

Part 1: Parent Engagement Strategy

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Active & Sustainable School Travel Parent Engagement Strategy & Action Toolkit (DRAFT)

Part 1: Parent Engagement Strategy

Introduction

Parents and caregivers are the decision-makers regarding children's independent mobility to and from school. Building parental support for active and sustainable school travel (ASST) is an important channel to shift the current car-culture surrounding the school commute. The City of Hamilton, in partnership with school boards, not-for-profit organizations, and community members form the Hamilton ASST Hub. The Hub is guided by the Hamilton ASST Charters: Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board ([HWCDSB ASST Charter](#)) and Hamilton Wentworth District School Board ([HWDSB ASST Charter](#)), which serve to inform the long-term commitment to providing support, resources, and training towards ASST.

The Active and Sustainable School Travel (ASST) – Parent Engagement Strategy is part of Hamilton's comprehensive approach **to facilitate a measurable shift in school travel to more walking and wheeling, and fewer car trips.**¹ More students, parents, and workers using ASST means fewer cars on the road, less pollution, improved safety, and increased physical activity.

This strategy was developed with support from the City of Hamilton, Healthy Environments Division and Transportation Planning Divisions, the Hamilton ASST Hub, and parents from HWCDSB and HWDSB. Project funding was provided by the Provincial Government's Ontario Active School Travel Fund, and by the City of Hamilton, Healthy Environments Division.

Background

In the Hamilton, there has been a steady decline in walking and wheeling to (58.3% in 1986 to 36% in 2016), and from (60.9% in 1986 to 41.8% in 2016) school over the past 25 years as children are increasingly dropped off (8.7% in 1986 to 27.9% in 2016) and picked up (5% in 1986 to 19.6% in 2016) by car.² This increase in car travel to school in the GTHA has added significant car traffic volume to roads during the morning peak period. Now schools are the second biggest car trip generator in the morning commute forming 22% of morning peak traffic, second only to workplaces, in the GTHA.³

¹ Smart Commute Hamilton. (2015). Active and Sustainable School Travel. Retrieved from <https://smartcommute.ca/hamilton/schools/>

² Metrolinx. (2018). School travel in the City of Hamilton: A report on trends. Retrieved from http://smartcommute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/SchoolTravelReport_Hamilton2016.pdf

³ Miller, E.J. (2001). The Greater Toronto Area Travel Demand Modelling System. Retrieved from www.dmg.utoronto.ca/pdf/reports/2001to2005/qtamod2v1.pdf

In October 2015, City of Hamilton, HWCDSB and HWDSB each signed an Active and Sustainable School Travel Charter. The goal of the Charters is to increase community impact and accelerate current initiatives by promising commitment, accountability, and resources towards ASST. The ASST Charters⁴ consist of five principles, each with a rudimentary list of practical applications. ASST Charter principles four and five are relevant to developing an ASST-Parent Engagement Strategy:

- Principle 4: Collaborate with all partners for a comprehensive approach to planning, implementing, and evaluating ASST.
- Principle 5: The community takes a leadership role in creating a culture where ASST is the norm where we live, learn, work, and play.

On November 16, 2017, the City of Hamilton's Board of Health Report recommendations directed the City of Hamilton to work with the HWCDSB and HWDSB to develop an ASST Action Plan and Implementation Strategy.⁵ The Hamilton ASST Hub's Action Plan and Implementation Strategy has had several iterations since its inception in 2000. In June 2016, the Hub hosted an ASST Sustainability Workshop to help guide ASST work. One of the five priorities identified at the workshop was to **develop and implement an ASST Parent Engagement Strategy**.

This ASST-Parent Engagement Strategy was informed by a thorough background review and stakeholder interviews, and guidance from City Staff, the Hamilton ASST-Parent Engagement Sub-Committee, the HWCDSB and HWDSB, and other Hamilton parents and partners.

