



Supporting Parents
Supporting Children

**NPC SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT OIREACTHAS COMMITTEE
ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS**

The Education (Amendment) Bill 2015 and
General Scheme of an Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016

2ND MARCH 2017

National Parents Council Primary

Introduction

National Parents Council Primary (NPC) is the representative organisation for parents of children in primary or early education. NPC was established as a charitable organisation in 1985, under the programme for Government, as the representative organisation for parents of children attending primary school. It received statutory recognition in the Education Act 1998.

NPC Vision

NPC want to see an Ireland where **every** child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

NPC Mission

NPC exists to ensure that all parents are supported and empowered to become effective partners in their children's education. NPC will work to increase the capacity and capability of the primary education sector, to achieve true partnership and deliver better outcomes for all children.

NPC's Key Activities are:

- Representing the parents' voice in primary education
- Advocacy
- Building participation
- Service delivery

NPC Service Delivery

NPC services are aimed at empowering parents so that they can support their children in all aspects of education.

Helpline

The NPC helpline is a national confidential service for parents. The helpline staff listen, and gives information and support to parents to help them make the best possible decisions for and with their children.

Training and Development

The NPC Training and Development programme is a national programme of training, development and support for parents. The purpose is to empower parents to play an active part in their child's education at every level.

Website

The NPC's website www.npc.ie aims to provide parents with information regarding primary education. The site also allows parents an opportunity to give NPC their views regarding primary education issues.

Background

In 2012 the NPC made a submission to the then Minister for Education; Ruairi Quinn TD, requesting a strengthening of the role of parents in the Education Act 1998.

The research is overwhelming in supporting the benefits of parents' involvement in their children's education

The European Commission in its report on the quality of school education in May 2000 stated that:

"..[It] holds that the degree of parental participation is a significant indicator of the quality of schooling."

Research studies have also supported the value of parental involvement in children's educational attainment;

"When parents are enabled to become effective partners in their child's education, performance in schools where children are failing improves dramatically."

(Best Practice Briefs' June 2004, Michigan State University)

Before making its submission to the Minister in 2012, the National Parents Council Primary examined the status of parents and parental involvement in the Irish Primary Education System. A significant amount of policy supporting parental involvement, ranging from the recent "Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life" strategy to school inspection procedures and many other occurrences was evident from this examination. However despite the range of policies and procedures that have been developed that reinforce parental involvement in schools, parents report consistently to NPC that they do not feel supported to be involved in the key partnership role they have in their children's education.

NPC examined the legislation regarding parental involvement and further examined directives to schools in this regard in the form of circulars issued. Irish legislation namely the Education Act 1998, gives express rights to parents and responsibilities to school Boards of Management in supporting parents. However in relation to other jurisdictions Irish legislation is quite limiting in its reach; in particular in relation to school planning regarding parental involvement. The legislation does not provide in depth direction to schools, however a Circular 24/91 (Appendix 2) "Parents as Partners in Education" was issued from the Department of Education which did give clear guidance to schools in relation to the involvement of parents in their children's education. This Circular contained a number of key instructions for schools regarding their role in working with parents as partners in their schools. The NPC wished to learn to what extent parents had experienced the benefits of the implementation of the Circular in their school and therefore initiated a survey to its

members to assess the impact for parents of Circular 24/91, the results of this survey formed the basis of the submission to the Minister, (see Appendix 1).

Following NPC's submission Minister Quinn confirmed at the NPC conference for parents in 2012 that he was "certainly open to looking at any new legislative provisions that could further develop a culture in schools that welcomes and supports parental involvement (see Appendix 4 for Ministers full speech).

The Education (Amendment) Bill 2015 and General Scheme of an Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016

NPC welcomes the General Scheme of an Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016. The General Scheme of an Education Bill broadly encapsulates the submissions and representations that NPC have made to the Department of Education and Skills and its Ministers over the last five years. We know that when parents are engaged and involved in their children's education that children do better; creating the right environment and culture within a school for parents and children to be active partners in school life is critical to this involvement. The general Scheme of the Education Bill 2016 NPC believes provides the legislative basis for the change that is necessary in schools to take place.

Head 1

NPC fully supports the contents of the Long title in Head 1. NPC particularly welcomes the introduction of a Parent and Student Charter, the powers of the Minister to publish guidelines and to direct school Boards to comply with the guidelines. NPC also supports the expanded role of the Ombudsman for Children and the clarification regarding the purpose of a student council. Specifically NPC also welcomes the amendment to Section 9 of the 1998 Act expanding the functions of a school

Head 3

NPC welcomes the statement of statutory principles within Head 3 and agrees with all of the principles as laid out. NPC requests the inclusion of an additional principal or the extension of principle (i) reflecting the values within principle (ii) giving acknowledgement to the importance of the student voice and participation in their own learning and progress.

Head 4

NPC supports the inclusion of Head 4 and believes that it is vital that the Minister has powers to direct School Boards to comply with the guidelines on the Parent and Student Charter. NPC's survey in 2012 showed a lack of awareness by parents of Circular 24/91 Parents as Partners in Education and furthermore showed that parents didn't experience the provisions contained within that Circular. For example:

Circular 24/91 states that “Each national school will be required to establish as part of its overall school policy/plan, a clearly defined written policy for productive parental involvement”. The response from parents when asked, did they know if their school had a parental involvement policy was that only 17% said yes that they knew that their school did.

Our survey further indicated that instead of developing partnerships for parents in education at the level of the local school and supporting and encouraging individual parents to become more involved in the education of their children the majority of those who responded list fundraising as their main activity. This is despite the fact that those who responded ranked fundraising as one of the lesser important ways they could be involved in their children’s education.

It is vital then that any legislation developed in this area is robust in ensuring that parents and students are able to experience the benefits of its provisions.

Head 5

NPC believes that it is important that the Minister can publish revised guidelines following consultation with the education partners to ensure that the guidelines are responsive to the needs of parents and students and are able to accommodate changes that maybe required with advances in practices and research.

Head 6 and 7

NPC particularly welcomes the expanded role of the Ombudsman for Children as set out in the General Scheme of an Education Bill 2016. The Education Amendment Bill 2015 was useful in setting out the challenges and possible way forward in addressing them. NPC believes the expanded role of the Ombudsman for Children as set out in the General Scheme addresses the issues raised in the Education Amendment Bill and negates the need for a separate Ombudsman for Education. The Education Amendment Bill drew attention to the deficiencies in the system that resulted in parents and students feeling they had nowhere to go with concerns and complaints if they felt that their issues had not been addressed at school level. Expanding the role of the Ombudsman for Children will address these issues and will ensure a one stop facility that parents and students can go to with their concerns. As we know from other areas of policy and practice, dividing children’s issues across departments and services often leads to overlap, gaps and significant work, financial resources and time spent establishing links.

Head 8

NPC welcomes the amendment to Section 9 of the 1998 Act to insert the additional function of a school to “promote the involvement of parents and students in the education provided to students”. NPC believes that Head 9 completely supports principle 1 as outlined in Head 3. If the Parent and Student Charter is underpinned by placing the student at the centre of school life and securing optimum outcomes for each student in relation to the student’s learning and holistic development then we know from research that parents are essential to the delivery of this principle. Ensuring then that a function of the school is to promote the involvement of parents and students in the education provided to students becomes vital.

Head 9

NPC supports the amendment of Section 27 of the 1998 Act in clarifying the purpose of a student council in promoting the interests of students as distinct from the interest of the school. The interests of the school will be better served if the student council promotes the interests of the students.

Appendix 1

National Parents Council Primary

**Report to the Minister
For Education and Skills
Regarding
DES Circular 24/91**



May 2012

National Parents Council Primary (NPC) is the representative organisation for parents of children in primary and early education. NPC was established as a charitable organisation in 1985, under the programme for Government, as the representative organisation for parents of children attending primary school. It received statutory recognition in the Education Act 1998.

