

# Helping Your Child Succeed in School



A Guide for  
Parents and  
Families of  
Aboriginal  
Students



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Putting children and families first

Manitoba 

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# Hello, Boozhoo, Anín, Tansí, Wotziye, Tansí, Asujutilli

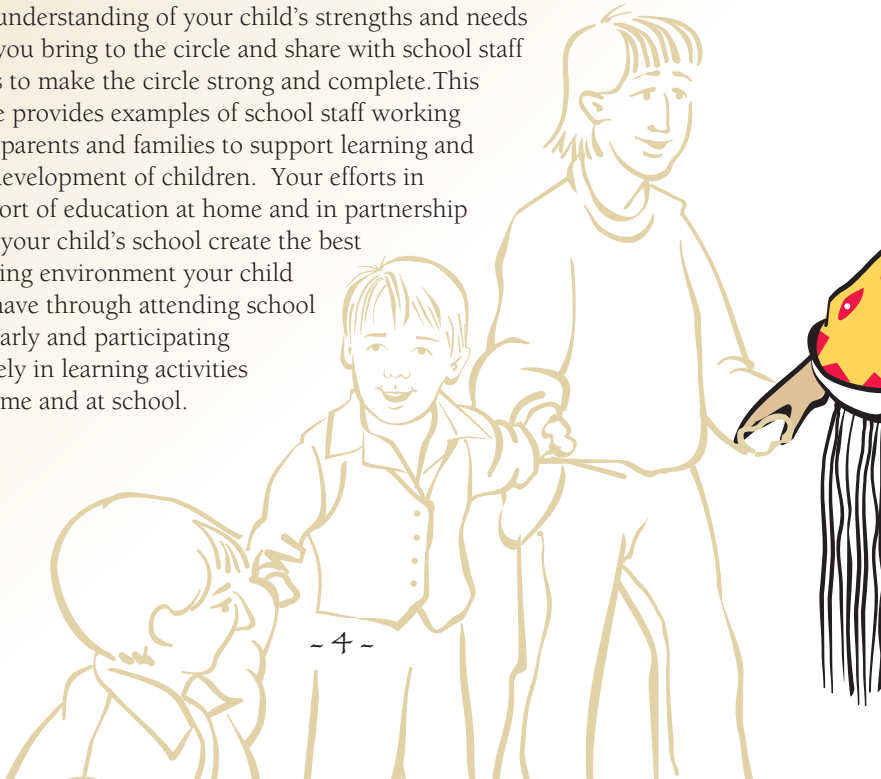
## A Word About This Guide

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Children learn best when their parents and families are actively involved in their education. Throughout this guide, the term “parent/s” includes biological parents, foster parents, legal guardians, and extended family members. As a parent, you are a first teacher and have a role that no one else can fill in helping your child to be a successful learner. This guide provides suggestions you can use to promote your child’s educational success.

All parents want their children to have school success and to enjoy lives of full participation in their families, cultural life, and communities. Traditionally, Aboriginal communities, parents and extended family members worked together to achieve these educational goals for their children by helping them to develop fully in mind, body, emotions and spirit. Today’s schools share this focus on healthy development of the whole child. The parent and school partnership is a circle of support for a child’s learning and self-esteem development created by many people working together.

The understanding of your child’s strengths and needs that you bring to the circle and share with school staff helps to make the circle strong and complete. This guide provides examples of school staff working with parents and families to support learning and full development of children. Your efforts in support of education at home and in partnership with your child’s school create the best learning environment your child can have through attending school regularly and participating actively in learning activities at home and at school.



*Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship. In Manitoba we embrace inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community. By working together, we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for all of us. (Philosophy of Inclusion, Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, 2001.)*



# How Can My Involvement Benefit My Child?

Children look to parents for guidance and support throughout the school years. Your involvement in education helps your child to

- ◆ have strong self-esteem
- ◆ feel that school learning is supported at home
- ◆ attend classes regularly
- ◆ do well on homework assignments
- ◆ have positive relationships with school staff
- ◆ put best efforts into school work
- ◆ get good results in academic subject areas
- ◆ extend learning through involvement in extra-curricular activities
- ◆ stay in school and graduate
- ◆ set and meet high goals for more schooling or training after high school

Educational success is directly related to student effort. Your child benefits in the ways listed above as you help him or her to be the best learner possible.

