



GUIDE TO SUPPORT THE PARENT COMPONENT

Preschool Education for 4-Year-Olds

Revised Edition

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As a child's first experiences are at home, the family is the root of learning and development. It thus follows any initiatives geared toward children and families can only have positive effects on both.¹

CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION [Translation]

What is the purpose of this guide?

The purpose of this guide is to facilitate the implementation of the Parent Component in the context of kindergarten for 4-year-olds and to offer ways to develop a rich and strong collaborative relationship with families. It will allow for the analysis and improvement of existing practices or the implementation of quality practices.

This document includes principles and avenues for reflection. It also presents the roles of the main stakeholders in the field (Appendix 1) as well as the means to be implemented in terms of organization logistics, the type of meetings to be held and their facilitation, as well as the creation of a link between the families and the parent-liaison (Appendix 2). In addition, a bibliography completes this guide.

What is the Parent Component in the context of kindergarten for 4-year-olds?

As mentioned in the Preschool Cycle program, the school team² welcomes³ children and their families⁴ by being responsive to the diversity of their experiences and to their culture. Research has shown that a close relationship between the family and the school is important in ensuring that children develop a positive image of school, so that they are able to settle in and feel confident learning.⁵ For this reason, teachers of kindergarten for 4-year-olds and staff should ensure that families are supported and experience a positive initial contact with schools.

The Parent Component contributes to the essential school-family-community collaboration outlined in the Preschool Cycle Program. The parents of children attending kindergarten for 4-year-olds will be supported in their role as children's primary educators by staff at a variety of meetings.

As stated in the document [*Maternelle 4 ans à temps plein : objectifs, limites, conditions et modalités*](#), the Parent Component consists of 10 meetings and is offered to parents whose children attend kindergarten for 4-year-olds.

1 Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (2012).

2 In this document, the term school-team refers to all school staff who work on behalf of the children.

3 In this document, welcome means "to make children and their families feel safe or secure."

4 In this document, the term families is used inclusively to cover foster families, grandparents and extended families whose members have ties with the school community.

5 Preschool Cycle Program.

What are the principles for building closer ties between families and schools?

According to current knowledge, certain principles promote harmonious school-family collaboration. A considerable body of research⁶ has identified protective factors that contribute to ensuring complementarity and strengthening relationships between families and schools. Three principles are included in this guide, from which three grids of analysis of the practices in place in the various environments are proposed. For information purposes, various activities are also suggested. The purpose of these suggestions is not for school teams to carry out all of the proposed activities, but to provide examples for school teams to take into consideration. Communities and schools are called upon to fine-tune their own innovative practices to meet the unique needs of families.

Research has revealed the following three principles:

1. To recognize that all families care about their children's well-being and success, and that they are doing their best to support their children's development.
2. To implement collaborative practices with families and stakeholders concerned with children's development.
3. To plan and organize meetings to support and accompany families in order to promote the children's school success.

⁶ The bibliography provides several references.

How to implement the Parent Component?

	In place	Improve	Implement
Encourage children and their families to care about school, and encourage schools to care about children’s families.			
Recognize the complex nature of working with families in vulnerable situations.			
Designate a competent parent-liaison to promote continuity.			
Promote an approach that focuses on the active participation of families, including parent-child activities.			
Specify the role of the primary stakeholders.			
Plan meetings throughout the year, starting at the beginning of each school year.			
Establish procedures for organizing meetings.			
Establish regular communication with families.			
Have the sensitivity to seek or create communication tools in the native language of the families in the group.			
Find a space to hold meetings.			
List community resources and understand their mission.			
Assess the quality of the services provided to families. (Low meeting participation rates may require working together to modify strategies.)			

What do we need to implement here?

A few factors for consideration

Parent-liaisons:

- have a thorough knowledge of the context (families, school, community)
- establish and maintain contact with various community resources to learn about their mission, and help connect those resources with families who need support
- must develop skills in working with adults and facilitating small groups
- are able to work with families in vulnerable situations (e.g. understand the principles of attachment)
- are committed to enriching their practice through professional development, particularly in adult education, group facilitation and the use of digital platforms

The 10 meetings planned:

- are held between September and June
- are organized based on the needs of families (childcare, transportation, interpretation service, etc)
- are held in a welcoming place for families
- are evaluated based on different aspects (i.e. the number of participants at the meeting should not be the only criterion considered):
 - emotional support (e.g. nurturing the climate, being sensitive to families' risk factors, fostering parental involvement and engagement)
 - facilitation (e.g. conducting productive and effective meetings, offering multiple modes of participation [e.g. in person, hybrid, or virtual; knowledge of and comfort in applying the principles of adult group facilitation; rule setting])
 - meeting the needs of families (e.g. quality of feedback; facilitative/knowledge transfer role; building a strong and lasting relationship with families beyond 4-year-old kindergarten; individualized support for families with special needs, where appropriate)

Appendix I sets out the role of the main stakeholders: school principals, parent-liaisons, teachers, education consultants, transition facilitators and secretaries.