Mission Statement of NPC

National Parents Council Primary is established to contribute to the advancement of the early education and primary education of all children, in order to improve and enrich the education of each child and to support the involvement of parents in all stages of education.

NPC Services

NPC services are aimed at empowering parents so that they can support their children in all aspects of education.

Helpline

The NPC helpline is a national confidential service for parents. The helpline staff listen, and give information and support to parents to help them make the best possible decisions for and with their children. In 2011 there were 2,106 calls and emails to the NPC's helpline.

Training and Development

The NPC Training and Development programme is a national programme of training, development and support for parents. The purpose is to empower parents to play an active part in their child's education at every level. In 2011 over 4,707 parents participated in NPC training countrywide.

Website

The NPC's website www.npc.ie aims to provide parents with information regarding primary education. The site also allows parents an opportunity to give NPC their views regarding primary education issues.

As well as the three service areas above the NPC are active in

1. **Advocating and representing parents.** NPC consult with parents and bring parents' views to bear on education policy.
2. **Facilitating and supporting the development of Parents Associations.** NPC facilitates and supports parents to develop associations in their schools and supports the organisation of county level and local area level support networks for parents.

Introduction

The European Commission in its report on the quality of school education in May 2000 stated that:

“..[It] holds that the degree of parental participation is a significant indicator of the quality of schooling.”

Research studies have also supported the value of parental involvement in children’s educational attainment;

“When parents are enabled to become effective partners in their child’s education, performance in schools where children are failing improves dramatically.”

(Best Practice Briefs’ June 2004, Michigan State University)

“The most accurate predictor of a student’s achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student’s family is able to:

- Create a home environment that encourages learning;
- Communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations for children’s achievement and future careers;
- Become involved in children’s education at school and in the community.

(Best Practice Briefs’ June 2004, Michigan State University)

The research is overwhelming in supporting the benefits of parents’ involvement in their children’s education; however the practice on the ground in schools in Ireland appears to be very mixed in regards to the support for parents in this regard.

The National Parents Council examined the status of parents and parental involvement in the Irish Primary Education System and found a significant amount of policy supporting parental involvement, ranging from the recent “Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life” strategy to school inspection procedures and many other occurrences. Despite the range of policies and procedures that have been developed that reinforce parental involvement in schools, parents report consistently to NPC that they do not feel supported to be involved in the key partnership role they have in their children’s education.

NPC examined the legislation regarding parental involvement and further examined directives to schools in this regard in the form of circulars issued. Irish legislation namely the Education Act 1998, gives express rights to parents and responsibilities to school Boards of Management in supporting parents. However in relation to other jurisdictions Irish legislation is quite limiting in its reach; in particular in relation to school planning regarding parental involvement. The legislation does not provide in depth direction to schools, however a Circular 24/91 (Appendix 2) “Parents as Partners in Education” was issued from the Department of Education which did give clear guidance to schools in

relation to the involvement of parents in their children's education. This Circular contained a number of key instructions for schools regarding their role in working with parents as partners in their schools. The NPC wished to learn to what extent parents had experienced the benefits of the implementation of the Circular in their school and therefore initiated a survey to its members to assess the impact for parents of Circular 24/91.

Methodology

National Parents Council Primary prepared a survey on parental involvement in schools in order to find out the extent to which the Department of Education and Skills Circular 24/91 is being implemented. We made the survey available to all parents on our website www.npc.ie and also circulated it to our members via email. We received a total of 508 responses over a period of two weeks (12th – 26th March 2012).

Findings

(see Appendix 3 for survey results)

Question 1: Does your school have a Parent Association?

This question refers to the existence of a Parents Association in every school. The circular states *"where none exists, an active Parents' Association be formed for each individual school"*. We found that this part of the circular is being followed in this instance as 98.2% of those surveyed said there was a Parent Association in their school. However, interpretations of the survey results are limited in this regard as the survey was only circulated to NPC members or available to parents who were visiting the NPC website.

Question 2: Is the Parent Association a member of the National Parents Council Primary?

This also shows the circular being followed as 93.2% of those who responded are members of NPC which is in line with the indication in the section of the circular which states that *"Parents' Association should strongly consider affiliating to the National Parents' Council Primary Tier."* However, again the interpretations of the survey results are limited in this regard as the survey was only circulated to NPC members or available to parents who were visiting the NPC website

Question 3: Are the Parent Representatives on your school Board of Management members of the Parent Association committee?

However only 64.5% of those who responded to this question reported that in their school, the Parent Representatives are members of the committee of the Parent Association. This is surprisingly low in that the majority of those who completed the survey were members of NPC and therefore have access to information regarding best practice.

Question 4: Is your Parent Association involved in any of the following?

This question asks parents to list the activities the Parent Association is involved in. This is an attempt to tease out to what extent the Department's view of the role of the Parent Association is being followed.

The circular states that the Parent Association is essential for “developing partnership for parents in education at the level of the local school”; we found that only 16.4% of those who responded listed this as an activity carried out by their Parent Association.

The circular also states that “supporting and encouraging individual parents to become more involved in the education of their children” is an activity that the Parent Association should be involved in, however only 31.1% of those who responded stated that they were involved in this. **However, in contrast to this, 95.8% of those who responded listed fundraising as an activity of their Parent Association.** This was closely followed by 83.3% involved in organising parties/social events for children and sports days at 53.5%.

Question 5: Does your school have a clearly defined written policy document for productive parental involvement?

Our survey shows that the circular which states that “Each national school will be required to establish as part of its overall school policy/plan, a clearly defined written policy for productive parental involvement” is not being followed in that only 16.8% of those who responded answered Yes to this.

Question 6: Who was involved in the drawing up of this policy document?

Question 7: Is the policy document reviewed

Question 8: Is the policy document made available to parents?

Only those who answered yes to question 5 were directed towards 6, 7 & 8 and of those 16.8%, a high proportion reported that the policy document is made available to parents, although worryingly more than half don't know how often it is reviewed and less than half know who was involved in drawing up the policy.

Question 9: What do you think are the most important ways parents should be involved in their children's educational lives? Please rank all of these in order of importance, 1 being the most important, 12 the least important

When we asked parents to rank the most important ways they should be involved in their children's educational lives the most important was *'Having a positive attitude towards your child's learning'*. Fundraising was ranked in the lower half of things the parents thought were important, with yard duty listed as the least important way parents should be involved in their children's educational lives.

Question 10: Are you aware of the Department of Education Circular 24/91 "Parents as Partners in Education"?

This question revealed that 78.8% of those who responded to this question were unaware of the Department's circular.

Conclusions

The NPC survey found that, whilst the majority of schools who completed the survey are complying with the circular 24/91 in respect of having a Parent Association, which is a member of NPC, the function of the Parent Association is not that which was envisaged in the circular.

Our survey shows that instead of developing partnerships for parents in education at the level of the local school and supporting and encouraging individual parents to become more involved in the education of their children the majority of those who responded list fundraising as their main activity. This is despite the fact that those who responded ranked fundraising as one of the lesser important ways they could be involved in their children's education.

Parents ranked being on the school's Board of Management as the third lowest priority, this is of concern to NPC and we believe this needs to be investigated further.

The circular demonstrates the view that a Parent Association is essential for developing partnerships for parents in education at the level of the local school and supporting and encouraging individual parents to become more involved in the education of their children. However only 75 out of 456 respondents said they had any involvement in developing partnerships for parents in education at the level of the local school and only 142 out of 456 respondents stated they were involved in supporting and encouraging individual parents to become more involved in the education of their children. We found that the Parent Associations are primarily engaged in fundraising and are not involved in the above essential activities.