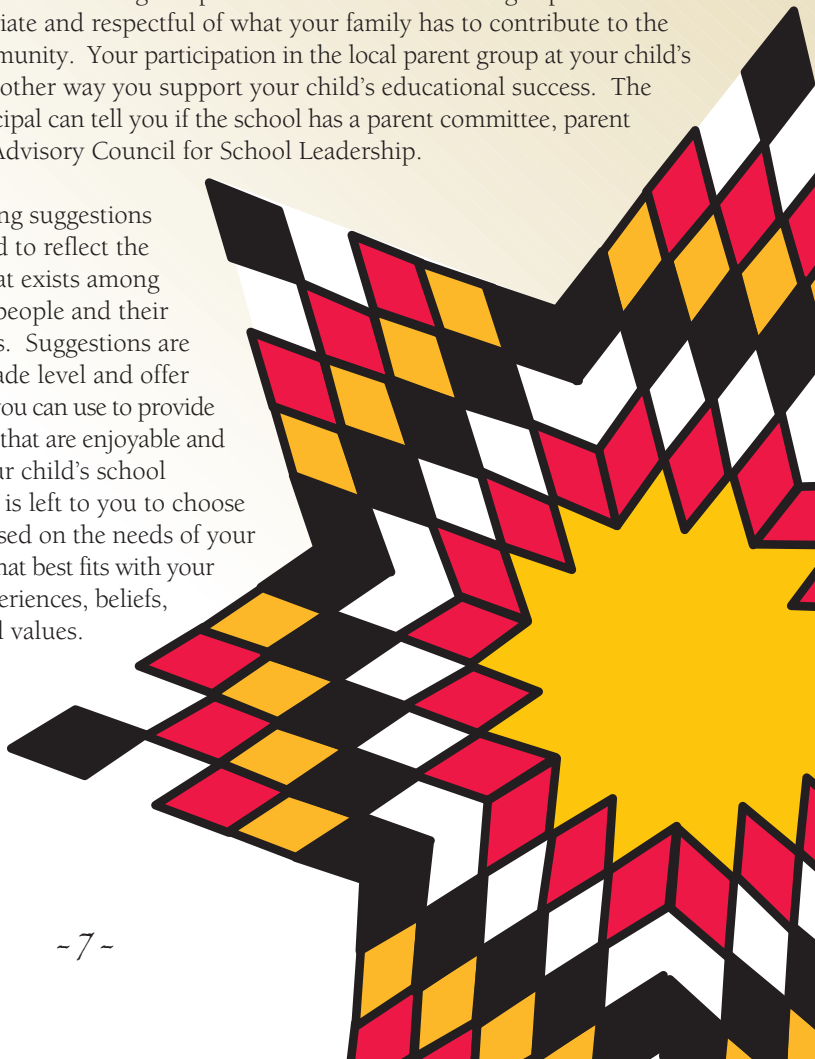




# How Can I Help My Child's Learning?

The things you are doing each day to build a strong relationship with your child also help to support successful learning. Talking with your child about school experiences helps you to know if your support is needed and gives you a chance to encourage your child. As a parent of an Aboriginal student, you also help your child to get the most benefit from education by making the school aware of your child's Aboriginal ancestry (through the "Aboriginal Identity Field" which is explained at the following website: < [www.edu.gov.mb.ca/aed/abidentity.html](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/aed/abidentity.html) >). The information you provide about your child's heritage helps the school to offer learning experiences that are appropriate and respectful of what your family has to contribute to the school community. Your participation in the local parent group at your child's school is another way you support your child's educational success. The school principal can tell you if the school has a parent committee, parent council or Advisory Council for School Leadership.

The following suggestions are intended to reflect the diversity that exists among Aboriginal people and their perspectives. Suggestions are listed by grade level and offer some ideas you can use to provide experiences that are enjoyable and support your child's school learning. It is left to you to choose activities based on the needs of your child and what best fits with your family's experiences, beliefs, and cultural values.



