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PARENT INVOLVEMENT: AN EXAMINATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES THAT FACILITATE AND ENHANCE PARENT PARTICIPATION IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

by

Michael John Deane

B.Ed. (Elem.), University of Victoria, 1972

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS (EDUCATION)

in the

Faculty of Education

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT: AN EXAMINATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES THAT FACILITATE AND ENHANCE PARENT PARTICIPATION IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Research has identified the significant effects that parent involvement in schools can have upon student attitudes and achievement and the attitudes of parents towards schools. The purpose of this study was to identify the practices that principals employ to facilitate the involvement of parents in schools identified as having high levels of parent involvement.

A reputational technique was employed to identify five schools in which there was a high level of parent involvement. The principals of these schools were interviewed as were three parents from each school. These interviews were structured so as to establish the present level of parent involvement in the schools and to identify the administrative practices that contribute to that level of participation.

The data were examined within the framework of Joyce Epstein’s five types of parent involvement: 1) the school’s work with parents in the areas of child-rearing skills and issues; 2) the diversity of home-school communication links; 3) parent involvement through a variety of volunteer activities; 4) parents working with learning activities at home; and 5) parents’ involvement in parents’ groups and advisory councils.

The study found that both principals and parents tended to possess a very narrow conception of “parent involvement” with both groups identifying volunteerism and involvement in parents’ advisory groups as the primary avenues of involvement. Neither principals nor parents acknowledged the myriad communication links between the home and the school as important facets of parent involvement. Similarly, these schools assume only a minimal role in working with parents in the enhancement of parenting skills; and
few examples of parents being enlisted to work with their children on schoolwork at home were revealed. Each principal did however, enunciate a firm belief in the important role parents should play in education, and they each worked actively to implement that philosophy in their schools.

The paper concludes with an inventory of fifty practices employed by these principals to facilitate parent involvement. These strategies, together with an accompanying set of recommendations, comprise a compendium of administrative practices that serve to increase and enhance the involvement of parents in elementary schools.
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CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of schools as we know them today, parents have had an important role to play in the education enterprise. The earliest schools were often controlled entirely by committees of parents and local citizens, and these groups assumed responsibility for all aspects of the operation of the school from providing the building, through establishing the curriculum, to selecting the teacher. In the earliest days of education, the school was an important and integral facet of the life of each community, and as such was not only under the control of the local citizens, but also reflected the desires and values of that community.

With the consolidation of school districts into larger units, and the increase in size of urban areas, parents however, were increasingly moved into the background of education, and so today we find many parents who feel alienated from the school and who no longer feel confident that they have a valuable part to play in the education of their children (VanDevender, 1988).

Parents however, exert a greater influence on the child’s life than anyone else. They are the child’s first teachers (Truby, 1987) and play a major, if often unacknowledged, role in the formal education of children (Chavkin & Williams, 1987). It was the reform movements of the 1980’s however, that brought a renewed interest in the variety of ways in which parents and citizens could participate in education (Davies, 1987; Chavkin & Williams, 1987) and as parents increase their demands on the school for
greater involvement, educators must come to recognize that parents can and must assume a more important and vital role in education.

Indeed, many feel that education is too important an enterprise to leave solely in the hands of school personnel (Culyer, 1988) and that educators can no longer ignore the reality that parents will demand that their legitimate voice be heard and exercise what they are increasingly viewing as their right to be equal and responsible partners in education (Storey, 1989). Storey states it even more emphatically: "...involving parents in their children's schools is both an educational and a political imperative." (1989, p. ix). Fullan (1982) also points to the need to involve parents with the implementation of new programs and curricula if they are to be successfully implemented and are to have a significant impact on students. It is up to the school therefore, to re-evaluate its policies and practices, in order to define new structures, new attitudes, new roles and new relationships (Seeley, 1989; VanDevender, 1988) if we are to accept the role of parents in the education process.

The foregoing discussion leads then to the question: Are schools ready to accept parents as partners? The 1986 Gallup Poll showed that not only do parents want more contact with the schools, but more strikingly, that teacher opinion reflected a positive attitude toward active parent involvement in children's education (in Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, Brissie, 1987). Moles (1987) reports a 1981 nationwide poll conducted by the National Education Association which indicated that 90% of teachers at all grade levels wanted more parent involvement. And Chavkin and Williams (1987) reported from a survey of school superintendents, school board chairpersons, and parents that 90% of parents felt it was important that they be involved in helping their children with school work and supporting school activities.
While educators have for some time stated that they recognized the positive influence of good parental involvement (Bauch, 1989), the actual participation of parents has been largely superficial and ritualistic (James, 1989; Moles, 1987): parent-teacher conferences, open houses, parent meetings, report cards, and newsletters. As well, the actual number of people participating in programs and projects of public involvement is limited. A study of Quebec’s mandated school committees indicated a participation rate of only eight percent (Levin, 1982), and several national polls in the United States in the late 1970's pointed out that no more than two-thirds of parents had had any contact of any description with their children’s schools (Moles, 1987). Nevertheless, in response to the 1984 Gallup Poll, teachers suggested that they felt that the biggest problem facing public schools at this time was the lack of parent involvement (Ost, 1988).

