# More Chances with Parents

## Contacts

**Primary target group:** #School leaders, #policy makers #parents

**Country:** # The Netherlands

**Tags:** #parental involvement #PTA

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Dutch schools expect parents to regularly attend and assist the school of their children and to support the children at home with schoolwork and school life.

The project named “More Chances With Parents” (Meer Kansen Met Ouders) is meant to connect parents with their children’s school with the objective of helping and supporting their children with their education. School-parent relationships are essential in preventing absence and dropout of students.

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![Diagram](image)

Ouders = Parents, Kind = Child, Prestatie = Achievement

**Keywords:** parental involvement

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**Links**

- [http://www.hco.nl/samen-met-ouders](http://www.hco.nl/samen-met-ouders)

**Links within the ESL+ platform:**
The Hague is a multi-ethnic city. Over 50% of the 500,000 inhabitants are non-Dutch from origin. This includes second and third generation descendants of migrants. The discourse on school–parent relationships in most countries of origin differ from the Dutch discourse.

Dutch schools expect parents to regularly attend and assist the school of their children and to support the children at home with schoolwork and school life. Many parents are used to uphold a hierarchical distance concerning school life and personal life (sometimes because of their migrant background, but certainly not always).

This difference in discourse causes misunderstanding and disinterest between schools and parents. Parents do not understand and act as a partner of school; schools are disappointed and misinterpret this behaviour as disinterest of the parents in school. Since school-parent relationships are essential in preventing absence and dropout, the City council felt responsible to address this problem.

The starting point was not an action-oriented analysis, but a scientific analysis of the problem and root causes. This was conducted by a local institute for higher education. The results showed the difference in discourse as mentioned above. This was discussed with schools, civil servants and the scientist. A project was developed in common agreement and on scientific base. This project appeared a major turning point in school-parent relationships at participating schools, and over the next 10 years more than 60 primary schools and more than 10 secondary schools participated in this project. The project is named “More Chances With Parents” (Meer Kansen Met Ouders).

The program focuses on schools as a starting point for changing relationships. Participating schools undergo a project on changing the culture within the school. The culture-change program focused on the images, goals and roles the schools wish to see parents in. Complaints on parents and their ‘bad’ behaviour were explicitly not the starting point; you yourself are the key to change. The project consisted of team-analysis, -trainings, the formation of an internal work-group on parental involvement, including a member of the management of the school, and the appointment of a parent-coordinator. This person was responsible of making a school policy plan on parental involvement, in cooperation with the working group, and where possible, with parents. The project was guided by the scientific institution. After two years a mental change was constituted and action plan delivered. The result was a more open attitude from school to the parents, which resulted in more and better relationships between parents and school. Parents felt welcome, and learned at school what their roles of supporter
of the school could consist of, and this was highly appreciated. All the schools who participated in this programme have a highly active parent population both regarding institutional activities as well as regarding their involvement in their children’s school-life.

Research: [https://www.dehaagsehogeschool.nl/onderzoek/lectoraten/jeugd-en-opvoeding](https://www.dehaagsehogeschool.nl/onderzoek/lectoraten/jeugd-en-opvoeding)

**Keywords**: migrant background, relationship schools and parents

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<th>• What were the main characteristics, outlines of the challenge</th>
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| Heldring VMBO is a secondary school for basic theoretical and practical vocational training in The Hague. It is one of 96 secondary school locations in The Hague. The population of the school mainly consists of children with a non-Western background. The Social Economic Status (SES) of students, parents and their social environment is on average low.

The students come from the whole area, with travel time varying from 10 minutes to more an hour by public transport. At other secondary schools this travel barrier prevents physical involvements of parents in school life of their children. Heldring VMBO broke this barrier, en created intense relationships with parents. This leads to parental involvement in school life of the children at school and in their homes.

Heldring is one of the few secondary schools who realised that taking up this challenge is less difficult than imagined, especially since most primary schools already had similar projects about parental involvement. The parents already were open to an intense relationship with school. The ground was fertile. Heldring VMBO seeded this ground with their own tailor-made programme for parents, within the framework of the More Chances With Parents-programme. Heldring VMBO is now one of the most successful secondary schools regarding parental involvement in The Hague. |

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<th>• Who was involved in the challenge? Please describe the target</th>
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The local government initiated the project in close cooperation with Heldring VMBO (secondary school) and the Haagse Hogeschool (local University).

The city council subsidised the change-programme for two years. After finishing it, the school can get finance for four labour-hours meant for keeping up the internal and external agenda of the school on parental involvement.

The ‘Haagse Hogeschool’ developed and guided the project ‘More Chances With Parents’. This project is scientifically based. It takes into account the reality of the school, sets the school as starting point for change, involves the whole team and management, sets one person as liaison officer within the school to keep colleagues on track, and makes long-term investments in a cultural change.

Heldring VMBO is one of the secondary schools in the city who successfully implemented this programme.

**Keywords:** pre vocational education

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Point of departure of Heldring VMBO is: ‘every parent wants to be involved in the school life of his/ her child’ Keywords in the approach toward parental involvement are:

- **PARTNERSHIP:** ‘your child is our student’. School and parents are equal partners with both a responsibility in the success of the child. This partnership is the basis for success. It means that parents are taken seriously. In creating parental involvement it is important that parents feel that the school listens to them, that their opinion is important and that the school is also their school.
- **POSITIVITY:** The school doesn’t tell parents what they don’t do well enough, they emphasize the importance of their role in the success of the child. In this, they clearly communicate what the parents may expect from the school and what the school expects of the parents (that they show up at the three or four awards of the school-reports, that they support their child at home in the educational program and that they participate in the decision making in and around the school).
- **SAFETY:** It is essential that parents consider school to be a safe haven, for their children as well as for themselves. Below, you see the logo of the school. The three circles represent the vision that school,
parents and children are partners. Moreover, it should express safety. What does this partnership between school and parents look like in practice?