# Ideas for Parents and Families of Students in Early Years

## Suggested Activities – Kindergarten

- Have a regular time to read together and have fun sharing stories, especially stories with Aboriginal content that you can connect to your child's life. Use poems, songs and rhymes and use Aboriginal language and cultural ideas.
- Play with your child: use old clothes for dress up time and imaginary play. Play games such as "I Spy" to build language skills and use Aboriginal languages such as Cree in the example shown below.
- Stress positive traits like caring and respectful behaviour. Talk to your child about Aboriginal culture and teachings valued in your community using traditional games. For example, in a game traditionally played by Anishinabe people, a small object such as a wooden stick, pebble, or fruit pit is hidden in one of four containers (traditionally, moccasins were the containers) or under pieces of cloth. The child guesses where the object is hidden. A correct guess means that the child gets the chance to hide the object. This game can be used to discuss the importance of the number four in Aboriginal culture as well as the songs and ceremonies commonly connected to the playing of the game.

nistikwan, nitehtimun  
nechkwen, nisit  
niskesik, nehtawakiy  
nitoon ekwa nikot

My head, my shoulder  
My knees, my foot  
My nose



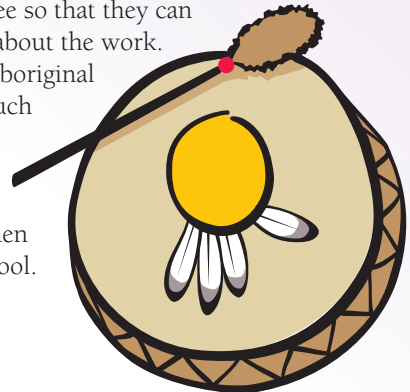


## Suggested Activities - Grade 1

- Play alphabet games like, “What are we eating that begins with ‘B’ (banana, bannock, beans).”
- Help your child make things using scraps, odds and ends, recycled objects and art supplies. For example, use natural materials in your home or yard to make a sculpture.
- Praise your child’s efforts and skills describing what the child has done well. For example, “Your dance steps show that you are listening carefully to the music in the Red River Jig.” (This jig is a Métis dance style)
- Offer to share a story with your child’s school class. Choose a book about a school theme or tell an Aboriginal story you know and explain its connection to Aboriginal cultural teachings.
- Explain to your child why traditional Aboriginal musical instruments such as whistles, flutes, and drums are made at certain times of the year in your community.

## Suggested Activities - Grade 2

- Have your child read something to you each day by finding familiar words on everyday objects such as street signs and items in your home. Help your child choose books that interest him or her suggesting reading material with Aboriginal content.
- Involve your child in shopping trips by having him or her help you write the list of items needed.
- Tell your child you expect his or her best efforts on school work and celebrate your child’s accomplishments. For example, if your child brings home a well done school assignment, display the work for other family members to see so that they can tell your child what they like about the work.
- Teach your child traditional Aboriginal activities or skills you know such as hunting, fishing or bead work and offer to teach them to your child’s classmates.
- Participate with your child when invited to attend events at school.



## Suggested Activities ~ Grade 3

- Talk with your child about the origins of Métis flags including the “infinity” symbol shown on this page.
- On family trips, have your child name a town, river or lake that begins with every letter of the alphabet.
- Take time to sing songs your child has learned in school and build the use of the local Aboriginal language into songs you sing together.
- Create and teach a game with Aboriginal place names such as Winnipeg, Manitoba, Wukusko, or Mitas Lake. Make it a rhyming or alphabet game or make up characters who live in those places. Help your child’s teacher to plan a field trip to one of these places and go along to help.
- Limit the amount of time your child watches TV or plays video and computer games.
- Encourage your child to use their limited TV viewing time wisely by watching educational TV programs for children on the Discovery Channel™ and the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network™.
- Read books or play board games or card games with your child.

## Suggested Activities ~ Grade 4

- Set aside “talk time” each day to discuss school activities and events with your child.
- Set aside a regular time for homework each day.
- Share with your child’s teacher the names of Aboriginal Elders or other people with cultural/spiritual knowledge reflective of your family background who could be invited to share their wisdom with students and school staff. Share with school staff what you know about respectful ways to work with an Elder/other cultural or spiritual advisor. (The school will need your consent for your child’s participation in activities related to spirituality.)
- Teach your child a traditional Aboriginal sports activity such as a Ring and Pin game. Description available on-line at [www.nativetech.org/games/ring&pin.html](http://www.nativetech.org/games/ring&pin.html). Explain the important skills and cultural teachings in the activity.