Joyce Epstein, one of the leading proponents of parent involvement in education, suggests that “Schools of the future will improve...if schools and families, teachers and parents, understand each other’s potential for improving the education of the children they share.” (1985, p. 18). She further states that “Teachers and parents...share common goals for children that are achieved most effectively when teachers and parents work together” (1986, p. 278). Storey adds an increased urgency to this idea when he states that “…we cannot afford to ignore the potential impact of parents on the education of children and youth.” (1989, p.ix)

The genesis of this report, then, is the dichotomy that appears to exist between the research that so clearly reveals the important role that parents can be, should be, and want to be, playing in education on the one hand, and the statistics that show the small percentage of parents that actually participate in their children’s education on the other. What then is the actual level of involvement in our schools? What are some of the ways in which parents are involved? What barriers exist to limit their involvement? And finally, what practices do administrators employ to encourage, expand, and enhance
parent participation? How can educational administrators enhance the interface between the school and the home?

**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, defines five categories or types of parent involvement (Brandt, 1989; Epstein, 1987, 1988). They are characterized as follows:

**TYPE 1**  **THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF PARENTS** (Parenting)

- Assuming the responsibilities of families to ensure children's health and safety (food, clothing, shelter)
- Using the parenting and child-rearing skills needed to prepare children for school.
- Supervising, disciplining, and guiding children at all age levels.
- Providing positive home conditions and basic supplies that support school learning and appropriate behaviour.

**TYPE 2**  **THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF SCHOOLS** (Communicating)

- Informing parents about the school; its educational programs and its activities.
- Informing parents about their children and their progress.

**TYPE 3**  **PARENT INVOLVEMENT AT SCHOOL** (Volunteering)

- Assisting teachers in classrooms or in other areas of the school with lessons, on field trips, at class parties, and with other classroom activities.
- Supporting student performances, sports, or other events.
- Assisting organized parent groups in fund raising, community relations, political awareness, and program development.
- Attending workshops or other programs for their own education or training.
TYPE 4  PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING ACTIVITIES AT HOME

- Pursuing parent-initiated activities or child-initiated requests for help.
- Following ideas or instructions provided by teachers for parents to monitor or assist their own children at home on learning activities that are coordinated with the children’s classwork.
- Participating in joint parent-child learning endeavours.

TYPE 5  PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE AND ADVOCACY
(Representing other parents)

- Assuming decision-making roles in Parent-Teacher Associations, advisory councils, or other committees or groups at the school, district, or provincial level.
- Participating in independent advocacy groups that monitor the schools and work for school improvement.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Using the foregoing areas of parent involvement as a framework, the purpose of this study is to examine the involvement of parents in selected elementary schools in a large urban school district. The two major issues to be explored are:

A. To what extent, and in what ways, are parents presently involved in each of the selected schools?

B. What administrative practices are employed by the principals of those schools to facilitate and enhance the involvement of parents in the process of education?

In order to investigate these major questions however, a number of sub-problems require examination.
A preliminary question requires exploration however, in order to ascertain just how aware both parents and administrators are, of the variety of elements in the relationship between parents and the school:

0.1 To what extent are administrators and parents aware of the multiple facets of the interface between the school and the home?

This question is then followed by a number of suit-problems designed to elicit information regarding the extent of parent involvement in each of the five major areas identified by Epstein, as well as the practices employed by principals that facilitate that participation:

**TYPE 1**  **THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF PARENTS** (Parenting)

1.1 What efforts do these schools undertake to assist parents in fulfilling their roles as effective parents?

1.2 Who has assumed the major role in mounting programs or providing advice and guidance in this regard?

1.3 What opinions do parents and administrators hold regarding the school’s role in monitoring the home situation of its students and acting when it deems it necessary?

**TYPE 2**  **THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF SCHOOLS** (Communicating)

2.1 What methods are employed by these schools to inform parents of the school’s program and activities?

The School Newsletter

2.2 In what ways is the effectiveness of the school’s newsletter enhanced as means of communication?

Soliciting Parent Opinion

2.3 What techniques are employed by these schools to solicit parent opinion and input into school issues?

Teacher-to-Parent Communication

2.4 What efforts do these principals make to encourage and support teachers in their efforts to maintain communication with the home?
Report Cards

2.5 How do parents view the effectiveness of the report cards currently in use?

2.6 What guidance have these principals provided teachers in the preparation of reports to parents?

Parent-Teacher Conferences

2.7 How do parents view the effectiveness of the parent-teacher conference?

2.8 What guidance have these principals provided to teachers in the conduct of parent-teacher conferences?

2.9 How is information provided by parents during the conference dealt with?

2.10 How do these schools accommodate working parents or parents who do not speak English?

Other Means of Communicating Pupil Progress

2.11 What other means, beyond the formal report card and the parent-teacher conference, are employed to inform parents of their children's progress?

2.12 Is there a balance between school-to-home contacts of a negative nature, and positive communications to parents about their children in school?

Other Avenues of Communication

2.13 How are the informal contacts between parents and teachers managed by these schools?

2.14 What efforts are made to monitor or influence the messages taken home by students?

2.15 What role do non-teaching personnel such as secretaries, custodians, nurses, teacher assistants, etc., play in communicating information about the school; and how are the messages conveyed by these non-teaching school personnel influenced by the school?

