

# Study on Building Parent Committees in Educational Discipline in Primary and Secondary Schools

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**Abstract:** The Parent Committee is a key organizational vehicle for home-school collaboration and plays a vital role in implementing educational discipline policies and carrying out disciplinary practices in primary and secondary schools. Strengthening the development of Parent Committees helps guide parents to participate effectively in educational discipline, promotes the standardized implementation of school disciplinary procedures, and facilitates the realization of the policy goals of educational discipline in primary and secondary schools. At present, Parent Committees in primary and secondary schools still face such problems as incomplete organizational structures, unscientific member selection, inadequate institutional safeguards, and uneven development across schools. It is therefore imperative to advance the development of Parent Committees in a systematic manner by clarifying their organizational attributes as well as rights and responsibilities, optimizing member election and composition, establishing sound operational mechanisms, and improving the support system.

**Keywords:** Parent Committee; Educational discipline; Primary and secondary schools

**Online publication:** May 14, 2026

## 1. Introduction

In December 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the *Regulations on Educational Discipline in Primary and Secondary Schools (for Trial Implementation)* (hereinafter referred to as the Regulations)<sup>[1]</sup>, which came into force on March 1, 2021, marking a new stage in the rule-based implementation of educational discipline in primary and secondary schools in China. The implementation of educational discipline in primary and secondary schools is closely related to students' healthy development. Its educational objectives cannot be achieved by schools alone but require effective home-school collaboration. As an important component of the modern school system, the Parent Committee is not only an important vehicle for advancing law-based school governance and internal democratic management, but also a key platform for supporting collaboration among schools, families, and communities in education. It plays an irreplaceable role in the implementation

of educational discipline in primary and secondary schools <sup>[2]</sup>. At present, however, the development of Parent Committees in primary and secondary schools still faces practical difficulties due to multiple constraints. Systematically identifying their operational bottlenecks and exploring ways to optimize them is of great practical significance for bringing the functions of Parent Committees into full play and ensuring the standardized implementation of educational discipline policy.

## **2. Significance of developing parent committees**

### **2.1. Orderly parental participation to build synergies for disciplinary education**

The Constitution of China stipulates that parents shall fulfill their obligation to educate their minor children. Participation in school education is not only a manifestation of parents' fulfillment of their educational responsibilities, but also an exercise of their right to participate in education. In the implementation of educational discipline in primary and secondary schools, parents' participation is indispensable, and parents must work together with schools to prevent and reduce student disciplinary violations <sup>[3]</sup>. In educational practice, however, long-standing habitual ways of thinking have led some parents to regard educational discipline simply as an internal school matter, resulting in a cognitive bias of "absence of responsibility" <sup>[4]</sup>; others intervene excessively in school educational affairs, showing a tendency to overstep their proper authority and thereby causing unnecessary disputes and confusion in modern school management. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the development of Parent Committees so as to promote parents' orderly participation in educational discipline. Through policy briefings and the study of relevant rules, Parent Committees can improve parents' understanding of disciplinary norms and their capacity to participate; they can also clarify the boundaries of rights and responsibilities as well as codes of conduct, regulate parental participation, prevent excessive intervention, and thereby build a home-school collaboration mechanism with clearly defined responsibilities and efficient operation, creating a sound co-education ecology for the implementation of educational discipline.

### **2.2. Standardized school implementation to safeguard procedural fairness in discipline**

Parent Committees are formed through recommendation and election by parent representatives from different backgrounds, and thus possess broad representativeness and a certain degree of public credibility. Their participation in and supervision over school management help expand and realize parents' rights to information and oversight in school governance and educational activities, thereby fostering a home-school governance community. While the promulgation of the Regulations grants schools and teachers the authority to impose educational discipline, it is also necessary to guard against the risk of abuse of that authority. In educational practice, teachers may fail to grasp the proper degree of punishment, use inappropriate disciplinary methods, or operate with unclear boundaries, thus triggering home-school conflicts and negative public opinion <sup>[5]</sup>. A well-developed Parent Committee can promote improvements in school rules and disciplinary codes, formulate implementation plans and other institutional arrangements for educational discipline, and promote the standardized implementation of discipline in schools. It can also push schools to establish corresponding supervision mechanisms and accountability systems for improper disciplinary practices by teachers, thereby urging schools and teachers to exercise authority impartially in accordance with the rules and to handle student disciplinary violations fairly in the course of teaching and educational activities. In addition, it can prompt schools to establish legal remedies related to educational discipline so as to safeguard the lawful rights and interests of schools, teachers, students, and parents.