# Ideas for Parents and Families of Students in Middle School Years

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## Suggested Activities - Grade 5

- Use newspaper pictures and articles to talk about current events and issues with your child.
- Keep a daily diary together about things that are important to you and your child.
- Watch movies together and discuss the stories. Ask your child questions about the movies and talk about what they mean to the child's life.
- Find out what resources and activities your child's school offers such as after-school sports, music, art, cooking programs, tutors, mini university, science or computer club, and encourage your child to participate in them. If you have a skill or musical talent, volunteer to teach it in an after-school program at your child's school.
- Let your child's teacher know that you are willing to share your Aboriginal cultural knowledge such as storytelling, drumming, beading, hoop dancing, making a clothing item for a pow-wow celebration, or making a Métis sash in your child's classroom.



## Suggested Activities - Grade 6

- Encourage your child to learn to cook. Make it a regular event to have the child make one thing for supper by following a simple recipe such as fruit salad or coleslaw.
- Be aware of the issues your child will face as a teenager and talk about how to deal with issues such as peer pressure, sexuality, drinking and drugs, loss of self and/or cultural identity.
- Continue to set aside a regular time for homework. Talk about how important school work is and provide a place where your child can focus on getting homework done. Find out if there is a major assignment or project that you might help with. Assist your child with support from family and friends or get extra help from the teacher or a tutor.
- Start talking about future jobs and careers your child might be interested in and help with finding information in the library or on a computer.
- Offer to teach traditional Aboriginal arts and games at your child's school such as making drums or playing Inuit string games.



## Suggested Activities - Grade 7

- Together, make a calendar that shows when your child's tests, projects and school assignments are due.
- Start talking with your child about the importance of high school graduation.
- Help your child organize time well and finish tasks.
- Be an active member of a school committee involving parents, the school's Aboriginal education planning committee, or help to start one if one does not exist.
- Teach your child about Aboriginal cultural knowledge you have that connects with school learning. For example, explain how math is used in making a traditional tipi or what modern science can learn from traditional Aboriginal knowledge about the relationship of people with the natural environment.

## Suggested Activities - Grade 8

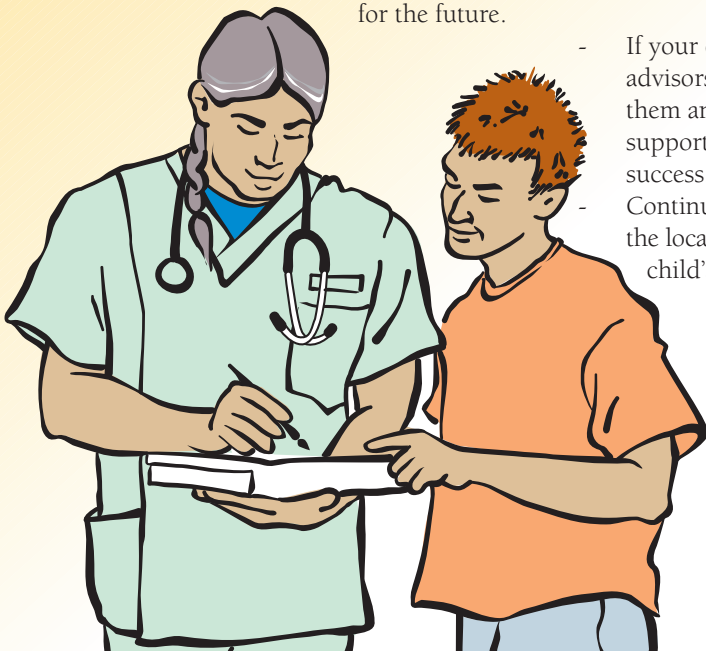
- Tell your child that school work is very important, but allow some independence. For example, when homework is done the child can choose a recreational activity.
- Talk with your child about his or her strengths and interests that may help in choosing courses in high school and beyond. For example, if fishing and hunting are favorite activities, the student might choose courses related to the natural resources, forestry or environment fields.
- Volunteer to help with an Aboriginal play at your child's school. Ask Elders/other people with cultural and/or spiritual expertise and community members to be involved in providing knowledge, helping build the sets, and inviting Aboriginal parents and all community members to a performance of the play.
- Stay involved in your child's activities and know who his or her friends are. Your positive influence helps your child to make good choices and avoid harmful types of peer pressure.