2.16 Do parents feel that they receive sufficient communication from the school and are kept adequately informed about the school and its activities, as well as about the progress of their children?
TYPE 3  PARENT INVOLVEMENT AT SCHOOL (Volunteering)

3.1 What proportion of the parent body participates as volunteers in the school?

3.2 What tasks do parent volunteers perform in these schools?
   • in classrooms:
     - as clerical assistants?
     - as part of the instructional program?
   • in other areas of the school?

3.3 To what extent are special skills, talents, or knowledge of parents employed in classrooms?

3.4 How are volunteer parents identified?

3.5 Is the use of parent volunteers more prevalent at certain grade levels than at others?

3.6 On what occasions are parents invited into these schools to be members of an audience or as spectators?

3.7 In what ways are parents involved in fund raising for the school?

3.8 What role do these principals play in encouraging and supporting the involvement of parents as volunteers?

TYPE 4  PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING ACTIVITIES AT HOME

4.1 To what extent do parents work with their children on school work at home?

4.2 What information is provided to parents concerning ways in which they can help their children at home?

4.3 Are specific homework tasks assigned for completion by both the parent and the child working together?

4.4 What impediments are there to parents working with their children at home?

4.5 How do principals encourage and support teachers in their efforts to involve parents in working with their children at home?

TYPE 5  PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE AND ADVOCACY (Representing Other Parents)

5.1 What proportion of the parent bodies of these schools participates in the parents' associations?
5.2 How representative are the parents' associations of their entire parent bodies?

5.3 With what types of issues do these parents' associations deal?

5.4 What role do these principals play in the parents' associations?

THE IMPACT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

6.1 What effect does parent involvement have upon student achievement?

6.2 What effect does parent involvement have upon student attitudes?

6.3 What effect does parent involvement have upon the attitudes of parents?

6.4 What is the general attitude of teachers towards parent involvement?

GENERAL ISSUES IN PARENT INVOLVEMENT

7.1 How is the role of parents defined or delineated in the statements of philosophy and/or mission statements of these schools?

7.2 How does the age or grade level of their own children effect the involvement of these parents?

7.3 Why do some parents play only a minimal role in the schools?

7.4 Is the level of parent involvement affected by such factors as the socio-economic level of the community; the size of the school; the designation of a school as a "community school"; the age or experience of the principal?

THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

8.1 How do these principals view their role in enhancing parent involvement in their schools?

8.2 What personal attributes do these principals have in common?

8.3 What do these principals do to increase the number of parents involved with the school?
IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Recent research has brought to the fore, the concept that parental involvement is an important factor in education. However, it would appear that this is an idea that is often overlooked as educators work to provide quality education for the students in our schools. The effective schools research makes it clear that parent involvement is one of the major factors in determining the effectiveness of a school. Research also points to the fact that this parent involvement will occur in a variety of ways, and in many aspects of the life of the school. The literature also identifies the positive effect that parent involvement has upon parent and student attitudes, as well as upon student achievement. It is incumbent upon administrators therefore, to find effective means for drawing parents into the education process.

Examination of the data collected in this study, should result in the identification of administrative practices that promote parental involvement in elementary education. These results should provide useful information for elementary school administrators as they work to enhance the relationship between the school and the family.

OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT

Chapter One introduces the study, and defines the problem and sub-problems to be examined. Included in this chapter also, are descriptions of the five main classifications of parental involvement in education, together with an outline of the importance of the study for elementary school administrators, and an overview of the study.

Chapter Two contains a review of the most recent literature on the subject of parent involvement, focussing on the impact of parent participation on parent and student attitudes and on student achievement; as well as upon the role of the principal.
Chapter Three describes the research methodology. The data requirements are discussed; the processes and instruments used for data collection are examined; the field sample is characterized; and the treatment of the data is outlined.

Chapter Four contains the analysis of the data collected. This data is discussed in relation to the problems and sub-problems identified in Chapter One, and discussed within the frame-work of Epstein’s five classifications of parent involvement. It concludes with an enumeration of the practices of principals identified as effective in the promotion of parent involvement in education.

The study concludes with Chapter Five: a review of the problems and the data collection procedures; a summary of the findings of the study; together with a discussion of the implications of those conclusions and a set of recommendations for elementary school administrators.
CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF RECENT LITERATURE

Educators examine the subject of parent involvement from two opposing positions. One opinion suggests that the school and the family must remain separate entities because of the inherent incompatibility, competition, and conflict that exists between the two institutions. The other viewpoint, however, is becoming increasingly the position of preference for educators. Schools can be effective only if they obtain parental assistance in the education process (Epstein, 1986). This latter position, is also supported by a considerable body of recent research.