Under the circular the Department undertook to draw up, in consultation with partners in education, guidelines for schools to support them to draw up a required policy for productive parental involvement. To date NPC have not been involved or are not aware of any such process.

This circular was issued in 1991, in the past 21 years there has been a wealth of research which shows the difference parental involvement can make in the educational outcomes for children. NPC believes it is timely therefore that there should be a change in legislation to bring Ireland in line with other jurisdictions such as the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 and the Section 118 of the American No Child Left Behind Act 2001).

NPC would like to formally request a meeting with the Minister to discuss the contents of this report and how to make positive change for children's educational lives.

If you would like any further information regarding any of the contents of this document please do not hesitate to make contact.

Circular 24/91



Note: This electronic version was re-typed from the original in March, 2006

Circular Letter 24/91

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

To the Chairperson, Board of Management of each National School

PARENTS AS PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

1 PARENTS AS PARTNERS

Partnership for parents in education is a stated policy aim of the Government. Through the Programme for Economic and Social Progress the Government and the Social Partners have formally recognised the promotion of parental involvement in the education of their children as an essential strategy of educational policy and practice. This Circular is concerned with ensuring that partnership for parents is positively pursued at a local level by each national school.

2 SCHOOL/FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

The Department endorses the view of the National Parents' Council, Primary, expressed in its recently published booklet, *Parents' Associations – Making Them Work*, that parents should be involved in their local school for two main reasons:

“The school is regarded as an extension of the home and an active partnership between parents and teachers make this a reality, especially in the eyes of the young child, who is the central figure.”

Research shows that parental interest and attitudes to school, to books and to education are the single most important influence on a child's learning."

These reasons are supported by the findings of the Primary Education Review Body.

The Department recognises that school/family relationships are particularly important at the primary level of education. As the recognised primary educators of the child, parents have a right to be assured that the child's needs are being met by the school. It follows that parents should be given as much information as possible on all aspects of the child's progress and development. Parents, as a body, are also entitled to know whether the school and the education system are meeting children's needs.

3 PARENTS' ASSOCIATIONS

It is important that, where none exists, an active Parents' Association be formed for each individual school in order to promote and develop effective and positive participation by parents in education at the school level.

Circular 7/85 issued by the Department of Education in January, 1985 urged school authorities to have a Parents' Association formed in association with every National School.

While much progress has been made since then, there are still national schools which do not have a Parents' Association. The Department sees a Parents' Association as essential for:

- developing partnership for parents in education at the level of the local school, and
- supporting and encouraging individual parents to become more involved in the education of their children.

The Minister for Education now requests each Board of Management to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that a Parents' Association is formed in association with its school. The Board should actively promote all means of effective co-operation between the school and the Parents' Association.

4 FORMING A PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

As a first step, the Board should call a general meeting of parents for the purpose of the parents forming a Parents' Association where one does not already exist. It would be desirable that the Board

arrange with the National Parents' Council-Primary to have a representative present to advise the parents.

The Booklet entitled *Parents' Associations – Making them Work* will be of particular assistance to schools in promoting parental involvement. A copy is being sent to the Chairperson of each Board for this purpose. Further copies may be purchased from the *National Parents' Council, 16-20 Cumberland Street South, Dublin 2 (01-6789980), price £2.00.*

It is in the best interests of the school that positive and effective communication exists between the Parents' representatives on the Board and the Parents' Association. To this end, parent representatives should be ex-officio members of the Parents' Association Committee.

5. DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS

Further developments will be necessary in order to bring about genuine partnership at school level.

Each national school will be required to establish as part of its overall school policy/plan, a clearly defined policy for productive parental involvement. The Department in consultation with the partners in education will draw up guidelines for this process. The guidelines will take account of the recommendations of the Primary Education Review Body on relations between parents and boards of management and teachers, which, in general, the Department accepts.

In conjunction with the guidelines, the Department will prepare an information booklet for parents on the educational provision being made for their children and on the operation of the national school system.

6 NATIONAL PARENTS' COUNCIL

Each Parents' Association should strongly consider affiliating to the National Parents' Council, Primary Tier. Such affiliation affords parents the opportunity and the mechanism for having a voice in decision making on primary educational issues at a national level. The National Parents' Council provides representation for parents, as partners in education, on various Government-appointed educational bodies. Through its representative function, the Council is making a distinctive and valuable contribution to central planning and policy development in education.

C.N. LINDSAY,

SECRETARY.

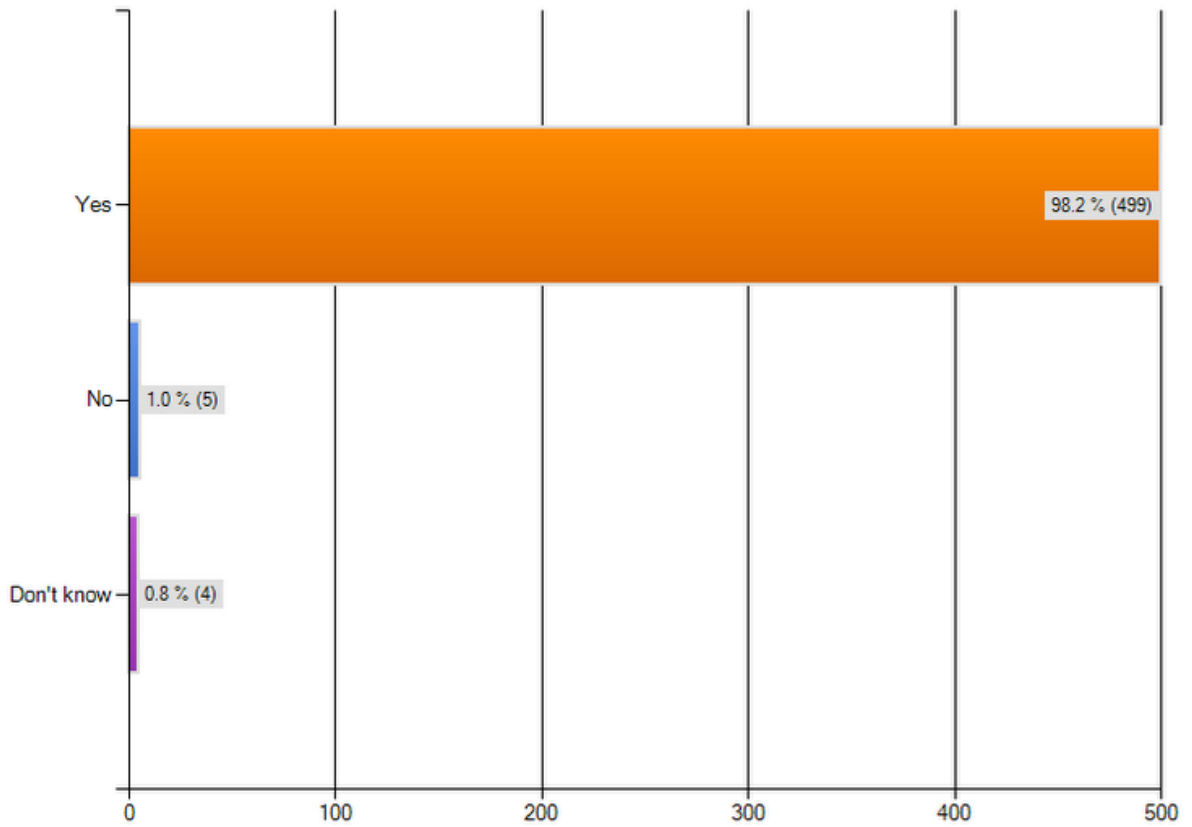
MAY, 1991.