FIRST PRINCIPLE

Recognize that all families care about their children’s well-being and success, and that they are doing their best to support their children’s development.

	In place	Improve	Implement
Adopt a positive attitude and maintain a positive bias toward all families.			
Use differentiated means to reach all families and establish a collaborative relationship with them.			
Be sensitive to the needs of families, including those with low literacy levels, low levels of education, limited language proficiency in the language of instruction or negative school experiences.			
Value families’ experience and abilities within the group.			

Suggestions for applying this principle

Make contact:

- Participate in welcome meetings and introduce yourself to the families.
- Take the time to personally call or use a digital platform to invite every parent to meetings.
- Take advantage of opportunities for families and the parent-liaison to get to know and recognize each other. (e.g. being in the schoolyard when parents bring their child to school in the morning).

Value the role of families:

- Acknowledge what families are doing well.
- Give families the opportunity to express their reservations or fears about school without feeling judged, and help them find solutions.
- Help families recognize and use their strengths in the school setting.
- Plan for open discussions with families about how to work with and support their child's development, and encourage families to talk to each other.
- Acknowledge the importance and the value of what families have to say and factor it into decisions.
- Emphasize the importance and the value of working with families rather than for them.
- Adopt a collaborative attitude in the coeducation of the child rather than an expert position toward the parents.

What do we need to implement here?

SECOND PRINCIPLE

Implement collaborative practices with families and all stakeholders concerned with children’s development.

	In place	Improve	Implement
Establish and maintain a relationship of trust with families even if they sometimes seem less engaged.			
Value families’ contributions.			
Ensure effective collaboration between teachers and parent-liaisons.			
Diversify and facilitate discussion and sharing among all partners while respecting the right to privacy.			
Foster involvement and the sharing of responsibilities while respecting each person’s strengths.			
Establish and maintain partnerships with community members, especially those who work with families in vulnerable situations.			
Offer professional development to partners who provide welcoming services, guidance and socio-emotional support for families.			

Suggestions for applying this principle

With families:

- Facilitate a session to encourage families to attend meetings (i.e. meetings with parents only or with parents and children).
- Encourage and support implementation of family-led initiatives.
- Respond to families’ requests based on their needs (e.g. topics of discussion, individual meetings or telephone calls, evening schedules, childcare, transportation).
- Respect the pace of the group, families’ need to talk to each other and different ways of contributing to the group.
- In collaboration with transition facilitators, help families build ties with the community, organizations and other families to develop a feeling of belonging and solidarity.
- Encourage families to use community resources that could be beneficial to them (e.g. hold a meeting at a community centre, library or community kitchen).
- Give families the opportunity to attend meetings with a stakeholder who is assisting them.
- Guide the family in their process and act as a reference figure for them.

With partners:

- Make connections, i.e. introduce an organization to the family and the family to that organization (e.g. share information about the community centre and activities offered by the public library).
- Recognize each partner’s role and how they complement one another.
- Provide an opportunity for more formal discussions during meetings with the preschool education for 4-year-olds team (principals, parent-liaisons, teachers, resource persons) to better support children and their families.

What do we need to implement here?

THIRD PRINCIPLE

Plan and organize meetings to support and accompany families in order to promote the children’s school success.

	In place	Improve	Implement
Take into account the principles of adult education when facilitating meetings with parents.			
Organize meetings in such a way that as many families as possible can take part (in person, hybrid, synchronous, asynchronous).			
Offer activities that meet the needs of families and children while ensuring the accuracy of the information provided and ensuring that parents emerge with an increased sense of competence.			
Get feedback from parents (e.g. show of hands, written survey) to make adjustments for future meetings.			
Take into account the Preschool Cycle Program and the importance of play in children's development when implementing parent-only and parent-child meetings.			