### **2.3. Connecting home and school to enhance the effectiveness of disciplinary education**

The core purpose of educational discipline is to fulfill the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and to promote students' healthy and all-round development, a goal that depends on collaborative governance between home and school. The combined educational efforts of families and schools are key to students' comprehensive development, especially when relatively serious disciplinary measures are imposed and effective follow-up and guidance from family education are urgently needed. In educational practice, however, parents' perceptions and behaviors are polarized: some overindulge their children and shield them from fault, refusing to accept reasonable discipline; some hold misguided views and impose secondary punishment at home; others fail in guardianship, causing a rupture in the educational chain. All of these factors significantly weaken the effectiveness of disciplinary education. On the one hand, developing Parent Committees can build a bridge for home-school communication, strengthen exchanges between schools and parents, and ensure timely follow-up in family education after educational discipline is imposed. On the other hand, through relevant training, educational activities, and seminars, Parent Committees can effectively improve parents' educational competence and overall quality, give full play to the educational role of the family, and enhance the educational effectiveness of home-school cooperation in the practice of educational discipline.

## **3. Dilemmas in the development of parent committees in primary and secondary schools**

In February 2012, the Ministry of Education issued the *Guiding Opinions on Establishing Parents' Committees in Primary and Secondary Schools and Kindergartens* (the Guiding Opinions), participating in school education, and facilitating communication between parents and families, while also offering guidance on the establishment of Parent Committees. Nevertheless, in educational practice, both the development of Parent Committees and the performance of their functions still face significant challenges.

### **3.1. Ambiguous organizational positioning and unclear responsibilities**

Although the Guiding Opinions require schools to establish Parent Committees, they lack operational guidance. Most schools merely complete their formal establishment without developing organizational structures or defining rights boundaries, leaving them nominal entities. Often regarded as “mediums” for communication rather than independent “governance subjects,” some committees are subordinated to school administration—with chairs serving as administrators—turning them into “mouthpieces.” While the Regulations emphasize their role in discussing disciplinary codes, most lack the capacity to perform effectively.

### **3.2. Imbalanced member composition and insufficient representativeness**

The Guiding Opinions stipulate that “schools shall organize parents, in accordance with due democratic procedures and the principles of impartiality, fairness, and openness, and on a voluntary basis, to elect from among the parents of current students those who can represent the will of all parents to form the Parent Committee.” In reality, however, the selection of Parent Committee members generally lacks genuine democratic procedures. Most members are directly appointed by schools or head teachers, leading to irregular formation mechanisms and insufficient representativeness. The composition of membership also tends to favor parents with ample time and

resources, further weakening its breadth and representativeness. In many schools, Parent Committee members are drawn largely from three groups: parents of students with outstanding academic performance, financially well-off parents, and parents with abundant social resources. Such members can represent only the wishes of some parents and fail to reflect the interests and demands of all parents, especially those from disadvantaged families. In educational practice, students who lack care and perform weakly in school are more likely to be subject to punishment and are in urgent need of support from families, schools, and other parties as well as assistance from Parent Committees. However, because the parents of this group are often unable to join Parent Committees, they lack representation and lose their voice, leaving high-risk students unheard in disciplinary decision-making and thereby violating the principle of educational equity.