# Ideas for Parents and Families of Students in High School

## Suggested Activities ~ Grade 9

- Set up a routine at the beginning of the school year that helps your child keep up with school work and allows time for friends, hobbies, and sports.
- Stay in touch with your child's teachers outside of formal reporting times so that you know how your child is doing throughout the school year.
- Support your child's involvement in school activities such as sports, drama, science or computer clubs, and volunteer your help with the activities.
- Participate in "Take Our Kids to Work day." (Information available at the following website: <[www.takeourkidstowork.ca](http://www.takeourkidstowork.ca)>.) Help your child's school to connect with Aboriginal organizations that may want to invite Aboriginal students to spend the day with Aboriginal workers.
- Work with your child and the school guidance counsellor to write a plan for the high school years, choosing the best courses for your child's career path based on the child's hopes and dreams for the future.

- If your child has teacher advisors, stay in touch with them and work with them to support your child's school success.
- Continue being involved in the local parent group at your child's school.





## Suggested Activities - Grade 10

- Encourage your child to get brochures about colleges and universities and discuss the choices that are available. Go online together and find websites about educational opportunities after high school.
- Work with your child to put together a career portfolio of best school work such as videos of activities, written pieces, art work and awards.
- Talk to the school guidance counsellor about your child's high school courses to make sure the courses chosen match with the child's future university, college or work plans after graduation.
- Help the school plan a trip for students to learn about Aboriginal history, cultural activities, or Aboriginal people in a variety of roles in the community.
- Let your child focus on getting homework done when the family schedule gets hectic by allowing a break from regular home chores.

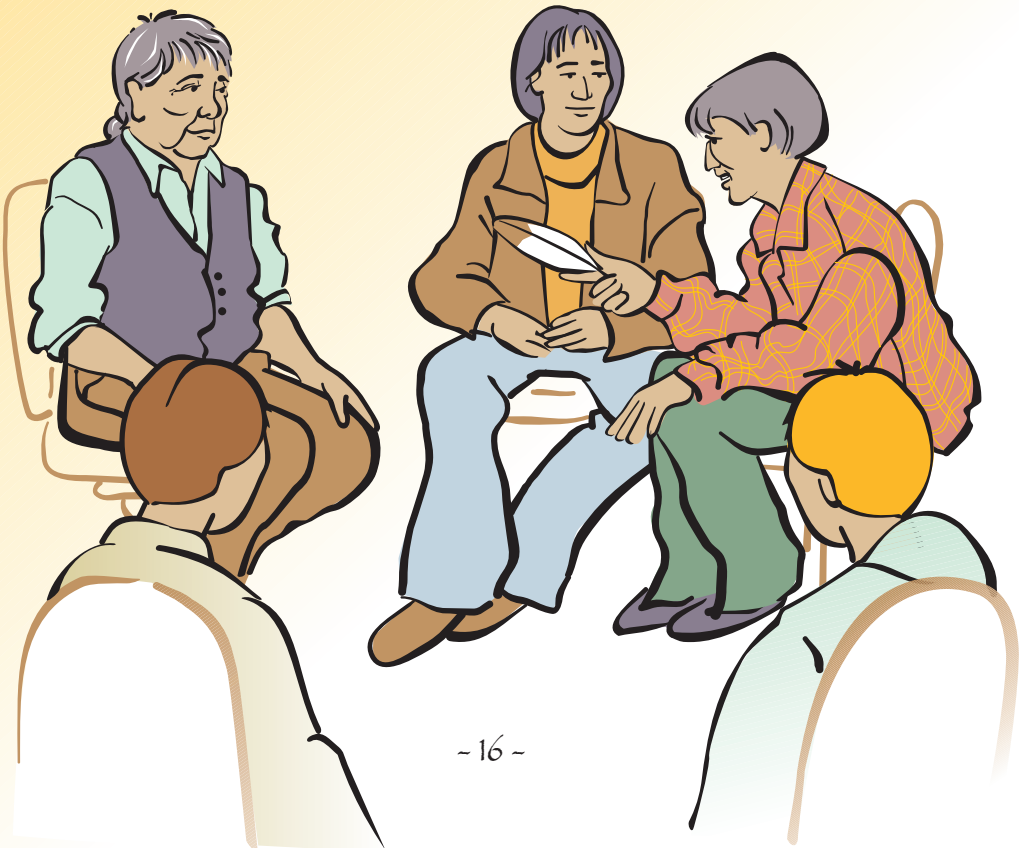
*For information about Manitoba government services and programs for youth (including an Aboriginal Programs section) visit the following website: <[www.mb4youth.ca](http://www.mb4youth.ca)>*