Suggestions for applying this principle

Organizing meetings:

- Use the first meeting to welcome families, to initiate contact with the school and to propose meeting logistics.
- Remind parents of the date and time of the meetings by telephone, email, a social media platform (a responsibility that can be undertaken by a parent from the group) or the children’s communication folders.
- Organize activities for parents by involving children as much as possible (e.g. have them take part in preparing and presenting an activity).
- Organize activities for parents and children by involving parents as much as possible (e.g. involve them in organizing meetings around topics such as the benefits of reading or the importance of play).
- Consider the principles of adult education (involve and support parents in their learning, take into consideration the experience and interests of each participant, provide scenarios or examples related to their daily lives, focus on problem-solving).
- Set aside time to evaluate families’ appreciation of the meetings (e.g. a simple questionnaire).

Facilitating meetings:

- Use a variety of facilitation techniques to establish an atmosphere that fosters listening and interaction (e.g. reiterate a parent’s question to the group, use accessible language, ask participants to sit in a circle, get up to greet families when they arrive).
- Brainstorm with the families for a variety of activities that are adapted to the needs and interests of families and that foster their active participation.
- Offer concrete activities that are easy to carry out at home.

What do we need to implement here?

Appendix 1: Roles of the Main Stakeholders

Families, schools and communities all have a role to play to support children in their development.

Here is an overview of the role that each of these partners is required to play.

School principal

- ◆ Consider parents as privileged partners in the educational success of their children.
- ◆ Promote awareness among school staff of the benefits of parent collaboration and the importance of recognizing families' abilities.
- ◆ Greet families and the children to make them feel welcome.
- ◆ Foster the integration of the parent-liaison with the school team by establishing collaborative relationships.
- ◆ Present the Parent Component to the governing board (parent collaboration could be integrated into the school's educational project).
- ◆ Provide venues and materials for meetings with families.
- ◆ Participate in meetings with the parent-liaison, if applicable.
- ◆ Highlight families' accomplishments, for example, in the school's newsletter.
- ◆ Encourage teacher participation in evening meetings (e.g. time off, scheduling accommodations).
- ◆ Take advantage of professional development opportunities to be able to welcome and accompany children and their families.

Parent-liaison

- ◆ Consider parents as privileged partners in the educational success of their children.
- ◆ Welcome families and be open and flexible in meeting their needs.
- ◆ Implement strategies that foster family involvement with the school (e.g. partner with community stakeholders who already know the families).
- ◆ Value the involvement of families, recognize their role, and support their abilities.
- ◆ Adapt intervention methods to the needs of the families.
- ◆ Plan, organize and facilitate two kinds of meetings: either with parents alone or with parents and children, and ensure regular follow-up to encourage family participation and strengthen relationships.
- ◆ Provide the material resources needed to facilitate the meetings (e.g. children's books, motor games, manipulatives, snacks, printed materials, markers).
- ◆ Evaluate families' participation and satisfaction level.
- ◆ Develop a relationship with teachers.
- ◆ Seek collaboration from the community.
- ◆ In partnership with the transition facilitator, inform families of the various services and resources available in the community.
- ◆ Take advantage of professional development opportunities to be able to welcome and accompany children and their families.

Teacher

- ◆ Consider parents as privileged partners in the educational success of their children.
- ◆ Relay, to families, information about the meetings for the Parent Component.
- ◆ Collaborate with the various partners and with the families.
- ◆ Establish communication with the parent-liaison.
- ◆ Participate in meetings with the parent-liaison if necessary.
- ◆ Take advantage of professional development opportunities to be able to welcome and accompany children and their families.

Education consultant

- ◆ Consider parents as privileged partners in the educational success of their children.
- ◆ Express interest in the Parent Component to understand its importance and relevance.
- ◆ Be available to support principals, parent-liaisons and teachers at the pedagogical level.
- ◆ Work in partnership with the transition facilitator.
- ◆ Ensure strategic monitoring of the Preschool Cycle Program.
- ◆ Take advantage of professional development opportunities to be able to welcome and accompany children and their families.

Transition facilitator

- ◆ Consider parents as privileged partners in the educational success of their children.
- ◆ Adapt to the diversity of needs in different environments.
- ◆ Oversee coordination of transition practices.
- ◆ Oversee the development and implementation of transition practices.
- ◆ Establish professional learning communities (PLC) or communities of practice (COP) on the topics of school-family connection, intake, social-emotional support and vulnerability factors.
- ◆ Contribute to the planning, facilitation and documentation of initiatives related to activities and practices to support the first school transition in line with the Transition Facilitator Reference Document.
- ◆ Support Passe-Partout workers.
- ◆ Demonstrate a wide range of knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- ◆ Take advantage of professional development opportunities to be able to welcome and accompany children and their families.

