

## What is Meaningful Consultation?

When important decisions are being made about your child's education program, you have a right to expect schools to "meaningfully consult" with you. What does this mean?

Adapted from BC Council of Administrators in Inclusive Education. *An Ecosystem of Support: A Guide to Meaningful Consultation*. 2024.

- ▶ Meaningful consultation means families, along with their children, are key decision-makers in education decisions.
- ▶ It involves transparent communications. It means being open about what is needed, what has been tried, what is working and what is not working, what else is possible ...
- ▶ It involves *ongoing* conversations about what will help students, versus a one-time information drop. It requires patience and commitment from everyone involved.
- ▶ It means taking the time to make sure that everyone feels informed and knows what options are available.
- ▶ It is about finding solutions that will lead to the best outcomes for students and their families.

If you are participating in meaningful consultations, you will feel heard, valued, and confident that your input will make a difference.

Meaningful Consultation IS ...	Meaningful Consultation IS NOT ...
<b>Inclusive.</b> It actively involves families in education decisions and planning with school teams.	<b>Telling families about a decision.</b> Families should not be brought in and told what the school is going to do.
<b>Open.</b> People will be honest. Everyone’s opinions will be welcome. Discussions will be cooperative.	<b>A “nice to have.”</b> Consultation isn’t a quick meeting to tick off a requirement. Meaningful consultation makes programs and services for students more meaningful. It makes schools more relevant. It is invaluable for school communities. It is essential, not optional.
<b>Transparent.</b> Information will be shared clearly. Everyone will understand why and when decisions have been made.	<b>About “one side winning.”</b> The focus must be on finding solutions, not who is right and who is wrong. When you find outcomes that are in the best interest of students, everyone wins! That must be the goal.
<b>Ongoing.</b> Consultation won’t happen just once. Parents should have regular input into their children’s education programs.	

What makes meaningful consultation work?

- ▶ **Including student voice and participation as much as possible.** Students learn to advocate for their own needs when they are given chances to share their thoughts and opinions. Students know their own goals best. They know what they want to learn to do better. Students can help direct their education journeys in ways that match their age and developmental abilities.
- ▶ **Valuing the expertise of families.** Families have unique understandings and insights that cannot be replaced. They love their children. They know their children best. Building on their knowledge is key.
- ▶ **Including everyone as equal partners.** All participants should feel free to share their perspectives. Everyone brings information that is important.
- ▶ **Fostering mutual respect.**
  - The needs and rights of students should be at the centre of all school-family efforts.
  - Parents’ rights and their fundamental role in their child’s life should be recognized.
  - School staff should be able to speak openly about what they can do, as well as any barriers that might need to be addressed. They play a key role in planning and implementing supports.
  - Everyone should be positive about working together in the best possible ways.
  - And each family and students’ unique identity, culture, traditions and values must be respected as the foundation for students’ success in school and throughout their lives.