Objectives

The Parent Engagement Strategy and complimentary ASST Action Toolkit have been developed with emphasis on the following objectives:

1. Increase awareness of HWCDSB and HWDSB parents and caregivers about the importance of ASST.
2. Increase the number of HWCDSB and HWDSB parents and caregivers who are engaged in ASST initiatives and assist in their child's active school travel.
3. Increase capacity of HWCDSB and HWDSB parents and caregivers to become ASST leaders/champions.

Principles of Engagement

Parental capacity to participate in and to lead ASST initiatives contributes to Hamilton's overall goal of increasing children's active school travel and decreasing sedentary travel. Increasing parental involvement in ASST initiatives will be facilitated through a variety of engagement strategies. A key lever to support a school travel culture shift is

⁴ City of Hamilton. (2015). Hamilton Active & Sustainable School Transportation Charter. Retrieved from <https://smartcommute.ca/hamilton/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2014/07/HWCDSB.pdf> and <https://smartcommute.ca/hamilton/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2014/07/HWDSB.pdf>

⁵ City of Hamilton. (2015). Active and Sustainable School Transportation Charter BOH15006. Retrieved from <https://pub-hamilton.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=116752>

the [School Travel Planning](#) (STP) process. STP is a community-based approach to increase the number of students and adults choosing active school travel. Parents are key community stakeholders in this process and the ASST-Parent Engagement Strategy may further help parents to contribute to this process.

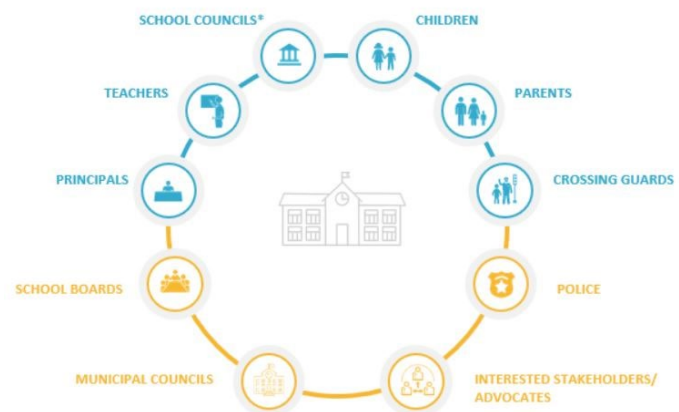
The City of Hamilton's Public Engagement Charter⁶ outlines the core principles to engagement designed to set the tone and direction for successful community engagement. The same seven principles will apply to this Parent Engagement Strategy and are as follows:

- Transparency and Trust
- Accountability and Action
- Inclusion and Diversity
- Create Opportunities for Active Participation
- Collaboration, Co-operation and Shared Purpose
- Ongoing Engagement and Open Communication
- Learning, Reflection and Evaluation
- Capacity for Engagement

Partnerships

While this strategy will focus on parent engagement, collaboration and partnerships with other stakeholder groups will be critical to achieve behavioural change across the City.

The Hamilton ASST Hub is one example of a network of local stakeholders committed to promoting and supporting walking, wheeling, busing, and other sustainable transportation modes to school. Additional groups to partner with may include organized neighbourhood groups, faith communities, local businesses and business improvement areas, not-for-profit organizations/charities (local, provincial, national), school boards, City Council and more.



Key Messages and Target Audience

The target audience for this strategy is City of Hamilton parents/caregivers of school-aged children. This group includes diverse families such as immigrants; urban, suburban, and rural; single-parents; persons with disabilities; and low-, mid-, and high-income families. Parents are busy, and for many of them, practicing ASST may present challenges to overcome.