Secretary

- ◆ Consider parents as privileged partners in the educational success of their children.
- ◆ Be informed of the schedule and logistics for the upcoming activities of the Parent Component.
- ◆ Receive parents and their requests in a way that makes them feel welcome.
- ◆ Provide a waiting area for parents.

Appendix 2: Methods

Meetings are intended to support families in their role as the primary educators of their children. Here are a few examples that can be used to encourage all families to attend and participate in meetings:

Organizational logistics
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon registration, inform families that it is important for them to attend meetings. • Make contact with the families upon registration and maintain that contact all year round. • If school facilities are limited, request a copy of the schedule for specialty courses (visual arts, music, etc.) and reserve those rooms. The rooms should be large enough and have furniture that is suitable for adults. • At the start of the year, consult families to learn about their needs, to find out what their interests are (schedules, topics for discussion, means of communication, etc.), and to encourage them to get involved. • Offer free childcare in collaboration with school daycare services. A project with the “big kids” at a school can be proposed so that older students can assist daycare educators. • Provide a snack or a meal during the meeting, and mention it in the invitation (the offer of a snack or a meal may encourage families to attend meetings). • Offer families a transportation service and organize carpooling. • Call families to follow up (follow-up sheets may not be returned to the school, or their contents not fully understood). • Some families may need to be called and reminded of meetings. • Include a reply form with invitations, to be presented as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I will attend the meeting. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> ○ I need childcare. <input type="checkbox"/> Age(s) of the child or the children: _____ ○ I need transportation to get to the meeting. <input type="checkbox"/>

Types of meetings
<p>Examples :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As early as August, organize a meeting for parents and children in the classroom to ease the transition. • Choose to hold parent-child meetings, for example with the children present for part of the meeting and without them afterward so that the parents can meet with the parent-liaison to talk about a particular topic or about something they have experienced with the children. • Hold parent-only meetings. • Favor individual meetings to discuss a particular topic. • Offer parents several meeting options (e.g. evening chats and discussions on discipline, child empowerment or dealing with children’s emotional outbursts, portfolio evenings, breakfast meetings, pyjama storytime, cooking workshops). • Suggest informal meetings to encourage parent participation (e.g. picnics, library outings). • Organize father-child meetings (which help increase the impact of fathers in the eyes of their children and highlights the importance of their active involvement in their children's school). • Organize meetings that provide information about resources in the community.
Facilitation of meetings
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop skills to better welcome and understand the different styles of participants. • Adopt rules of conduct for the group at the first meeting. • Co-create and collaborate with parents to organize and run the meeting so that they can use their experiences and innate qualities as natural educators of their children (e.g. organizing a game, preparing the room and materials, participating in a reflection, demonstrating a skill). • Show the children’s work (using photos or a video) to prompt a discussion. • Use common materials that are accessible to the greatest number of people, favouring second-hand or reused objects. • Use materials that parents can take home (e.g. pictograms for language, books, modelling clay made during the parent-child segment). • Take the time to make parents feel secure, so that they feel accepted for who they are; reassure them and encourage them to take their place in the group and play a part. • Use the meetings to share tips and encourage conversation between parents in order to create a social fabric that will persist beyond kindergarten for 4-year-olds. • Facilitate the meetings according to different logistics and in synchronicity (parents in virtual mode and others in person, which fosters greater participation).

Connecting families and the parent-liaison

Examples :

- Make sure that parents are welcomed (e.g. shake their hand, stand at the front door of the school to direct them to the meeting place, offer them coffee).
- Respect the culture of each person (e.g. documents translated into several languages, interpretation service, transportation, drop-in childcare service during meetings, determination of meeting times according to parents' availability).
- Ensure that the parent-liaison is present in the classroom on a few occasions in order to get to know the children better and create a connection with the parents.
- Reach out to parents who are difficult to engage in various ways (e.g. establish contact with them at times other than meetings [upon arrival at the daycare centre in the morning, upon leaving school, through a personalized phone call, through an offer of support for childcare or transportation, etc.]
- On an exceptional basis, reach out to the extended family to maximize participation in meetings.
- Facilitate the meetings with humour and by applying the principles of adult education in a friendly atmosphere so that the parents feel comfortable and want to return.
- Offer individual meetings to parents as needed.
- Encourage the teacher and the principal to attend meetings, where appropriate.
- Involve children in making invitations to the meetings.

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