NPC Survey Results

Question 1: Does your school have a Parent Association?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	98.2%	499
No	1.0%	5
Don't know	0.8%	4
<i>answered question</i>		508
<i>skipped question</i>		0

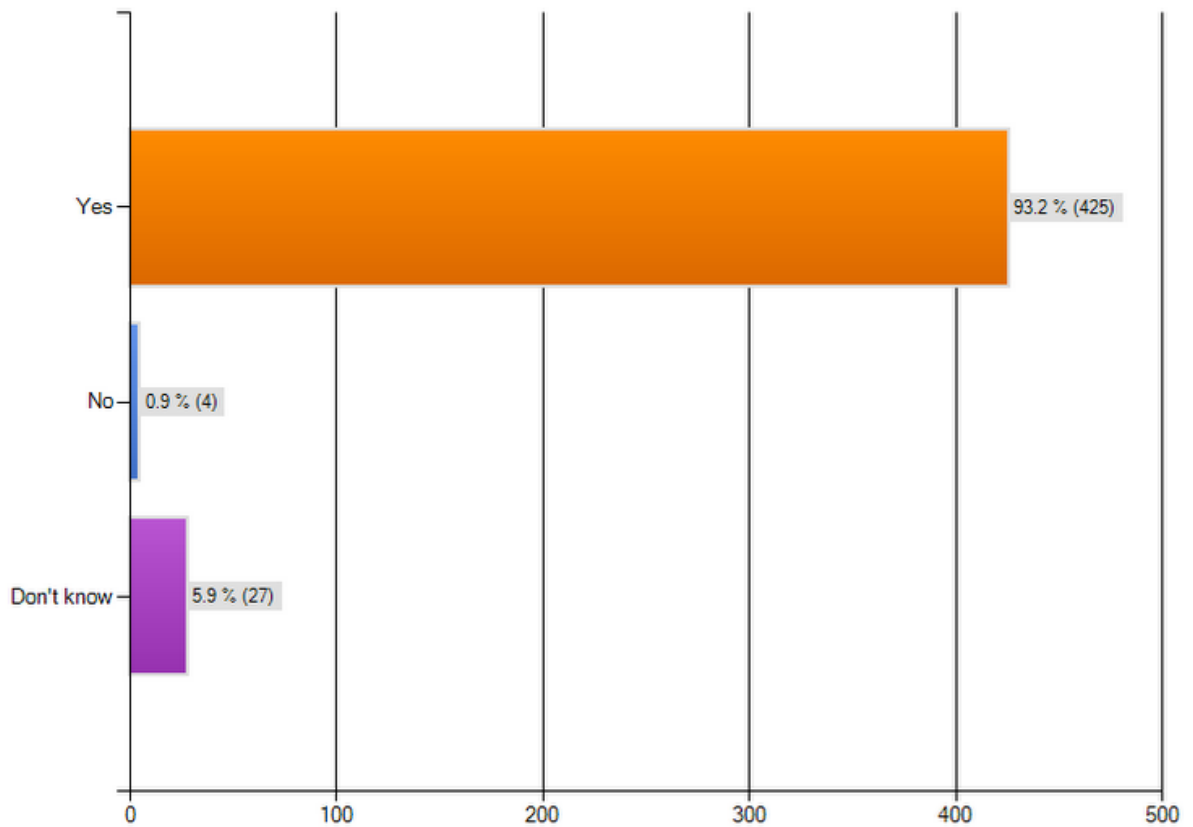
Does your school have a Parent Association?



Question 2: Is the Parent Association a member of the National Parents Council Primary?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	93.2%	425
No	0.9%	4
Don't know	5.9%	27
<i>answered question</i>		456
<i>skipped question</i>		52

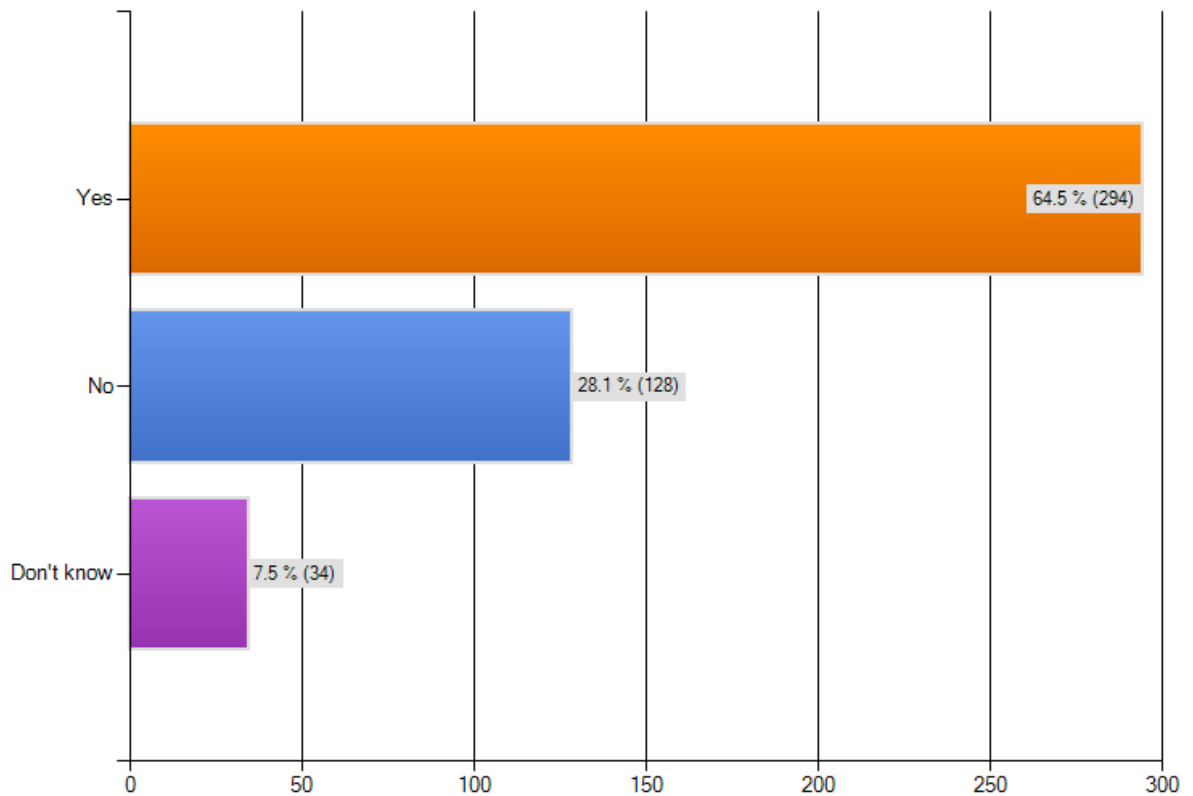
Is the Parent Association a member of the National Parents Council Primary?



Question 3: Are the Parent Representatives on your school Board of Management members of the Parent Association committee?