⁶ City of Hamilton. (2014). Public Engagement Charter. Retrieved from <https://www.hamilton.ca/sites/default/files/media/browser/2015-11-18/public-engagement-charter.pdf>

Based on research conducted through the project’s background review, the Hamilton ASST Parent Engagement Subcommittee, and Metrolinx’s parent engagement research, the following key messages were developed:

- Parents largely understand the benefits of ASST, but often feel that it is less convenient than driving. Communicate that practicing ASST can be flexible – parents walk or bike their kids to school once a week, or walk a block to the school, or walk their kids to the nearest bus stop. Try the following message below:
 - ASST can fit any lifestyle! There are lots of ways that you can participate, like walking or wheeling to school once a week, parking and walking a block to the school, or taking transit together! Every small step can make a difference.
 - You do not need to **always** practice active transportation to support active transportation! The Toolkit has actions for you to help your school community become more ASST friendly for you and other families in your community travelling to and from school, and beyond.
- Facts and figures are not always the best way to communicate the advantages of ASST. Messages need to reach parents on an emotional level – consider the safety, health, and environmental risks associated with car travel. This can be done by mixing facts with personal or hypothetical experiences. See the following examples below:
 - **Safety** – Less cars on the road lead to safer streets, and safer kids. We have all witnessed a close call on school property. Walking and biking to school with your kids teaches them safety skills that they will practice for life.
 - **Health** – Children in Hamilton are not receiving the amount of physical activity that they need to be healthy. If more people walked, wheeled, or walked a block to the school, kids would be happier and healthier!
 - **Environment** – The City of Hamilton has declared a climate emergency. Schools are the second biggest car trip generator in the morning commute,³ which results in higher greenhouse gas emissions and more air pollution around schools and the playgrounds where children play. By using sustainable modes like transit, biking, or walking, you can support a cleaner environment for your family.

Engagement and Communication Tactics

During the ASST-Parent Engagement Strategy development, a number of engagement and communications tactics (see **Table 1**) were identified to help achieve the strategy goal and objectives. The tactics reflect best practice research and input from the Hamilton ASST-Parent Engagement Subcommittee.

Table 1: ASST-Parent Engagement Strategy Tactics

Engagement Tactic	What it is	Why use it	Materials	Implementation Considerations
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Engagement Tactic	What it is	Why use it	Materials	Implementation Considerations
Sign up for Facilitator Training for School Travel Planning	Parents can be trained as School Travel Planning facilitators	Parents can facilitate STP's at their child's school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STP trainers and training materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Hamilton would facilitate this for interested, motivated parents
Have a permanent ASST position on Parent Council	There would be a parent assigned to ASST initiatives within each school. They would be a point person for ASST on Parent Council to champion ASST initiatives and provide information	ASST parent will ensure that ASST is top of mind at the school and in discussions at Parent Council meetings and within the school. ASST parent can ensure that ASST is a part of every school newsletter, Promote event days, facilitate conversations about ASST and will champion ASST at the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A position needs to be created for ASST on Parent Councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Board will need to approve and mandate this change
Have a Permanent ASST position on the Parent Involvement Committee	There would be a parent assigned to ASST initiatives so that the issue of ASST stays on the agenda at PIC meetings. They would be a point person for ASST on Parent Involvement Council to champion ASST initiatives and provide information	This parent would champion ASST, enhance ASST awareness, and engage parents in the entire board. Role of PIC members in HWDSB: https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/elementary/get-involved/pic/ For HWCDSB: https://www.hwcdsb.ca/board/policies/?fileID=349847	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A position needs to be created on the PIC committee at both school boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both School Boards need to approve and mandate an ASST position

Engagement Tactic	What it is	Why use it	Materials	Implementation Considerations
Create a Mom /Dad on-line chat group (Facebook groups)	An informal on-line parent group where ASST issues and initiatives can be discussed and shared among interested/motivated parents.	Provides an opportunity for engaged parents to have a support network and to share their ASST ideas, challenges, successes, experiences, lessons learned etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to internet, the Facebook group and the ability to invite other interested parent champions to the group • Key connectors can keep the conversation going • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Facebook group needs to be started • Interested parents will be invited to join the on-line group
Pop-Up Events	Setting up an information booth at events or places parents may be gathering, for example, school open houses, meet the teacher nights or other school-based gatherings	To reach and inform a higher number of parents by meeting them where they are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Table and chairs • Promotional cards • Roll-up banner • Incentives (e.g., bike lights) • Physical copies of toolkit • Other ASST information or City marketing materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact location to determine a date and time for the event • Bring materials required for event • Have 1-2 people engaging parents at time of the event
Presentations	Attending school council meetings/other organized groups and presenting the key messages outlined in the Strategy, providing more information on the toolkit, and allowing the opportunity for attendees to ask any questions regarding ASST	<p>To engage a group of parents by meeting them where they are to accommodate their schedules</p> <p>To build capacity with parents at a specific school(s) to promote the toolkit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of talking points to cover • Promotional cards • Physical/digital copy of the toolkit • PowerPoint presentation, laptop, projector (optional) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the parent/school/community group to determine a date and time for the presentation • Bring materials required for event • Have minimum 1 presenter in attendance