Epstein cites almost two decades of research, all of which identifies and documents the importance of parent involvement at all grade levels (1987) and further indicates the consistent findings in general social research that clearly show that children have an added advantage in school when their parents encourage and support schooling (1984). Henderson’s review of the literature (1988) also supports this finding and she goes on to suggest that the precise form of that involvement is not the critical factor. Parents are eager to participate in a wide variety of roles and feel that all levels at which parents are invited to participate are important to the education of their children (Henderson, 1988). There is a caution of which to be aware, however: if parent involvement does not have a clearly defined purpose, and is not an integral part of the school’s defined mission and goals, only limited benefit will be derived from it (Storey, 1989). Parent involvement activities must therefore be planned to enhance the school’s mission, and must be evaluated in relation to that mission and those goals. If parent involvement is not woven into the total fabric of the school, then parent involvement will be little more than a cosmetic feature.
PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS RESEARCH

Much of the substantial Effective Schools research of the late seventies and early eighties clearly points to the importance of parental involvement as a critical factor in defining effective schools; and parent involvement practices are repeatedly mentioned as one of the prime ingredients for educational excellence (Gotts & Purnell, 1987; Berninger & Rodriguez, 1989). In a similar vein, Peter Mortimore in his study of British secondary schools, identified twelve factors that effective schools had in common, one of which was a significant level of parent involvement with parents as partners in the education of their children (1986). This body of research also indicates that parents play a role, not just in supporting the work of the school, but also in being a part of the actual instructional program of their children. Epstein however, points out that, of the many types of parent involvement, it is not yet clear how each type contributes to whole school effectiveness (1987).

The effect of parent involvement on teacher efficacy and school climate is also evident from the research. There appears to be a positive correlation between the level of parental involvement in a school and the level of efficacy felt by teachers in that school (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 1987). This in turn leads to the development of the positive school climate which is another of the factors that contribute to school effectiveness (Eicholtz, 1984). Thus, one of the most effective ways to enhance the climate of the school is to involve parents in all the facets of the school’s life (Norris, et al., 1989).

Much of the research also serves not only to identify the roles that parents can play in schools, but also to identify the factors that make schools effective so that parents can work to make their schools better (Fruchter, 1984). As educators build bridges between the school and the home, they need to employ every avenue available to involve the parents in the education enterprise (Eicholtz, 1984).
In summary therefore, it is clear from the research, that parent involvement has positive effects upon achievement, attitudes, behaviours, and attendance (James, 1989; McAfee, 1987; Henderson, 1988; Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 1987).

We are there for learning, and parents’ involvement with their children’s education is on the critical edge. That participation can make the difference between the best that the teacher can accomplish for learners and the best that the combined force and energy of home and school can accomplish for them. (Storey, 1989, p. 193).

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

The literature also presents a strong case for the effects of parent involvement on student achievement. A number of projects have studied the relationship between the level of parent involvement and student performance. Henderson (1988) reported on over fifty studies, all of which identified the link between the involvement of parents and measurable gains in student achievement: involving parents made a critical difference to learner outcomes. If, therefore, the major concern in education is to enhance the impact that education has upon educational outcomes, then school personnel can ill-afford to ignore the importance of including parents in the learning process. Accordingly, the focus must change from considering whether or not parents will be involved in the education process, to *how* that involvement will be implemented (Storey, 1989). It is incumbent upon school administrators, therefore, to find the most effective strategies with which to involve parents.

Such involvement has been recognized by many American federal government programs (for example, *Head Start* and *Follow Through*) which required that parents assume a pivotal role in the education of their children (Henderson, 1988). Such roles as teacher aides, tutors, classroom volunteers, observers, co-learners, and decision-makers are included among the functions that parents should play in the learning process. This approach also supports Henderson’s contention that parents are a basic ingredient but
must be involved \emph{intimately} with the school and not just be the audience for public relations efforts.

Epstein also reports on studies she has conducted that equate gains in students reading achievement and the level of parent involvement practised by the teacher (1985). Her study, however, did not produce the same results with mathematics achievement, though she suggests that this may have occurred more from the inclination of teachers to involve parents more readily in reading activities, rather than any innate differences among the subject matter or the parent's abilities to work in other subject areas. Epstein has also conducted some interesting studies related to student involvement in decision-making—in the family, in school, and in the classroom. Her findings include the fact that the critical feature in developing successful decision-making capabilities, is the family and the school working together (Fullan, 1982). Epstein cites as well, research from the likes of Coleman et al. (1966); Clausen (1966); McDill and Rigsby (1973); Leichter (1974); Lightfoot (1978); Epstein and McPartland (1979); Marjoribanks (1979); and Epstein (1983); all of which supports the contention that parent involvement and school success are positively correlated.

Henderson (1988), however, adds a qualifier to this research. While she recognizes and accepts the body of research that relates parent involvement to individual student achievement, she suggests that the relationship between parent involvement and improved performance of the school as a whole is not well developed and is in need of further research. Stevenson & Baker (1987) also suggest a possible negative aspect of this research: it would appear that parents of high-achieving students become more involved than those of lower-achieving students. He also suggests that parents with more education will be more involved in the activities of the school. Such ideas however, are not supported by the myriad of other studies that examined parent involvement with students from poor communities or minority communities, such as those sponsored by the United
States federal government. It has also been suggested that it may be difficult to persuade parents to take part in the education of their children, especially through direct involvement with instruction, the aspect of parent participation that appears to impact most directly upon student achievement (Storey, 1989). And there are those who would suggest that parent involvement can even in fact, be detrimental (Comer, 1984).

Nevertheless, it is clear from the research that the involvement of the home with the school, accounts for most of the variation in pupil achievement (Wiles, et al., 1981). Schools therefore, must reach out to parents, make them welcome participants in the learning process, and involve them in enriching and extending the work of the classroom (Lamm, 1986).