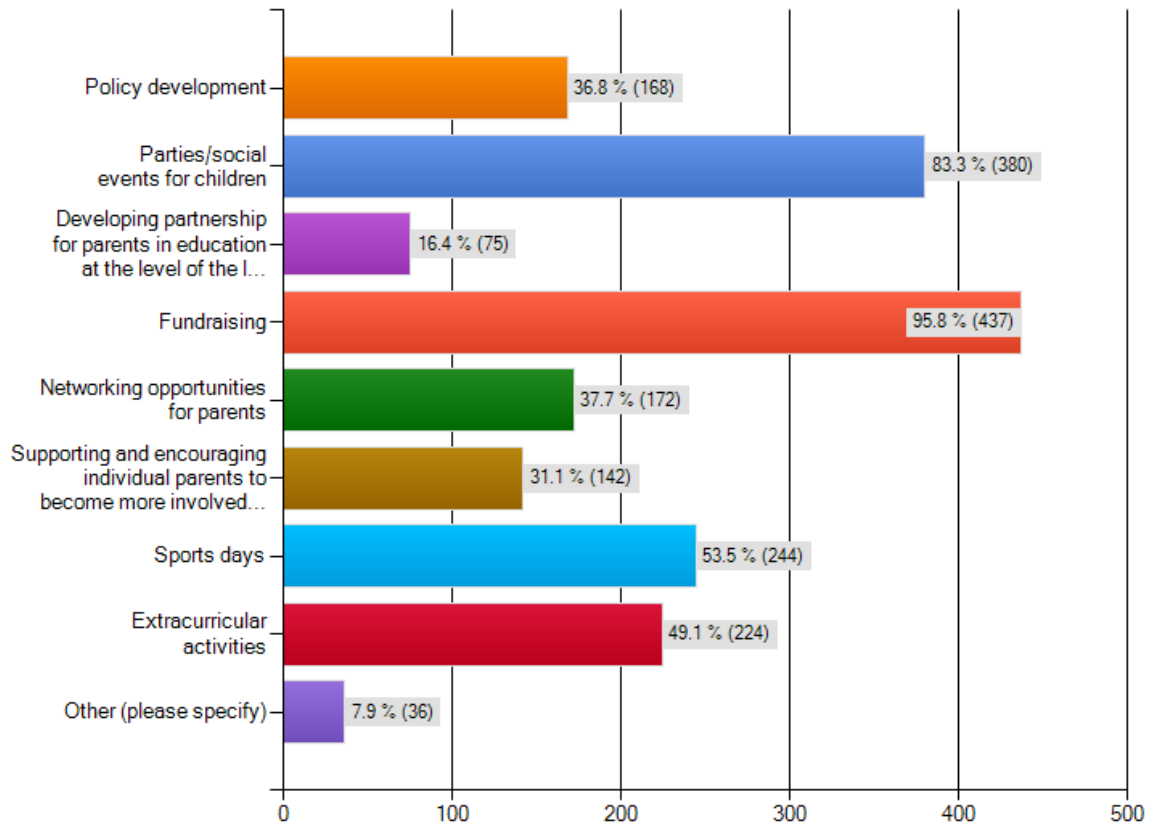
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	64.5%	294
No	28.1%	128
Don't know	7.5%	34
<i>answered question</i>		456
<i>skipped question</i>		52

Are the Parent Representatives on your school Board of Management members of the Parent Association committee?



Question 4: Is your Parent Association involved in any of the following?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Policy development	36.8%	168
Parties/social events for children	83.3%	380
Developing partnership for parents in education at the level of the local school	16.4%	75
Fundraising	95.8%	437
Networking opportunities for parents	37.7%	172
Supporting and encouraging individual parents to become more involved in the education of their children	31.1%	142
Sports days	53.5%	244
Extracurricular activities	49.1%	224
Other (please specify)	7.9%	36
<i>answered question</i>		456
<i>skipped question</i>		52

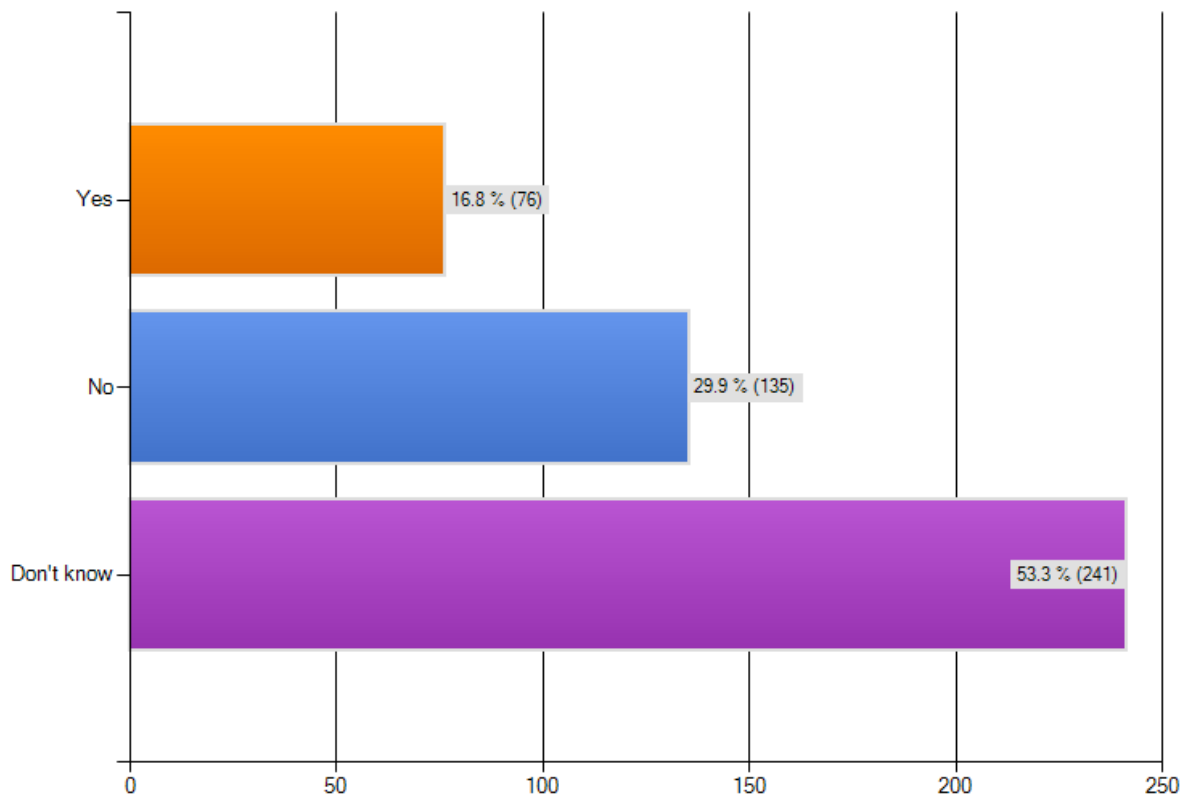
Is your Parent Association involved in any of the following?



Question 5: Does your school have a clearly defined written policy document for productive parental involvement?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	16.8%	76
No	29.9%	135
Don't know	53.3%	241
answered question		452
skipped question		56