Engagement Tactic	What it is	Why use it	Materials	Implementation Considerations
Expand our current Core group membership email list	This email list will keep parents connected to each other and connected to the City staff.	Parents will be able to stay connected to like-minded parents with the same desire to further the ASST agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List so parents can sign-up to be on the email list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Someone to manage the email list and send out information items etc.
Fun ASST Events (i.e. Glowride, Bike Rodeo, Halloween Parade)	Fun, family events engaging parents and their child(ren) in ASST activities	To engage parents and their children in ASST activities and create an opportunity to highlight the Toolkit/need for ASST parent champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of talking points to cover Promotional cards Other materials (will vary depending on event) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine target audience, where and when the event will be held Organize schedule and logistics Create promotional materials and share them Leverage community partnerships/networks when possible
Incentives	Offering a gift in exchange for participating in ASST or implementing key actions from the Toolkit. Can be targeted to parents, children or both (i.e. discounts at a local bike or fitness shop/increase chances to win a bike/scooter, chance to win free gym equipment for the class, chance to win a walking fieldtrip to a local museum, etc.	<p>To increase participation in ASST activities or actions</p> <p>To broaden social media reach through likes/retweets/shares in exchange for a chance to win prizes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider who the incentive is for, and what action you are trying to incentivize Create a list of possible incentives and choose ones that you think will be effective and work with your budget Promote the incentive to your audience using any of the communications tools above, or more direct means if the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try to leverage partnerships or seek corporate sponsorship if you are tight for resources Think about whether many smaller incentives or one large incentive is more effective for your purposes

Engagement Tactic	What it is	Why use it	Materials	Implementation Considerations
			audience includes students (i.e. school announcements)	
Start a Movement	Parent Engagement is a newer term, but engagement in school travel planning is a well-established concept. Schools that have been successful have believed in the importance of active and safe school travel and treated it as a movement, just like the eco-schools, healthy kids and smoking cessation movements	<p>This creates parent buy-in at a level that does not make ASST seem like a chore, but rather a necessity that is important and rewarding.</p> <p>People want to feel like their volunteer activities are improving their community and children's well-being and being part of a movement can help.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enthusiastic parent champions, school and city support and the toolkit to help raise awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivated parents need to be connected to start the movement. This can be a Facebook or email connection or informal connections with other parents at school or in their neighbourhood.

Potential opportunities to engage parents about ASST are listed below:

- When there is construction in the school's neighbourhood that may impact routes to school
- School Council/Home and School Association/Parent Involvement Committee Meetings
- School events, including
 - Open House
 - Meet the Teacher Night
 - Kindergarten and Grade 9 Orientation
- Beginning of the school year/new year
- Walking and wheeling event days such as Bike Month

The **Table 2** outlines the different opportunities to engages parents, and the different engagement tactics that can be used for each.