1. **Heldring VMbo has a very active parents council**
   - The Parents Council consists of 30 parents (26 mothers and 4 fathers) having meetings frequently.
   - The Parents Council is involved in planning and decision-making. For example, the school wanted all children to get the same schoolbag, which they then get for free. This idea is put to the Parents Council and they have to approve it and choose the schoolbag that is ordered.
   - At meetings of the Parents Council always a member of the board is present, so the parents can use his/her expertise when necessary.
   - Parents of the Parents Council receive business cards just like other staff-members of the school, so they feel equal partners and connected to the school.
   - The Parents Council supports the staff in reaching the parents that are difficult to reach. For this group of parents it is easier to talk to another parent, instead of to a teacher or directive.
   - The Parents Council facilitates the organisation of thematic meetings, for example on alcohol, drugs, sex and reaching adulthood. By organising these meetings in the safe environment of the school and with representatives of the Parents Council (no teachers or board members are present), these taboo topics are discussed. This is a huge step forward.
   - The Parents Council organises activities for parents, by parents. For example the Summer Celebration. All parents are invited to bring some food from their own culture and these are shared together. In this way, parents learn about each other’s background and it is an accessible way to visit the school and have a positive experience with it, so they will visit more easily the next time.
   - The Parents Council is present at all the information meetings for parents, so they are visible (and become familiar) and accessible for questions of the parents. In this way, they can recruit new parents to join the Parents Council. Moreover, difficult questions are more easily asked to another parent, than to a teacher or board member.
   - In school the only language that is spoken, is Dutch. Parents often are ashamed to recognise they don’t speak the language well enough and the step to apply for a language course is huge (because they then admit their shortcoming). Parents of the Parents Council stimulate other parents via-via to learn the language and they facilitate language courses, so that it is easier for parents to take this step.

2. **Heldring VMbo has a parents coordinator** The Parents Coordinator is one staff-member (no teacher) from within the school. The parents coordinator has a clear job description. She keeps
in touch with parents at the micro-level: she calls them if they do not show up and she visited them even at home. Besides, she is also the person dealing with absence. If children regularly are late or when they don’t show up in the lessons, she immediately contacts the parents to ask what’s going on. It is important that this is not an external person, but someone who has a true connection with the school. In this way, she has a familiar face to all parents, so that they have easy access to her and don’t experience barriers in this contact.

3. Heldring VMbo frequently organises meetings (‘contact-moments’)
   • Award of the pupils’ school-reports (3 or 4 times a year): the school communicates very clearly (in a positive way) that parents are expected in school at these moments. If they don’t show up, the parent coordinator is involved, to find out what is going on. These meetings are important to bind parents to the school, in showing that it is important and fun to be involved.
   • Thematic meetings: meetings about ‘difficult’ themes, such as alcohol and drugs and about themes that parents have suggested themselves, because these are important to them. Show-up is higher than at other schools.
   • Information meetings: - Intake of the new pupil: expectations are clearly communicated towards the parent. - Before the start of the school year: all parents of pupils who start at the school next year (who are finishing primary education) are invited to come to school for an information meeting. The board expressly appreciates the importance of their presence and parents of the Parents Council tell about the role of parents in the school life of their child. - Just after the start of the school year there is another meeting for parents. This meeting has the informal character of a ‘high-tea’. The parents are invited, together with the last teacher of the primary school of their child and the mentor of the child at the new school. In this way, the school wants to secure the transition of the child from primary to secondary school. Point of departure at this information meeting: it is very important to involve parents from the beginning (or even before the actual start) of the child’s school career, because keeping them involved is much easier then.
   • Informal activities for all parents, most of the time organised by the Parents Council.

Keywords: parents coordinator, resources
This parental participation forms the basis of an early warning system on problems that may lead to absence and dropout. The preventive approach resulted in significant lesser absence and dropout rates compared to other secondary schools, despite the low SES of the students and their parents.

**Keywords:** low truancy

Heldring VMbo has run into the following challenges:

- Involving all parents, since they live across the whole city and so a lot of them are physically far away. The school invested a lot in building a relationship indirectly between parents with the school as centre of this relationship (via the Parents Council).
- Dealing with differences in expectations: because of their different (cultural) background, a certain group of parents has a different perspective on the relationship between schools and parents. In their vision school and home are two worlds apart and hence, they do not interfere in the school-world. The school invests in inviting the parents personally and keeps trying to get in touch with them to build on a relation. This is done by the parents coordinator and the Parents Council.
- Language, especially communication in writing: do parents understand the message in a letter? Do they even open the letter? Parents from the Parents Council produce the text, so it connects more to the parent’s perception.
- Involving parents with a low socio-economic status: they have a lot of other things to worry about (financial problems, aggression, housing, etc.). They want to be involved, but do not have the time or opportunity to do so. The school tries to facilitate parents as much as possible, for example, they serve a simple dinner, pay for public transfer costs, etc.
- Lack of (human) resources in the school to contact all parents personally. Heldring successfully applied for funding of the City Council which they used for coordination of all activities concerning parental involvement (i.e. the parents coordinator) and developing a policy plan, so that parental participation has become embedded in the school instead of a number of separated activities.
- Dealing with negative images that staff members of the school have about ‘complicated’ parents. They pictured that it costs many efforts to keep in touch with this difficult group of parents and hence they did not have a welcoming attitude towards them. More Chances With Parents and the guidance from the scientist addressed these negative images, which resulted in
a cultural change programme which showed the staff members the advantages of having a close relationship with these parents.

**Keywords:** challenges with parental coordination