### **3.3. Absence of operational mechanisms and inadequate institutional safeguards**

The Guiding Opinions clearly call for the establishment of a joint meeting mechanism between schools and Parent Committees so as to ensure that Parent Committees carry out their work lawfully, in a standardized manner, in an orderly way, and effectively. In educational practice, however, most schools have not established such home-school joint meeting mechanisms or participatory management systems for Parent Committees, making it difficult for them to participate effectively in school governance, supervise school operations, and coordinate educational activities. In the context of implementing educational discipline in primary and secondary schools, some schools have not established institutional arrangements that involve Parent Committees in the operation, supervision, and accountability of educational discipline, creating numerous obstacles to their effective participation in disciplinary practice. Schools are expected to foster an awareness of multi-stakeholder participation in supervision and governance, allowing different actors to oversee teachers' exercise of the power to impose educational discipline and to participate in the formulation of school-based rules on educational discipline<sup>[6]</sup>. Such arrangements are conducive to the implementation of educational discipline by teachers and other relevant staff and can clearly define the rights and obligations of teachers, parents, and students<sup>[7]</sup>.

### **3.4. Significant resource dependence and constrained development**

The development and operation of Parent Committees require support in terms of manpower, material resources, financial resources, and venues. Against the background of China's urban-rural dual structure and the uneven distribution of educational resources, the development of Parent Committees shows marked differences across schools: Parent Committees in high-quality schools enjoy obvious advantages and develop at a higher level, whereas those in weaker schools are at a disadvantage. Among schools at the same level, Parent Committees in economically developed regions are generally better established than those in less developed regions, and Parent Committees in rural schools lag behind those in urban schools. In short, the development of Parent Committees is related to schools' geographic locations, the resources schools can provide, and the economic environment of the regions in which schools are located, thus leading to uneven development among schools. In addition, there are obvious differences among schools in the concrete conditions for Parent Committee development: some larger Parent Committees are provided with dedicated office space by schools, while others have no fixed offices and remain detached from schools' educational management systems. In terms of performance, some Parent Committees actively perform their duties and achieve remarkable results, whereas others only hold formalized activities such as seminars and social gatherings at the beginning and end of each semester, degenerating into "social clubs"<sup>[8]</sup> or "shielding tools," which further widens inter-school disparities in home-school cooperation on educational discipline.

## **4.Strategies for advancing the development of parent committees in primary and secondary schools**

To better overcome the dilemmas discussed above and seek solutions, it is necessary to advance development systematically from the following four dimensions.

### **4.1. Clarifying organizational nature and consolidating the foundation for development**

First, the content of the Regulations should be improved by adding provisions related to the development of Parent Committees and by clarifying, at the policy level and in school charters, their positioning as organizational bodies for home-school cooperation in educational discipline, together with their specific functions in guiding and managing such cooperation. Second, the organizational structure of Parent Committees should be improved. At the stage of establishment, Schools are expected to make overall plans, set up three-tier organizations at the school, grade, and class levels, define senior- and mid-level management positions, and establish subdivisions for teaching, supervision, support, and arbitration so as to form an organizational framework with clear rights and responsibilities, a well-defined division of labor, and efficient operation. On this basis, additional posts such as external liaison, financial supervision, and educational discipline assistants may be created, the personnel management system may be improved, and members' duties may be specified so as to ensure the effective implementation of educational discipline. Finally, the rights of Parent Committees should be clarified. Schools are expected to fully respect their right to participate in educational discipline and formulate a clear "list of rights" for Parent Committees. In particular, parents' rights to information, participation, supervision, and remedy in school disciplinary matters should be clarified so as to ensure that Parent Committees participate without overstepping and supervise without being absent.

