

The Voice of Catholic Parents

By Annalisa Crudo-Perri
and Joe Perri

Parental engagement is widely recognized as one of the most important factors in a student's success. When parents are involved in their children's learning, students perform better academically, showing improved behaviour and developing stronger social skills.

The Ontario Ministry of Education has made positive efforts to engage parents in meaningful and impactful ways. Backed by a strong policy framework, *Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools*, the ministry highlighted that parent engagement goes beyond helping their children with homework; it includes participation in decision-making processes, school councils and broader educational planning. This inclusive vision paved the way for a cultural transformation across Ontario schools, where parental voices were actively welcomed and appreciated.

The Initiative: Parent Partnership Through Shared Leadership

Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education is a champion of the parent voice of engagement. Since its inception, OAPCE has deepened its role in education through meaningful advocacy, collaboration with schools, boards and the Ministry of Education, and a strong commitment to student-centred values. This form of shared leadership – where parents, educators and system leaders work together to support student learning – is an initiative that Catholic education has embraced with intention and care.

OAPCE has helped embed parental voice not just on school councils, but in provincial discussions about policy, curriculum, well-being and the important gift of Catholic education. This collaborative model of leadership respects the unique role parents play in



shaping educational experiences of their children and in shaping the mission of Catholic education itself.

"As representatives of the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education (OAPCE), we believe that parents are not only the first but the most enduring educators in their children's lives. Our partnership with schools in shaping the educational and spiritual growth of students is paramount, as together, we instil values that go beyond textbooks, guiding our children towards a brighter future rooted in faith and knowledge." – Annalisa Crudo-Perri, Co-Executive Director, OAPCE

Leadership Implications: A New Model for Partnership

When families and schools move from separate support systems to real partnerships, the impact is significant and lasting. OAPCE's work has helped build a school culture where:

- Students thrive academically and emotionally because families are informed, involved and connected.

- Parents feel empowered – they have access to clear communication pathways, are meaningfully involved in decisions and share responsibility for student success.
- Schools benefit from stronger trust and transparency, leading to better alignment between home and classroom expectations.
- Faith and values are reinforced in different contexts, creating a united, mission-driven community.

"We believe that when parents are actively involved as partners, students thrive – not just academically, but emotionally and spiritually. Our goal is to work together to support each child's growth."

– Jennifer Pilzecker, OAPCE Niagara Director

A key pillar of the organization is its voice. OAPCE is the only Catholic parent association recognized by the

assessing proposed policy changes. For example, from the 2024/2025 survey results, parents indicated areas where Catholic schools were successful, which included faith-based practices, communication, community and parental engagement, to areas of concern, which included discipline, student behaviour and safety. OAPCE uses these results to shape advocacy and engage in proposed legislation to ensure parental voice, faith values and local accountability are considered.

OAPCE is a strong advocate for promoting student well-being and participates in education task forces concerning student safety and conduct, such as Ontario Policy/Program Memorandum 128, which pertains to smart phone and vaping restrictions in schools. Based on parental input, OAPCE provided insight and recommendations towards a long-term action plan to support schools and create a positive learning environment for students.



Ontario Ministry of Education through Regulation 612 (School Councils). Through this mandate, representatives come from parent councils across the province, enabling OAPCE to connect directly with engaged parents. The “liaison representative” model helps local school parent councils connect with the provincial body, facilitating a two-way flow of information: parental concerns upward and government policy clarification downward.

OAPCE further strengthens parental voice through its pillar of advocacy. OAPCE produces position papers and survey results, which articulate parent viewpoints when





Most importantly, OAPCE advocates for faith formation, ensuring Catholic values are embedded in education. Parents in Catholic education connect to express their desire to see a continuous focus on faith-based education in schools, OAPCE responds through discussions with ministry partners on curriculum content and implementation, guest speakers in schools, etc.

"OAPCE has been instrumental in helping me navigate the complexities of the education system. Through their support and advocacy, I feel confident that my child is receiving an excellent Catholic education. I am grateful for all that they do."

– Sharon R, Dufferin Peel Parent

The Power of One

The theme of OAPCE's 2025 annual conference was "The Power of One." Parents gathered to learn how Catholic education is strengthened by individual parent action and how one parent can shape a child's life and their school community.

The conference demonstrated how leadership is not just top-down. It involves many volunteer parents, liaisons and school representatives. It requires building capacity among parents to understand policy, to raise issues, to advocate. For school leaders and boards, this supports the importance of partnering with parents, respecting parental input and maintaining open channels of communication.

"The growth and well-being of every student within the Catholic education system and its future, relies on the individual efforts and contributions of each and every person. Those valued individual contributions not only highlight

the power of one, they make it possible for all of us to come together as one in the mission of maintaining and growing Catholic education across the province."

– Joe Perri, Co-Executive Director, OAPCE

The work of OAPCE reinforces a powerful leadership message: that leading in education is no longer confined to titles or roles. True leadership is shared, distributed, and inclusive of diverse voices, especially those of parents.

This model of shared leadership challenges educators and policy makers to listen more intentionally, to invite collaboration early and often, and to recognize that leadership can and should include every stakeholder in the education system.

As OAPCE continues to model this through training, communication and participation in provincial consultations, school leaders are reminded that trust and collaboration are essential tools, not just ideals. In an education landscape where funding, politics and societal values sometimes pull in many directions, an organized parent voice helps ensure the system doesn't drift away from its mission, which matters for families choosing Catholic education while protecting the Catholic system's distinctiveness.

Let us continue to build schools where every child is supported by a village. And where leadership is not just exercised but shared. [CP](#)

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