouraging empathy, and engaging in conversations about boundaries and online influences. Awareness about available counselors and behavioral supports should be proactively shared to reduce stigma and foster trust. Educators noted that parents share an equal role in the effectiveness of communication with the school, and that there are times when email or other important communications from the school are missed or ignored.

Staff noted that one emerging problem is the misperception shared by some parents that outside activities (for instance sports such as hockey) are dominant in importance over school. Parkland School Division is actively attending to attendance issues for students, and this is likely to

PLANNING FOR A PREFERRED FUTURE FOR OUR STUDENTS

As we navigate an ever-evolving educational landscape, stakeholders noted that planning for a preferred future for our students requires intentionality, collaboration, and a forward-thinking mindset. Recognizing the diverse challenges, and opportunities faced by today's learners, Parkland School Division's schools must continue to focus on the Parkland School Division Mission:

We assure supportive learning environments, meaningful experiences and healthy relationships that create opportunities to develop resilience, to gain diversity in perspectives and to achieve enduring success.

By fostering academic excellence, social-emotional development, and a sense of purpose, educators and families can work together to ensure students are prepared to embrace the future with confidence and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Creating a Welcoming, Caring, Safe and Respectful Learning Environment

Stakeholders shared that schools and parents must work together in fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity, where bullying and discrimination are actively addressed. This includes education for both students and parents on conflict, mean behaviour, and targeted, repeated mean behaviour (otherwise known as bullying). Stakeholders perceived that conflict and mean behaviour education can be improved through the promotion of restorative practices, and by ensuring that students understand the importance of empathy and diversity.

Parents play a key role by reinforcing these values at home and maintaining open communication with schools about their child's experiences. Joint initiatives, such as community-building events, parent workshops, and clear reporting mechanisms for bullying, create a unified approach to safeguarding all students. Some table discussions focused on the challenge of children who see inappropriate modeling of bullying-type-behaviour from adults. There are more exemplars of aggressive behaviour that are readily apparent for children; heightened use of expletives in political messaging on vehicles was stated as an example of inappropriate modeling. The solution to this reality is beyond the scope of schools, but will require a collaborative effort by schools, parents and the community-at-large, to amplify civility and model the behaviours we want to see in children.

Ensuring Equitable Access to Resources and Activities

To ensure all students thrive, schools must address barriers to access by offering programs that support families facing financial challenges. Initiatives such as subsidized lunch programs, technology lending libraries, and waiving fees for extracurricular activities can significantly reduce disparities. Parents can collaborate by participating in fundraising efforts or volunteering to support these programs. Transparency and open communication about available resources help families feel comfortable seeking support when needed.

Stakeholders shared the potential for Parent Workshops as an effective method to equip parents with the knowledge and tools to support their children effectively. Possible topics include understanding child development, children's mental health and wellness, nutrition and physical activity, Internet safety, and/or supporting learning at home. These sessions could be offered in flexible formats—online webinars, in-person workshops, or hybrid events—to accommodate diverse family schedules. Schools and parent councils can also collaborate to identify pressing topics and tailor sessions to the unique needs of the community.

Final Thoughts

Throughout the Stakeholder Engagement Event, parents and staff shared perspectives on the diverse challenges and opportunities shaping today's Grade 4 to 6 learners. The insights presented provide clarity that that our young learners' journey is influenced by the intersection of academic, social, and emotional factors. From navigating the residual effects of the pandemic to grappling with the complexities of technology and cultural shifts, these formative years require intentional, collaborative efforts from educators, families, and communities. Overall, the stakeholders present called upon Parkland School Division's parents and educators to collaboratively foster effective development for the students who began their educational journey at a challenging time. Together, we can create a future where our students possess the confidence, resilience, insight and skills required to thrive in, and positively impact, the world.