### **4.2. Optimizing the selection mechanism and ensuring broad representation**

At present, representatives on Parent Committees in many primary and secondary schools are appointed by schools or head teachers, which has reduced some Parent Committees to "elite clubs." Therefore, it is imperative to fundamentally reform the mechanism for selecting committee members by implementing necessary democratic procedures such as parental self-nomination or recommendation, school recommendation, voting by all parents, and public announcement of election results. The selection mechanism should be transformed from one of "designation and appointment" to one of "public recommendation and election," so that Parent Committees can evolve from exclusive "elite clubs" into genuinely representative committees. Members generated through public recommendation and election come from different social strata and educational backgrounds and can therefore reflect the will of a broader range of parents. In educational practice, however, the problem is not only inadequate representativeness but also insufficient capacity to perform committee duties. Some schools fail to consider whether candidates recommended by head teachers are competent to serve on Parent Committees, resulting in weak role awareness and inadequate competence among members<sup>[9]</sup>. Coupled with unclear divisions of responsibility, members often lack authority, enthusiasm, and initiative in carrying out their duties, leaving their work superficial and unfocused. To address this problem, a dynamic adjustment and withdrawal mechanism should be established for Parent Committee members. In the context of implementing educational discipline, Parent Committees may adjust their membership in a timely manner in light of actual conditions, replace members who have long failed to play an effective role, and recruit eligible parents. In particular, members who

are unfamiliar with the Regulations or unable to implement them properly should be removed, while parents who have conscientiously studied and mastered the Regulations and are capable of performing functions related to educational discipline should be included. Such measures would enhance the overall competence and credibility of Parent Committee members in the implementation of educational discipline and help ensure the achievement of the policy's educational objectives.

### **4.3. Establishing long-term mechanisms and safeguarding the implementation process**

To ensure that Parent Committees perform their duties effectively in educational discipline, it is essential to strengthen their institutional development. First, schools should establish pre-implementation mechanisms enabling committees to publicize the Regulations and revise school rules and disciplinary codes. Second, in-process oversight should ensure disciplinary practices are lawful, transparent, and procedurally fair. Third, post-implementation redress mechanisms—including student appeals and parental complaints—should resolve disputes and complete the institutional loop.

### **4.4. Improving the support system and promoting sound development**

First, the laws and regulations governing the development of Parent Committees should be improved. At present, Parent Committees in China lack dedicated legal support and rely only on policies issued by educational administrative departments; higher-level laws such as the Education Law of the People's Republic of China and the Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China do not contain clear provisions on the matter. Therefore, the legislature should enact specialized laws and regulations to clarify the nature and positioning of Parent Committees, standardize their operational mechanisms, and define the boundaries of rights, responsibilities, and interests among Parent Committees, schools, and educational administrative departments, so as to replace arbitrary decision-making with institutional governance. Only in this way can Parent Committees exercise their rights on a solid legal and regulatory basis. Meanwhile, the Guiding Opinions should be revised to specify the organizational nature, functions, and structure of Parent Committees, thereby empowering them to play their important role fully in school management and in the implementation of educational discipline. Second, a government support system for the development of Parent Committees should be established. The government should put in place the necessary financial, technical, and professional support systems to help Parent Committees access important educational information, encourage parents to participate actively in educational governance, and provide incentives for such participation. Third, primary and secondary schools are expected to strengthen their support for the development of Parent Committees. Schools are expected to increase support in terms of venues, funding, personnel, technical services, and institutional arrangements so as to ensure the orderly advancement of Parent Committee development. At the same time, Schools are expected to build consensus between families and schools on educational discipline, improve the home-school cooperation mechanism, and clarify the rights and obligations of students, parents, teachers, and schools in disciplinary matters. Safeguarding all parties' right to information and their lawful rights and interests will help schools and families reach consensus and carry out coordinated cooperation on issues related to educational discipline<sup>[10]</sup>.

## **5. Conclusion**

The implementation of the *Regulations on Educational Discipline in Primary and Secondary Schools*

(Trial) has promoted the standardization of educational discipline in primary and secondary schools, and home-school collaboration is the key to achieving its educational goals. As the core carrier of home-school cooperation, Parent Committees play a prominent role in promoting orderly parental participation, ensuring disciplinary fairness, and improving educational effectiveness, which is crucial for students' development. Currently, they still face dilemmas such as ambiguous positioning, unbalanced member composition, insufficient institutional guarantees, and resource dependence. To solve these problems, it is necessary to clarify their positioning, optimize selection, improve operation and support systems, gather home-school synergy, promote the standardized implementation of educational discipline, and provide support for students' healthy development.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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