## Suggested Activities - Grade 11

- With your child, talk to teachers and a school guidance counsellor to make sure your child is meeting the course requirements needed to graduate.
- Ask your child's teachers or the school guidance counsellor about tutoring or other support the school can give your child to help with difficult course work.
- Contact the school guidance counsellor and find out what bursaries and scholarships are available to your child.
- Talk with your child about positive ways to deal with social, cultural and political issues that affect Aboriginal people and their identity.
- Talk to your child about Aboriginal people in a career field of interest to the child. For example, Douglas Cardinal - architect; Susan Aglukark - musician; Arnold Asham - business; Murray Sinclair - law; Judith Bartlett - medicine; Verna Kirkness - education; Phil Fontaine, Yvon Dumont - political leadership.

## Suggested Activities - Grade 12

- Contact the school at the start of the school year to get university and college applications. Help your child fill them out and send them in early. Applying for apprenticeship, university, college or training programs a year in advance is strongly recommended. It gives students a better chance of getting into the programs they want.
- Contact Aboriginal funding sources (First Nation band council, Manitoba Metis Federation etc.) for information about funding support your child might get to continue their education after high school. Submit bursary and scholarship applications as early as possible.
- Talk often with your child about school activities and keep encouraging your child to do well in school work. If your child is having problems with course work, ask the teacher about tutoring or extra help for your child.
- Volunteer to be on the committee that helps the graduating class plan a safe graduation event.



# School Partnerships in My Child's Learning

It has already been said in this guide that students need the circle of support provided by parents and school working together. School staff work hard each school year helping students to be successful learners. The following information highlights some school partnerships that support what parents and communities contribute to student success.

## Teachers Assisting Parents and Students

Some of the ways teachers support your efforts to help your child achieve educational success are highlighted below.

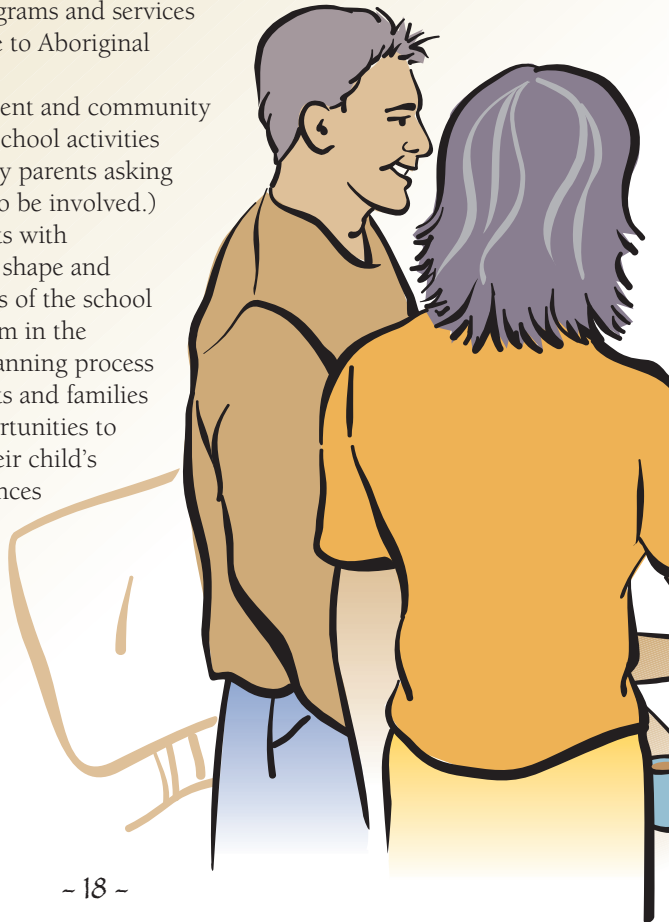
- ◆ Learning as much as possible about the students and families represented in the classroom so that the strengths of the family can be used to support each child's learning
- ◆ Extending personal invitations by phone, notes or e-mail to parents and family members of students welcoming their participation in school activities
- ◆ Greeting parents and families of students personally and offering assistance that makes them feel comfortable in the school
- ◆ Providing opportunities for learning about the cultural heritage of all students in the classroom in positive and respectful ways.
- ◆ Building learning activities on what the children already know by using the experiences and positive values they bring from their families and communities
- ◆ Seeking out information about the varied cultural perspectives and rich knowledge represented among Aboriginal people and helping all students in the classroom to develop an understanding of the perspectives and knowledge of Aboriginal people.
- ◆ Incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into curricula and classroom activities using resources including *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into Curricula: A Resource for Curriculum Developers, Teachers, and Administrators* available online at <<http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/policy/abpersp/>>
- ◆ Inviting parent partnerships that help students achieve learning success