Table 2: ASST-Parent Engagement Tactics and Potential Engagement Opportunities

Engagement	When to Engage Parents
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Tactics	Construction	Bike Month	Parent Meetings	School Events	Start of School Year/New Year
STP Facilitator Training			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Permanent ASST Position on School Council			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Permanent ASST Position on PIC			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mom/Dad on-line chat group			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pop-Up Events	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Presentations			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Parent Champion Email List			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fun ASST Events		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Incentives	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Start a Movement		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

When asked for examples of effective engagement strategies, parents highlighted the following:

- Fun school events (e.g., Bike Week and Wear Yellow Day)
- Seeing messages on multiple communications outlets
- Learning through student programs/engagement

The following communications tactics can be used to compliment any of the engagement tactics listed above, or used alone to promote online access to the ASST Action Toolkit for parents:

Table 3: ASST-Parent Engagement Strategy Communication Tactics

Communication Tactic	What it is	Why use it	Preparation	Implementation Considerations
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Communication Tactic	What it is	Why use it	Preparation	Implementation Considerations
Promotional Cards	Printed resource outlining benefits to ASST, key messages, and where to find the toolkit that is easy to distribute to parents	<p>To have the flexibility to promote from wherever (handing out in person or leaving in community spaces)</p> <p>To give parents a convenient way to take home the information to reference later.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft the text you would like to include on the card • Determine if the card should be one-sided or double-sided based on size, amount of text, flow, and cost. • Communicate with the Marketing Department to create the cards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to include information that will not go out of date (unless you need to promote the date of an event) to avoid wasting extra cards • Always direct the reader to an online destination on the card with an easy to read link address
Posters/Roll-Up Banners	Printed resource outlining the benefits to ASST, key messages, and where access the toolkit that can be posted in different locations. Digital posters can be displayed on televisions in City and School Board facilities	<p>To increase reach geographically by posting in community spaces around the City</p> <p>To have a larger presence in a community space or at an event</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft the text you would like to include on the card • Determine the size of posters/roll-up banners, and how many to print • Communicate with the Marketing Department to create designs and print 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compile a list of community spaces that you would like to promote in (i.e. libraries, recreation centres, BIA windows, etc.) to know how many you will need, and to consider the amount of staff time required to post them • Reach out to local businesses and schools to take a poster
Digital Communication	Key messages shared digitally on popular social media outlets from	To get broader reach and provide direct links to websites and the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the social media accounts available for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to include media on all posts (i.e. images or

Communication Tactic	What it is	Why use it	Preparation	Implementation Considerations
	the City and School Boards (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) and housing the Toolkit online on the City and School Board websites	online Toolkit	<p>you to use, and what their limitations are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft text for posts including shortened links to the online Toolkit/other relevant information • Send to relevant staff to schedule and post 	<p>videos) to increase the number of interactions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tag other relevant partners to expand your reach (i.e. through re-posts) • Refer to the key messages to help draft your posts

With respect to the communications tactics, specific areas where they may be posted or shared include

- City and School Board websites
- School communications (i.e. newsletters, social media, emails, agenda, etc.)
- Social Media
- Community Centres and Libraries
- Places of Worship

When asked where parents hear about new programs or projects, they highlighted the following:

- Through conversations with other parents and students on the school yard
- From their School Council/Home and School Representatives
- Posters in community centres, libraries, Boys and Girls Club, etc.
- Places of Worship
- School communications (e.g., website, social media, newsletter, emails, meeting agendas)

Evaluation

Evaluation Rationale and Purpose

To increase and encourage the involvement of parents/caregivers in active and sustainable school travel for children, the Active and Sustainable School Travel (ASST) Parent Engagement Strategy Pilot will be implemented in 6 Catholic elementary schools and 3 public elementary schools between September to December 2019. The ASST

Parent Engagement Strategy aims to engage parents in hopes to have more children walking and wheeling to school. A formative evaluation will be conducted to ensure the strategy activities are feasible, appropriate and acceptable before full scale implementation.¹

This evaluation aims to improve the implementation and design of the strategy, maximizing its likelihood of successfully achieving the desired outcomes. Within the 4 month pilot, different components of the Parent Engagement Strategy and its tools will be piloted and evaluated to document the extent of its acceptability by the parents. The evaluation will employ a mixed-methods approach that includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The results of the evaluation will provide a better understanding of the needs of the parents/caregivers in shifting the current car-culture surrounding the school commute and provide recommendations for strategy improvement. For the purposes of this document, the complete evaluation design has not been included, but it is available upon request.