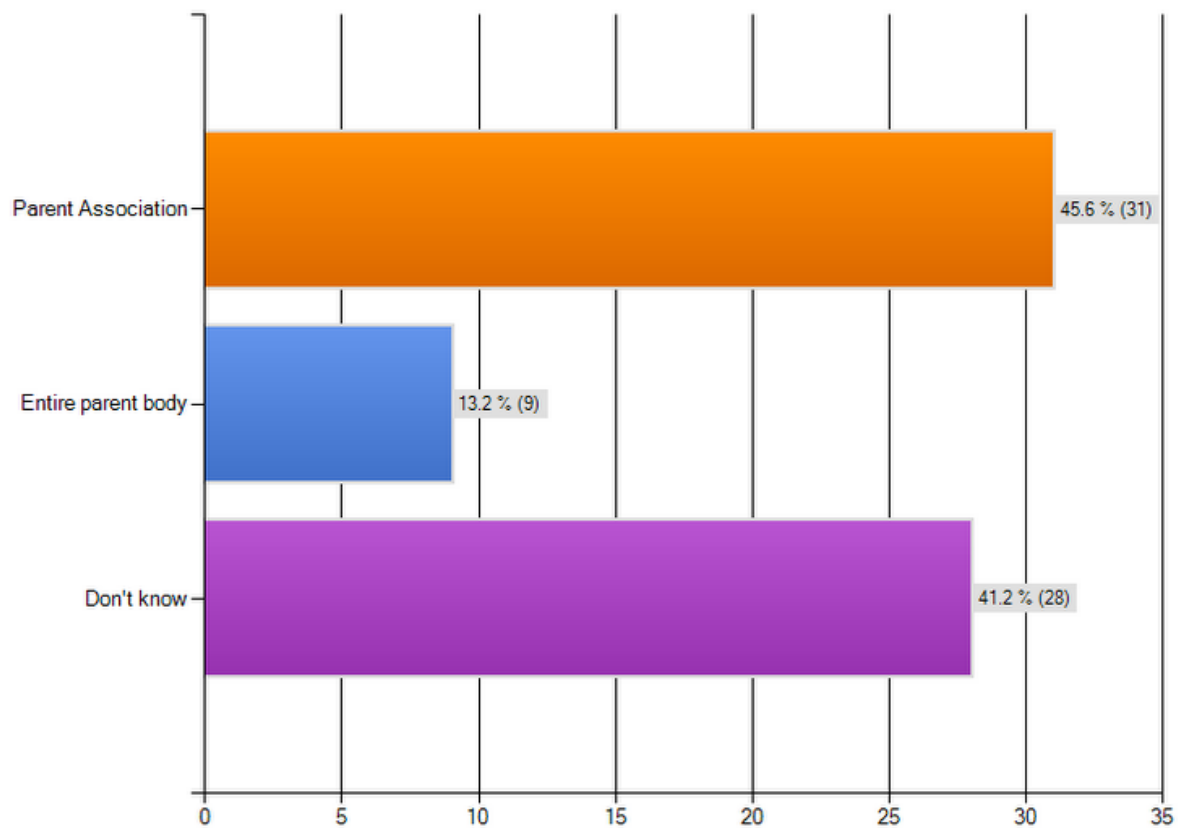
Does your school have a clearly defined written policy document for productive parental involvement?



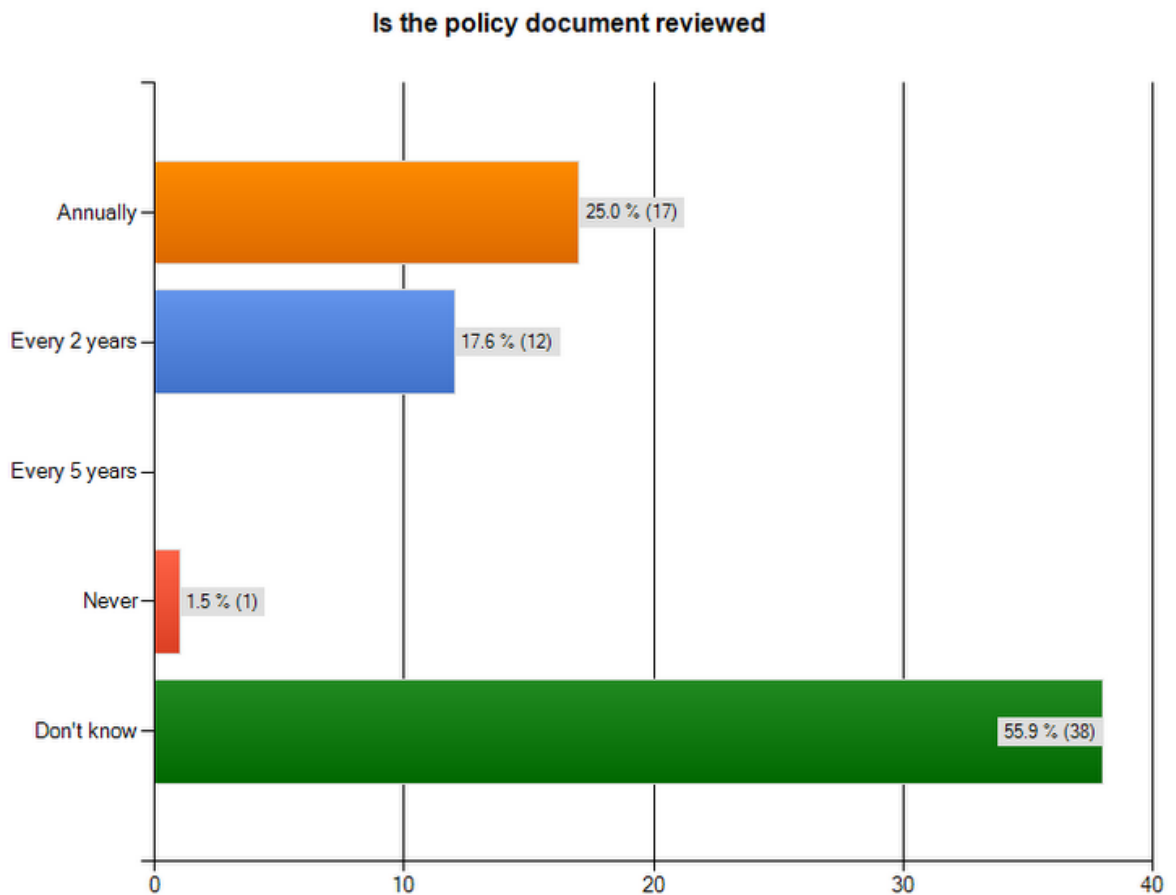
Question 6: Who was involved in the drawing up of this policy document?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Parent Association	45.6%	31
Entire parent body	13.2%	9
Don't know	41.2%	28
<i>answered question</i>		68
<i>skipped question</i>		440

Who was involved in the drawing up of this policy document?



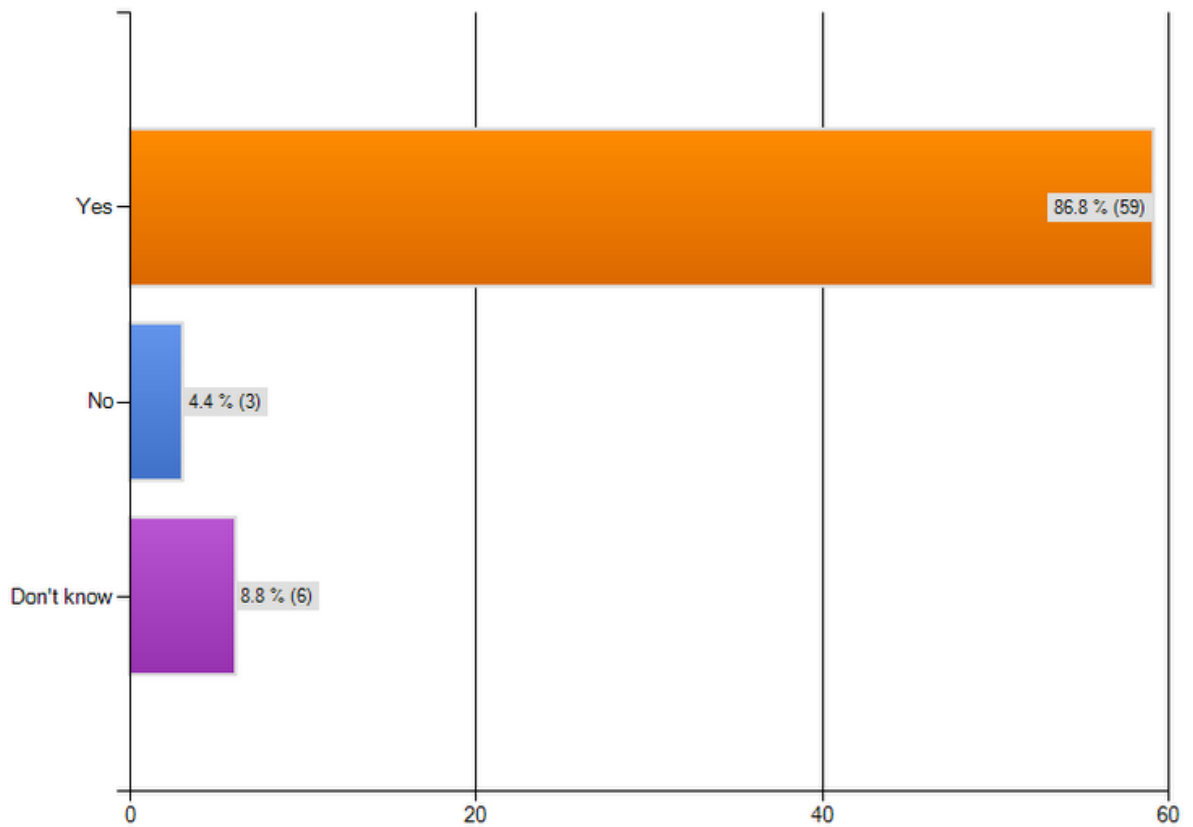
Question 7: Is the policy document reviewed		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Annually	25.0%	17
Every 2 years	17.6%	12
Every 5 years	0.0%	0
Never	1.5%	1
Don't know	55.9%	38
answered question		68
skipped question		440