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND STUDENT ATTITUDES**

Research has also established a positive relationship between the degree of parent involvement and the attitudes that students hold toward their school, their education, and their families. The cooperative relationship that can be established through involving parents in the school results in positive feelings in students (Epstein, 1985). Ostlund, et al., (1985) described a project in which parents and students studied science topics together. As a result of the project, students reported more positive attitudes, not only towards their own learning, but also towards their parents, as a result of the cooperative learning environment that the project had created. Such positive attitudes not only contribute to the student's academic achievement (Comer, 1984) but also result in greater levels of self-esteem and self-concept (Eicholtz, 1984). Parents' interest in the child's schooling promotes the positive attitudes that are critical to achievement (Henderson, 1988). Epstein's research (1985) supports this thesis as well, and Fullan (1982) cites studies conducted by Melaragno et al., (1981) that suggest that students develop better attitudes when their parents are involved in the instructional program. Fullan further
states that positive student attitudes evolve not just from the involvement of parents in the instructional program, but also from the familiarity with the school and the instructional program that parents gain from participating in the school on any of a variety of planes.

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND PARENT ATTITUDES**

Parent attitudes can be measured by the confidence they profess in the school and in the programs in which their children are involved (Storey, 1989). As a result of an extensive study in Maryland, Epstein determined that parent involvement in education led to significant improvements in parents’ attitudes towards schools and teachers. Among her findings were that parents who worked with their children under the direction of the teacher held the teacher in higher regard, recognized the hard work the teacher did, and identified the teacher as superior in both teaching abilities and interpersonal skills (Epstein, 1984, 1985, & 1987). “These findings suggest that, in general, teacher practices of parent involvement maximize cooperation and minimize antagonism between teachers and parents and enhance the teachers’ professional standing from the parents’ perspective.” (Epstein, 1986, p. 290).

From their study in Montreal, Lucas and Lusthaus (1977b) suggested that there was also a positive correlation between the frequency of contact with the school, and parents’ positive attitudes toward the school. Parents who help their children learn at home develop attitudes in themselves and in their children that impact positively upon school achievement (Henderson, 1988). Finally, Lindle (1989) reported that the factor that most affected parents’ attitudes towards the school was the “personal touch”—school personnel taking a personal interest in the children.

However, Epstein’s research (1986) also uncovered the finding that parents of high-achieving students were more critical of the school and teacher than are other
parents. From this it would appear that it is even more critical for schools to involve parents of students from all levels of student ability, rather than parents of students at just the lower end of the achievement scale as has so often been the case with parent involvement projects (as, for example, special needs students, low income families, and minority families).

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND TEACHER ATTITUDES**

Little study appears to have been done in evaluating the impact of parent involvement on teacher and administrator attitudes. Epstein (1986) in her Maryland study did find that teachers rated parents more highly when those teachers employed frequent parent involvement practices. Teachers rated parents higher in helpfulness and follow-through with learning activities at home, and their positive feelings were directed to all parents, not just those with higher socio-economic status and educational background. She also suggested that the presence of parents acting in a volunteer capacity in the school, appeared to positively influence teachers’ interactions with other parents (1987) because of the signal that this presence gave that other parents would be willing to assume involvement roles if asked. Henderson (1988) found from her reviews of the literature that as parents became more involved with their children’s education, teachers began to devote more time to teaching, were more likely to experiment, and developed approaches that were more student-oriented. Moles (1987) also found that teachers who actively involved parents in their programs were less likely to use low socio-economic status of parents as a reason not to ask parents to work with their children either at school or at home. It would appear that experience (and enthusiasm) enable teachers to overcome the prejudices that may exist toward lower status families.

Fullan (1982), however, does report some negative attitudes that may develop when teachers begin working with parents. The required extra time to plan and coordinate
the work of parents, as well as doubts about the skills, abilities and commitment of parents to work with children, are indicative of a need to bring teachers along slowly and incrementally toward involving parents in education. Clearly, there is room for more research into this facet of parent involvement.

CLASSIFICATIONS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Accepting the idea that parent involvement in education is a political and educational imperative as Storey suggests (1989) and accepting the fact that parent involvement has been shown to have significant, positive effects upon student learning, it is then necessary to examine precisely how parents can and do participate in the education of their children.

Joyce Epstein (1988, p. 59) suggests that there are three overriding goals of parent involvement:

1. The improvement of school programs, classroom management, and teacher effectiveness.
2. The improvement of student learning and development.
3. The improvement of parents’ awareness of their continuing responsibilities and contributions to their children’s education and social and personal development across the school years.

Michael Fullan (1982) defines four different forms of parent involvement in schools:

1. (a) Instruction: at school (e.g., parent aides)
   (b) Instruction: at home (e.g., parents as tutors)
2. Governance (e.g., parent advisory councils)
3. Home-school relations (e.g., projects to increase community support)
4. Community service (e.g., adult education, use of facilities)
Joyce Epstein, on the other hand classifies parent involvement in education into the following five major categories (Brandt, 1989; Epstein, 1987, 1988):

**TYPE 1 THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF PARENTS (Parenting)**
- assisting parents become more effective in their role as parents

**TYPE 2 THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF SCHOOLS (Communicating)**
- information from the school regarding programs and activities
- information regarding individual students

**TYPE 3 PARENT INVOLVEMENT AT SCHOOL (Volunteering)**
- in the school
- in the classroom
- in fund raising activities
- as audience and spectators

**TYPE 4 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING ACTIVITIES AT HOME**
- working with their children on school work at home

**TYPE 5 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE AND ADVOCACY (Representing other parents)**
- parents' association or councils
- parent advocacy

Each of these authors of course has identified essentially the same major areas of parent involvement, though each has attached somewhat different labels. Each of their classifications as well, encompasses a vast array of practices, though as Epstein states, "...any one practice...can't cover the full range of ways parents and teachers need to work together for their children's education.” (Brandt, 1989, p. 24)
It has been proven, however, that only direct involvement with instruction (either in the classroom or at home) has a direct effect upon student learning (Fullan, 1982) though Fullan also suggests that some of the other forms of involvement may have an indirect and even a cumulative or synergistic effect upon student achievement and positive attitudes. Nevertheless, he states that there is no proven relationship between parent participation on advisory or consultative councils, and educational outcomes.