More information about parent/community partnerships with schools is available in the document *School Partnerships: A Guide for Parents, Schools, and Communities* available on-line at <[www.edu.gov.mb.ca](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca)> in the Family and Community Section.

# Principals Assisting Parents and Students

School principals have a key role to play in supporting communication between the school and the parents, families, and communities of students. They are leaders in the process of building partnerships. The following list describes activities of principals that welcome parent, family and community involvement.

- ◆ Leading and involving all staff in creating a school environment where students, parents, families and community members feel welcome and comfortable in the school
- ◆ Informing parents that the school needs information about their child's Aboriginal heritage in order to provide the best learning opportunities for the child (see reference to "Aboriginal Identity Field" on page 7)
- ◆ Providing parents with specific examples of programs and services that are available to Aboriginal students
- ◆ Encouraging parent and community involvement in school activities (Example: Survey parents asking how they want to be involved.)
- ◆ Providing parents with opportunities to shape and support the goals of the school by involving them in the yearly School Planning process
- ◆ Providing parents and families with many opportunities to participate in their child's learning experiences



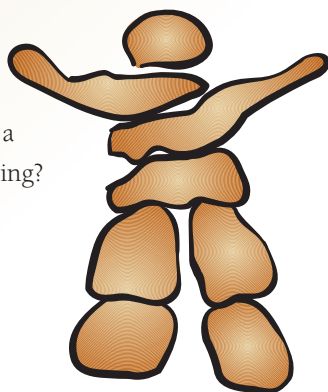
- ◆ Providing a place in the school where parents and families can get information about community resources
- ◆ Providing teachers with professional development opportunities that help to create effective partnerships with parents, families, and communities
- ◆ Participating in professional learning activities about Aboriginal education and cultural awareness
- ◆ Providing Aboriginal students with opportunities to see their cultural heritage represented and celebrated in the school through visits and presentations by their parents, Aboriginal Elders/other people with cultural knowledge, and community members
- ◆ Understanding stereotypes of Aboriginal people in visual displays and learning resources and eliminating these stereotypes
- ◆ Including Aboriginal perspectives in the curricula taught throughout the school
- ◆ Inviting parents, families and community members to help with school improvement plans and activities





# What Questions Can I Ask About My Child's Learning?

1. Is my child meeting grade level outcomes and learning expectations?  
If not, what needs to be done to help my child be successful?
2. What are my child's strengths and challenges in specific subject areas?
3. Is my child participating in any programming in addition to regular classroom activities?
4. How can I support my child's learning at home?
5. Does my child complete assignments well and on time?
6. Does my child attend classes regularly?
7. Is my child getting along well with other students in the classroom and school?
8. Are there extra-curricular opportunities, programs, or services available to my child?
9. Is there information I can provide as a parent that will help my child's learning?