Question 8: Is the policy document made available to parents?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	86.8%	59
No	4.4%	3
Don't know	8.8%	6
<i>answered question</i>		68
<i>skipped question</i>		440

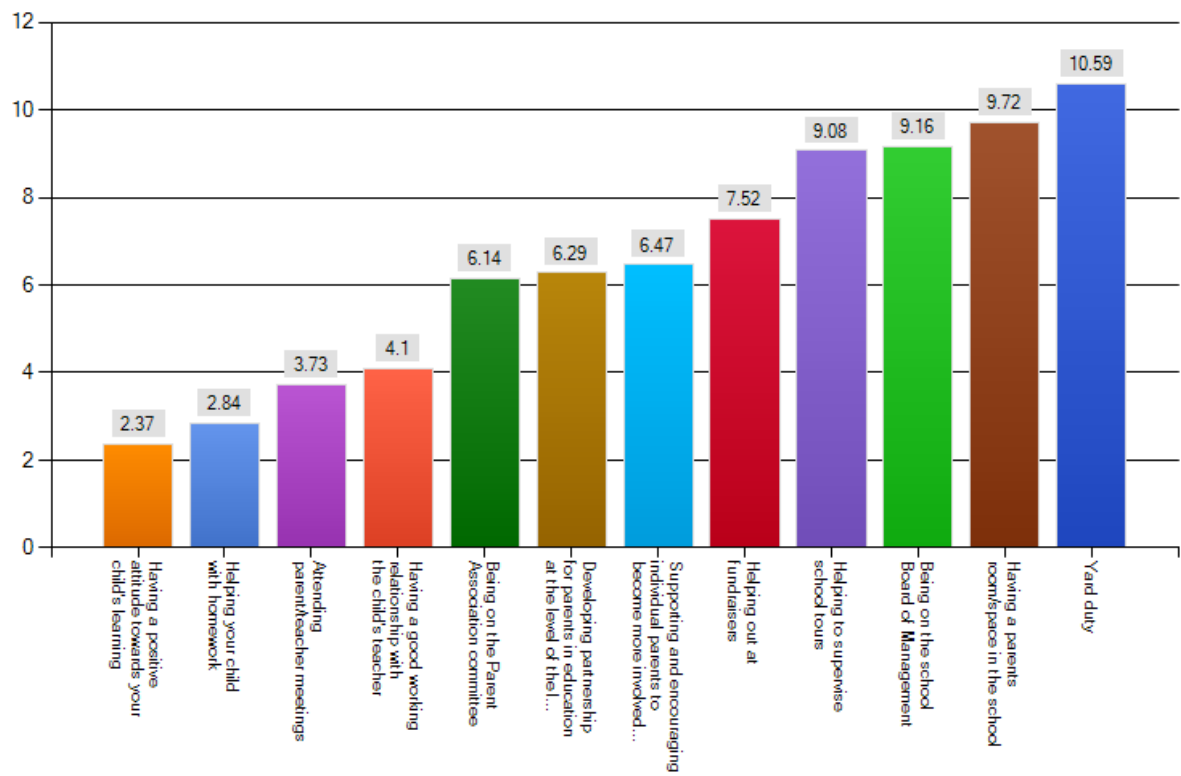
Is the policy document made available to parents?



Question 9: What do you think are the most important ways parents should be involved in their children's educational lives? Please rank all of these in order of importance, 1 being the most important, 12 the least important

Answer Options	Response Average	Response Total	Response Count
Attending parent/teacher meetings	3.73	1,316	353
Being on the Parent Association committee	6.14	2,169	353
Developing partnership for parents in education at the level of the local school	6.29	2,220	353
Helping out at fundraisers	7.52	2,654	353
Helping your child with homework	2.84	1,002	353
Having a positive attitude towards your child's learning	2.37	835	353
Helping to supervise school tours	9.08	3,204	353
Supporting and encouraging individual parents to become more involved in the education of their children	6.47	2,285	353
Having a parents room/space in the school	9.72	3,430	353
Having a good working relationship with the child's teacher	4.10	1,447	353
Being on the school Board of Management	9.16	3,233	353
Yard duty	10.59	3,739	353
<i>answered question</i>			353
<i>skipped question</i>			155

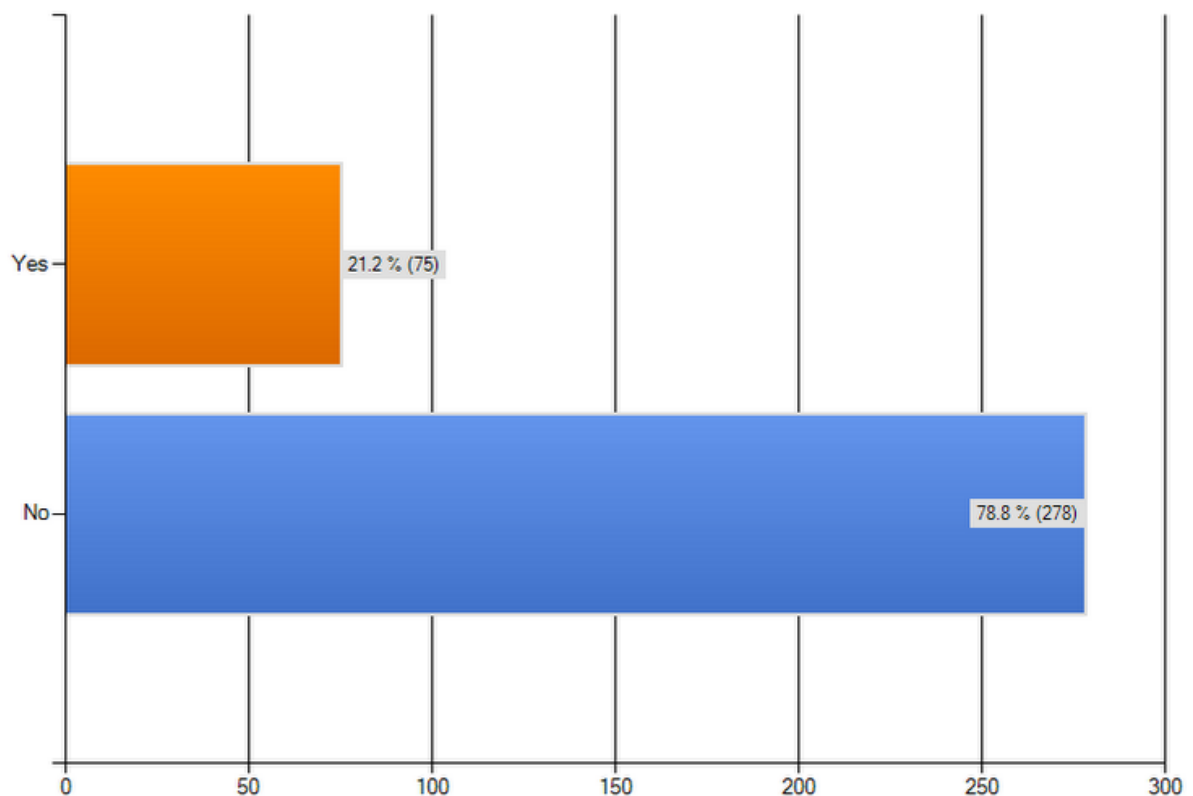
What do you think are the most important ways parents should be involved in their children's educational lives? Please rank all of these in order of importance, 1 being the most important, 12 the least important



Question 10: Are you aware of the Department of Education Circular 24/91 "Parents as Partners in Education"?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	21.2%	75
No	78.8%	278
<i>answered question</i>		353
<i>skipped question</i>		155

Are you aware of the Department of Education Circular 24/91 "Parents as Partners in Education"?