For the purposes of this study, Epstein’s classifications will be used to organize the examination of the current literature as well as to examine practices in the field.

**TYPE 1 THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF PARENTS (Parenting)**

The idea that schools have a part to play in helping parents be better at the task of parenting, is one that has received really very little attention in the literature. Nevertheless, if schools and teachers are in fact the experts that their training suggests that they are, then it seems only reasonable that the school should take something of a leadership role in this regard. When those basic obligations of parents that Epstein (1987) speaks of (providing food, clothing, shelter, health, and safety) are not being met, the school has a responsibility to ensure that appropriate social agencies are alerted. Beyond those basic needs, however, the school must ensure that parents are aware of the need for providing a suitable learning environment in the home (Henderson, 1988) by providing appropriate spaces and time, and encouraging good study habits (VanDevender, 1988).

There is also a role for the school to play in providing services that enhance parents’ ability to become more effective as parents. Workshops on parenting skills (Lueder, 1989) and programs that support parents in their efforts to fight drugs and understand the development of their children (Lindle, 1989) are activities that the school can promote, if not provide directly. Interestingly, Epstein (1987) found that teachers who conducted workshops for parents, especially ones whose objective it was to provide
parents with skills and information to permit them to work with their children, were also
the teachers who were most liable to have parents involved directly in their instructional
programs both at school and at home.

TYPE 2  THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF SCHOOLS (Communicating)

Among the first things the school must do to involve parents in education is to
open and maintain communication links with the home. Much has been written about
effective school-to-home communication, and many administrators have spent time
learning to produce “effective” newsletters informing parents about the school. It goes
almost without saying that such communication is an important facet of school/home
relations since parents have two overriding concerns about their schools: they want the
best for their children; and they want to know about their children’s activities at school
(Storey, 1989); and parental attitudes are shaped when communication from the school
clearly indicates that “the best” is occurring and parents are being kept informed. There
also appears to be a direct relationship between the quality of school-to-parent
communication and the perceived effectiveness of the school-home relationship (Fullan,
1982). As well, before parents can begin to play any of the other roles in the school such
as assisting with instruction, they need to have knowledge about the child’s schooling
(Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Cattermole & Robinson, 1985). There appears to be very little
real evidence to suggest a direct link between the majority of liaison activities employed
by schools (Storey, 1989) and student learning, but it is fairly clear that effective
communication is the foundation upon which other parent involvement structures will be
built. If the school can gain the cooperation of parents through strong, multi-dimensional
liaison programs, then the way is facilitated for succeeding with the child (VanDevender,
1988; Storey, 1989).
Communication between the school and the home will occur along two fronts: providing information about what the schools are doing; and transmitting information about the child's progress.

In their examination of how parents prefer to receive information about the school and their children's education, Cattermole & Robinson (1985) established that the preferred method was direct, first-hand contacts between the school and the parent. Information would reach them through such avenues as their children's conversations about the school, phone calls or written communications from their child's teacher, their child's report card, and the school newsletter. This research suggested however, that the most effective methods were direct one-to-one personal contacts and the parent-teacher conference.

Lindle (1989) supports and expands upon this idea with her research which found that parents preferred a less formal relationship with their child's teachers such as regular, informal contacts via telephone calls or notes. Nevertheless, Epstein (1986) reported that in spite of the volume of information received from the school through such vehicles as the school newsletter, many parents reported few direct communications from their child's teacher, and Lucas and Lusthaus (1977) found that seldom did schools make an effort to communicate "good news" about the child—what they refer to as an "out-reach" function—and that a substantial body of parents considered the "tone" of school communications to be too impersonal and even "paternalistic", perceptions that create barriers between the two institutions. Clearly schools have to examine and re-evaluate their approaches to communication.

There is an almost endless list of ways for communicating information from the school to the home: classroom newspapers; "Good News" phone calls and letters of praise; communication folders; memos; notices; report cards; parent-teacher conferences;
parent manuals; calendars; open houses; curriculum evenings; “Meet the Teacher” night; forums for discussion of educational topics; and so on. Of these, probably the most common example of a planned and structured communication activity is the school newsletter. When preparing the newsletters, schools must consider those with whom they are communicating, and ensure that the message is written in a form that parents will understand. That means, that they must be written in clear, straight-forward language, and be free of educational jargon. In addition, newsletters may need to be prepared in a variety of languages, if there is a mixture of cultures included in the school’s community (Brandt, 1989). The primary factor to consider in all communication however, is ensuring that the receiver of the message is able to fully understand the information, and is able to act on it if appropriate (Lucas & Lusthaus, 1977).

