Do you know the **FACES** of your learners: students, teachers, leaders and *parents*? Each parent and teacher contributes to each student’s individual achievement; each class contributes to school targets; each school contributes to system targets; and, each system contributes to the provincial targets. Having every parent wanting to know how his/her child is doing and *how to help*, is where it starts. Everyone within the system must have a ‘line-of-sight’ through the data, to every student and parent to make it happen.

Looking at the Parameters of System and School Improvement (detailed in the sidebar), no school or system improvement work progresses smoothly unless Parameters 1 and 14: shared beliefs and understandings and shared responsibility and accountability for each and every student – the bookends – are in place. The parameters are the foundational conditions of all system and school improvement work. Importantly, to increase the probability for improvement, there must be authentic parental and community involvement (Parameter 12) that goes way beyond the typical ‘parent engagement.’
Parents as partners

Effective system and school leadership teams work toward establishing strong community-home-school relationships. Epstein (1995) indicates that parent and community involvement increases all students’ achievement. Schools build strong relationships with parents by clearly communicating expectations and keeping them informed about their children’s progress. School leaders and teachers keep parents informed and involved in their approach to teaching, learning behaviours and skills in every subject area [they explain the “what” and the “why”]. Parents, caregivers and the broader community are helped to understand how they can support their children and are continuously ‘invited-in’ to provide input into annual system and school plans for improvement. Then, when these plans are drafted, they are shared once again. Parents and the broader community are seen as partners at decision-making tables together, focused on growth and achievement for ALL students (Sharratt & Harild, 2015). Parents and community members must be included as active participants in system and school improvement processes, from the classroom level onwards.

Involvement is value-add

School leaders interrogate data, discern directions, model expected practices, monitor change and adapt as change unfolds to ensure optimal conditions for student success. They are listeners, they engage in dialogue and participate as learners alongside parents and members of the broader community. They know and value the key stakeholders – teachers, leaders, students and parents who have important roles in improving student learning outcomes. By being open and attentive to the many voices at play, school leaders draw widely on parents’ expertise and are better informed to paint the clear horizons for them to bring about change in practice (Pam Betts, Executive Director, Brisbane Catholic Schools, In Personal Communication, July 28, 2017).

The 14 Parameters of System and School Improvement

1. Shared Beliefs and Understandings
   • All students can achieve high standards given the right time and the right support
   • All teachers can teach to high standards given time and the right assistance
   • High expectations and early and ongoing intervention are essential
   • All leaders, teachers and students can articulate what they do and why they lead, teach and learn the way they do.
   (Adapted from Hill & Crevola, 1999)
2. Embedded Knowledgeable Others
3. Quality Assessment Informs Instruction
4. Principal as Lead Learner
5. Early and Ongoing Intervention
6. Case Management Approach
7. Focused Professional Learning at Staff Meetings
8. In-School Meetings – Collaborative Assessment of Student Work
9. Book Rooms of Levelled Books and Multi-Modal Resources
10. Allocation of System and School Budgets for Learning
11. Collaborative Inquiry – a Whole System Approach
12. Parental and Community Involvement
13. Cross-Curricular Literacy Connections
14. Shared Responsibility and Accountability


Questions are key

Parents and the broader community are important stakeholders having roles critical in students’ success. Most don’t know the questions to ask their children, or how to approach and ask teachers when they want to know more about how their children are doing in school. Many are nervous, because they don’t have the vocabulary. One answer is to give them a script to overcome reluctance or discomfort. Recently, I discussed the “Five Questions for Parents to Use with Teachers” with colleagues in Manitoba.
These questions are closely related to those asked of students in Learning Walks & Talks except they are addressed to the teacher:
1. What is my child learning?
2. How is s/he doing?
3. How do you know (how s/he is doing)?
4. How can s/he improve?
5. What supports can I provide, and can you provide, if s/he is struggling? When will we check-in again?

In large Australian school districts where I work extensively, system and school leaders have determined a need to design five more specific, ‘deliberate pause’ questions to assist parents to engage with their child’s learning:
1. What did you learn today?
2. How did you go/do?
3. What did you do if you didn’t understand?
4. How can you improve on your learning?
5. What are you most proud of?

Using these questions creates opportunities for informative conversations with their children. It provides a script for discussions with their child’s teacher (in personal communications with Tosca Galluzzo, Sydney Catholic Schools). Collaboratively designing the right questions to ask is another way to change school culture, support parental involvement and build collective efficacy.

5 Questions to Students are Linked to Assessment ‘For’ and ‘As’ Learning:
1. What are you learning? Why?
2. How are you doing?
3. How do you know?
4. How can you improve?
5. Where do you go for help?

(Sharratt & Fullan, 2012)

**Precision-in-practice**

Related to Parameter 12, precision-in-practice is demonstrated when teachers and leaders know how, and then actually help parents identify the need for, and build a culture where learning thrives in the home. One of the greatest impacts that parents can have is to lead learning in the home, what Quinn (2016) calls Family-Led Learning. A common understanding of the language of schooling, such as Learning Goals and Success Criteria, is not only important for parents’ engagement in their children’s learning but also for empowering parents themselves to improve their own resourcefulness (Clinton, Hattie & Dixon, 2007).

What else do parents need in order to create and lead this learning environment in the home? Educators need to listen to parents to understand their starting points, and then coach parents in differentiated ways to be active participants in their child’s learning, providing them with:
- An understanding of the goals of school and the school improvement plan
- A knowledge of 21st century competencies needed by their children in adulthood
- Visible and specific opportunities to witness and understand the continuum of learning and curriculum expectations from K-12 (Sharratt & Planche, 2016).

Taking time to consider what teachers and school leaders can do to harness the power of parents and communities as equal partners in educating all students is ‘Precision-in-Practice.’ Including parents – the first teachers – within the 14th Parameter: ‘Shared Responsibility and Accountability’ engages and empowers them to make student growth and achievement a common goal.

---

**Dr. Lyn Sharratt** coordinates the doctoral internship program in Leadership and Policy at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Lyn is the former Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction Services in the York Region District School Board, a large Canadian school district, where she and her curriculum team analyzed assessment data and developed a comprehensive literacy improvement program, which they launched with the cooperation of senior leadership, principals, and over 9000 teachers. [http://lynsharratt.com](http://lynsharratt.com)