16 June, 2012 - Address by Ruairí Quinn, TD, Minister for Education & Skills to the National Parents Council Primary Conference Saturday 16th June 2012

Introduction

Chairperson (Breid Greene) and delegates,

I want to thank you for the invitation to address your Conference.

To begin with, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the National Parents' Council for your work in supporting parents in the primary sector.

We share a common interest – working together so that education can unleash the potential of all of our children.

To deliver that promise, we must enhance parental involvement in our education system.

Since taking office, I have found your organisation to be of immense value on helping transform our education system.

From working to tackle the cost of school books, to finding ways to eliminate the scourge of bullying from our schools, as parents you have shown an attention to the policy areas that will make a real difference to the lives of our students and parents.

Your annual conference is an opportunity for me to acknowledge role of the National Parents Council as an invaluable advocate for parents and guardians of young people.

I am encouraged by the theme of your conference which is about parental involvement in their children's learning.

I have spoken on many occasions about the importance of parental involvement in the learning of their children, and I am glad that is your focus for the Conference.

Parental support involves assisting and advising your children and being active in the operation of their school, as well as informing policy initiatives.

Forum on Patronage and Pluralism

When speaking to the Conferences of the Teaching Unions at Easter, I was delighted to announce the publication of the report of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector.

I will outline my response to that report in full on Wednesday, and the National Parents Council will have a major role in that developing story.

But today I wanted to let you know that we will be seeking your help with one particular task. The Programme for Government commits to the preparation of a White Paper on the issue of patronage of our primary schools.

We will be seeking the assistance of the NPC with the preparation of an information leaflet to ensure that parents are involved in the development of the White Paper.

I have read with interest the report on the survey that the National Parents' Council conducted on Parents as Partners in Education, otherwise known as Circular 24/91.

This Circular in its time was a pioneering document and provided guidance to schools in relation to the involvement of parents in their children's education.

Re-reading it recently, I was struck by the vision that it set out for the involvement of parents in their children's schooling.

Since it issued, much has been achieved in the involvement of parents in schools and in the educational system generally.

For example the 1998 Education Act recognises the contribution parents make in the delivery of education by schools to their children.

The role of parents as part of a school's ongoing quality assurance and improvement is recognised through the requirement for Boards to establish procedures for informing parents of matters relating to the performance of the school.

The circular and the Education Act laid a foundation for parental involvement.

But 15 years later, it is absolutely necessary that we take stock of progress and consider what further work can be done.

Your survey certainly suggested that some challenges remain for parents, for schools and for the National Parents' Council.

That said, I think we also need to bear in mind other evidence that tends to confirm some but not all of the report's findings and conclusions.

For example, when conducting whole-school evaluations, the Inspectorate now surveys parents by questionnaire so that parents have an opportunity to share their perspectives on the work of the school.

Schools are provided with a copy of the survey results and, where there are difficulties identified, are advised to work with parents to clarify the issues and address them.

I note that an analysis of parental responses on the survey questionnaire indicates that almost all parents (98%) strongly agree or agree that the school is welcoming, and this is very good news.

However I also note that some parents have concerns regarding being invited to contribute their views on school policies, and the parents' association keeping them informed about its work.

Your report suggests that legislative change should be considered to strengthen the implementation of the objectives originally set out in Circular 24/91.

I agree that what we need to do is improve implementation and action on the ground.

Certainly, greater guidance to schools may be beneficial, and some of the principles that you have suggested to me may well be useful in drafting such guidance.

I also believe that self-evaluation is at the heart of effective school improvement, and one of the ingredients essential to improving student and school performance is an involved, well-informed parent.

If we are to improve the outcomes from our education system, it is vital that self-evaluation, and reporting the outcomes of that evaluation to parents, become a much more central component of our school system.

In the development of genuine partnerships and engagement between pupils, teachers and parents, one of the things that should be clear is that these must be based on mutual respect and trust.

A shared objective for schools and parents must be to empower parents with information and support to enable them to become a more active partner in the 3-way relationship.

In return, parents can fulfil their responsibilities and play a full part in supporting their child and their school.

The guidelines on School Self-Evaluation, for example, which are the subject of consultation at present, make clear that evidence concerning parental satisfaction with the school should be part of the evidence used by schools to judge their own work.

The Self-Evaluation Guidelines also provide a means whereby schools will be able to keep their communities informed about their strengths, and their priorities for development.

NPC-P can play a significant role in the successful implementation of the school self-evaluation by including information on this process in their training programmes for parents' associations.

Legislative change - how to strengthen the role of parents in education

As you know I have undertaken to introduce a new regulatory framework on school admission.

I mention it today because in the context of that work my Department is examining the efficacy of Section 28 of the Education Act.

I firmly believe that we need to have a fresh look at some aspects of the Education Act of 1998.

It is 14 years since its enactment and we need to take stock of how its intent has been fulfilled.

We certainly need to look at the adequacy of Section 28 of the Act.

Section 28 is about grievances of parents and students.

I support the availability of good local mechanisms for dealing with difficulties, complaints and grievances.

I believe we need to look at how a stronger culture of valuing parental involvement at the level of each individual school can be created.

The more we can succeed in that direction and strengthen relationships, the less need there should be for grievance procedures.

The work underway in the Department on a revision to Section 28 will take a wider focus, and take account of the recent work that you have done.

I am certainly open to looking at any new legislative provisions that could further develop a culture in schools that welcomes and supports parental involvement.

My officials will engage positively with you and indeed the NPC - Post Primary in that regard.

Finally I want to mention the anti-bullying forum held last month that brought together a range of experts, support groups and representatives of the schools sector, including parents and students.

It provided an opportunity to explore with all the stakeholders how best to tackle bullying in schools, and to consider what changes or updating of existing practices and procedures are required to achieve this.

In addition to the Forum, stakeholders and any other interested parties are invited to submit their views on this important topic to the Department by 29th June 2012.

Full details of how this can be done are available on the Anti-Bullying Forum webpage on the Department's website.

Conclusion

To conclude, thank you again for the opportunity to engage with you today.
The educational benefits from deepening parental involvement are far-reaching.

I am confident that if we continue to work together we can look forward to a future where many more parents are involved and engaged.

A future where the role of parents can become even more valued.

And above all, a future where every child receives the best possible support to reach their potential and fulfil their ambitions

- See more at: <http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Speeches/2012-Speeches/16-June-2012-Address-by-Ruair%C3%AD-Quinn-TD-Minister-for-Education-Skills-to-the-National-Parents-Council-Primary-Conference-Saturday-16th-June-2012.html#sthash.7qMNJmFX.dpuf>