Schools have not yet really begun to explore some of the new technology and its implications for information distribution. Even the simple answering machine has been given little attention as a means of conveying information from the school. Bauch (1989) describes a project first piloted in Huntsville, Alabama, wherein teachers recorded brief daily messages for their parents, outlining the day’s activities, providing information about the day’s homework assignments, and describing ways in which parents can work with their children to enhance the day’s learning. The answering machine can also provide a vehicle for messages from the parent to the teacher. Bauch also highlights some of the potential of the computer. This technology is only just beginning to be recognized as providing valuable tools for use in the school, and educators could make them effective tools in their efforts to keep parents informed and to maintain an open dialogue.

The formal school newsletter and devices such as those just described, while important agents for communication, are not the only means by which the school can provide information, though they are ones over which the school can exercise considerable control. Less controllable, however, and perhaps even more potent, are the
informal messages carried out of the school by a variety of school people. Administrators, teachers, support personnel and students all carry important messages about the school to parents as well as to the community at large (Storey, 1989). Teachers are probably the key communicators to parents, and as such must constantly be aware that any and all contacts they have with parents, including the informal chat in the school hallway or on the soccer field, convey important messages about the school, its programs, and its attitudes. Incorrect impressions conveyed at this level can be devastating to a school, and exceedingly difficult to reverse. The student too, is an important carrier of information and impressions. As noted earlier, parents consider their children as important lines of communication from the school. Schools therefore, need to be cognizant of the messages they are imparting to children as they are a link that many schools and teachers fail to recognize as influential information carriers.

Another key group of message-carriers is the variety of support staff who work in the school: custodians, secretaries, teacher assistants, nurses, etc. Many parents consider this group of people to be the ones who know “what really goes on” in the school (Storey, 1989) and as such, administrators and teachers must again be fully aware of the messages that these people take into the community. They can often be subjected to some considerable questioning, and the school must ensure that it knows how they will respond, that they are prepared with accurate information, and that they will carry the right messages on behalf of the school.

It is also necessary to look beyond the immediate community of school parents when considering the dissemination of information about the school. Periodic distribution of school newsletters to the entire neighbourhood is one idea that may be considered.

The newsletter, however, is probably one of the least effective means of developing any kind of two-way communication or dialogue between the school and the
home (Storey, 1989). If it is accepted that communication between the school and the home should go two ways, "just as the child does" (McAfee, 1987, p. 198), then schools have to consider structures that permit dialogue. Letters to parents that request a reply (Davis, 1989), surveys and questionnaires that seek parent input and try to identify parent attitudes and perspectives, and open forums for the discussion of important education and/or school topics, are all activities that might be employed to open communication from the family back to the school. This will enable educators to more clearly understand community perceptions, and be better able to respond to parental opinions, desires, and requests. It may prove to be something of a challenge at first to convince parents that the school is in fact really prepared to listen to them and consider their ideas, but such approaches will serve to begin establishing the parent partnership of which Storey speaks so strongly (Storey, 1989).

As well as seeking information about the school in general, parents are naturally wanting information about their own child's program and progress. The two most frequently used approaches are pupil report cards, which vary considerably in the quantity and quality of the information they convey; and the parent-teacher conference. Of the two, the parent-teacher conference is preferable since it requires a physical meeting of the teacher and the parent and therefore, most effectively provides opportunities for two-way dialogue between them. As well as the teacher relaying information about the child's academic progress, the conference should also provide an opportunity for the parent to tell the teacher at least as much about the child. Ideas for home learning activities should also be added to the discussion (Moles, 1987; Culyer, 1988) as well as time for cooperative planning between the teacher and the parents for the child's future progress (VanDevender, 1988). Not all opinions of the parent-teacher conference are positive however. Lindle (1989) cites the difficulty that parents reveal they often have in explaining to the teacher their perceptions about the child; the limited
time of the conference; the lack of interest in parent opinions that many teachers portray; and the formalized professional-client relationship that forms the basis of so many of these meetings. Moles (1987) describes two studies where the conference was little more than an exchange of information rather than a bilateral discussion of perceptions and future plans, as well as the perception of parents that too often they are called to a conference only when there is "bad news".

In their evaluation of the parent-teacher conference as a means of communication, schools must also consider the needs of parents and their often busy schedules. By scheduling conference times early in the morning as well as during the evening thereby working around parents' job commitments; in widely-scattered parent communities considering holding conferences at sites other than the school; and in communities with significant numbers of non-English speaking parents providing translation services; are all ideas that could help the school to preserve open communication links and maintain positive relationships with its parents.

TYPE 3 PARENT INVOLVEMENT AT SCHOOL (Volunteering)

Communication activities occur largely beyond the world of the child, but parents can and should be involved in capacities that bring them in closer contact with students. Parent volunteerism occurs on several planes; some directly connected with children, others only loosely coupled to the education process. Despite the fact that research has shown that only a limited number of parents will be involved in such activities, parent assistance at the school is the type of parent involvement that most parents and administrators currently support (Epstein, 1986).