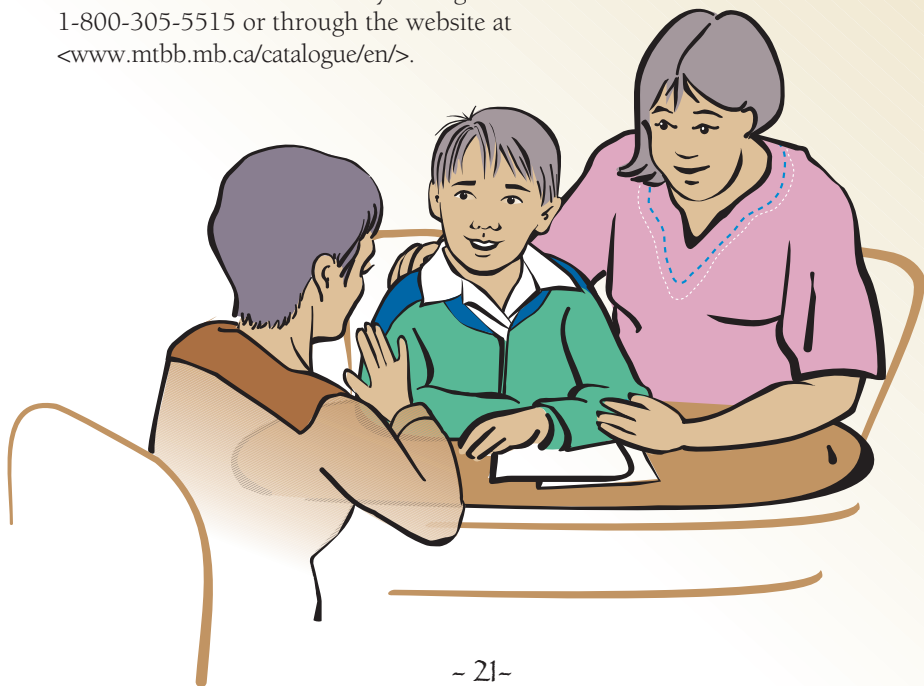


# What Should I Do If An Issue Arises?

During your child's school years there may be a time when you have a concern and you need to speak to someone who can help to solve an issue about your child's education.

The person you contact first about an issue will depend on who needs to deal with the concern. For example, if your child's teacher can help solve an issue, the teacher is the person to speak to first. If other members of the school team (resource teacher, guidance counsellor, school principal) have a role to play, you can ask for their help. At times, the involvement of the school division student services administrator or superintendent may be needed but it should be possible to resolve most concerns at the school level.

Helpful information is also available in the document *Working Together: A Guide to Positive Problem Solving for Schools, Families, and Communities*. The document is on-line at <[www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/documents.html](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/documents.html)>. Print copies (stock number 80468) are also available for purchase from the Manitoba Text Book Bureau by calling toll-free 1-800-305-5515 or through the website at <[www.mtbb.mb.ca/catalogue/en/](http://www.mtbb.mb.ca/catalogue/en/)>.



# Other Sources of Help and Information

Following is a list of resources that can give you more information.

- ◆ Your local advisory council for school leadership or your school's parent group
- ◆ Your local school, school division office, school board
- ◆ Your local Aboriginal Education Authority

## **Aboriginal Circle of Educators (ACE)**

Telephone: 204-333-9805

Website: < [www.aboriginalcircleofeducators.ca](http://www.aboriginalcircleofeducators.ca) >

## **Manitoba Association of Parent Councils (MAPC)**

Telephone: 204-956-1770 in Winnipeg

Website: <[www.mapc.mb.ca](http://www.mapc.mb.ca)>

## **Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS)**

Telephone: 204-487-7972 in Winnipeg

Website: <[www.mass.mb.ca](http://www.mass.mb.ca)>

## **Manitoba Association of School Trustees (MAST)**

Telephone: 204-233-1595 in Winnipeg

Website: <[www.mast.mb.ca](http://www.mast.mb.ca)>

## **Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (MECY)**

Telephone: 204-945-6875 in Winnipeg;

1-800-282-8069 toll free (Extension 6875)

Website: <[www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/index.html](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/index.html)>

## **Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Center (MFNERC)**

Telephone: 204-940-7020 in Winnipeg;

1-877-247-7020 toll free

Website: <[www.mfnerc.org](http://www.mfnerc.org)>



**Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF)**

Telephone: 204-586-8474 in Winnipeg

Website: <[www.manitobametisfederation.com](http://www.manitobametisfederation.com)>

**Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS)**

Telephone: 204-888-7961 in Winnipeg

Website: <[www.mbteach.org](http://www.mbteach.org)>

**Student Services Administrators Association  
of Manitoba (SSAAM)**

Telephone: 204-857-7861

Website: <[www.ssaam.mb.ca](http://www.ssaam.mb.ca)>