There is a myriad of activities in which parents volunteer time in the school. From marking papers to making costumes; cooking hot dogs; assisting at track meets; preparing bulletin boards; accompanying children on field trips; participating in outdoor schools;
helping with class parties; working in the library, in the cafeteria, on the playground; to fund raising—the list is almost endless, and includes tasks that are vital to, and appreciated by, the school. For many parents, this is their preferred way to be involved at the school because it is the parents themselves who control the time and the level at which they will participate (Storey, 1989). Nevertheless, the importance of this level of participation must not be down-graded. Even when parents choose to limit their involvement to short-term endeavours such as this, they convey critical messages to the school and to the child; that the parent does support the school, and is interested in what the child is doing (Storey, 1989). Comer (1984) relates the experience of a school in the poorer areas of New Haven, Connecticut. In this school, the presence of parents in respected and responsible roles sent a positive message to the students that school was important. For many other parents, it is also an opportunity to gather more factual information about the school and to see the total picture of what goes on in the school (Powell, 1986). School becomes no longer an "...alien place.... It becomes something positive in their life." (Powell, 1986, p.32). Many parents want to give something to the school, and volunteering gives them the opportunity to do so without having to make a major, long-term commitment (Powell, 1986).

Michael Fullan states it succinctly: "...the closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement." (Fullan, 1982, p. 193). Beyond that, there is a substantial body of research that shows that parent involvement in the instructional program can have a significant impact upon a student's academic progress. Fullan goes on to qualify his statement by pointing out the fact that it is parents working in collaboration with the teacher, who have an effect upon learning outcomes and not just general teacher aides or assistants. That is an important distinction to make. It would appear however, that this is one area of parent involvement that has not been fully explored in the research (Storey, 1989) and while the evidence is
clear, more empirical studies need to be completed to define precisely what the effects are that bear on successful achievement for learners (Ostlund, et al., 1985).

Working alongside the teacher in the classroom is one way in which parents can participate in their children's education. While many of the activities listed under the heading "Volunteerism" may contribute to this element of parent involvement, that involvement is more likely to have the desired effect when the parent is working with the child in the process of learning. Parent aides in the classroom are a valuable asset for students. They may perform such tasks as reading to children, and listening to them read; assisting with special projects; working with them on regularly assigned classwork; or offering help and tutoring as required.

Many special education programs have been designed with the specific provision that parents play an integral role in the education of their youngsters. The New Haven school referred to earlier (Comer, 1984) also ensures that parents play an important role in the classroom and their presence, along with the other elements of the program have resulted in important educational gains for the students. Phillips Elementary School in Pittsburgh (A+ Schools, 1986) is yet another example of a school where parent involvement in the classroom has resulted in unparalleled gains in achievement, gains attributed directly to the participation of those parents. Finally, Immaculate Heart of Mary School in Las Cruces, New Mexico requires its parents to either pay a fee of two hundred dollars over and above the regular tuition or to provide the school with equivalent services and/or skills (Berninger & Rodriguez, 1989). While this might create an avenue for parents to become actively involved in the school and contribute to their children's education, the program has not been entirely successful in view of the fact that parent participation is often unplanned and sporadic.
There are several other positive features of such involvement, besides the effect upon student achievement. Hunter reports (1989) that as a result of their involvement in her “Par-Aide” program, parents felt “…a deep and profound respect for the professional competence required to teach in a way to accelerate learning.” (Hunter, 1989, p.41), and Powell (1986) reports a mathematics teacher’s response to parents working in the classroom with him, that they helped him be a more effective teacher.

Not all is positive however. Epstein (1987) cites the fact that, while teachers and administrators generally agree that parent involvement at this level is important, few teachers appear to be willing to invest the time required to organize and plan programs involving parent participation. Hunter (1989) issues a caution about the professional and confidential information to which parents have access while working in the classroom. Michel (1985) refers to Sara Lightfoot’s contention that there were many parents who prefer to maintain a separation between the classroom and the family. And Epstein (1985), reports from her studies that only about four percent of parents are active at the school level. Be that as it may, if the research is accurate, that parent involvement with instruction is a valuable asset to improving students’ success in school, then it is incumbent upon all educators to ensure that the obstacles are overcome; that the best is secured for all students.

Another level of volunteering occurs in the sharing with the school of skills, talents, and knowledge that parents possess. By developing an inventory of parent skills, the school is able to facilitate the involvement of a further group of parents (Davies, 1976; Brandt, 1989). Such involvement need not be limited either to parents or to the school site, however. There are many members of the school community who are not parents, but who would welcome the opportunity to work with children and share their interests, either by coming into the school, or by having children visit their homes, their studios, or their businesses. This is an aspect of community involvement that has not been
explored to any great extent, but provides an important means of building bridges of communication and understanding between the school and the broader community of which it is a part.

One further facet of parent volunteerism, is attendance at school functions such as plays, sporting events, and open houses. While many educators may not view this as an element in the traditional vision of parents volunteering, it is nonetheless, an important indication of support for the school and its activities (Brandt, 1989).

Finally, the impact that parent volunteers have on teacher attitudes cannot be overlooked. Apart from the assistance that such parents provide, it is a known fact that the very presence of volunteer parents in the school positively influences teachers’ interactions with these and other parents (Epstein, 1987).

**TYPE 4 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING ACTIVITIES AT HOME**

Of even greater importance to student achievement, is the involvement of parents with their children’s studies at home. And this level of parent involvement has a singularly decided advantage over all other kinds of involvement: every parent can participate; and every child can benefit.

Epstein cites several studies that show that when parents work with their children at home, those children are likely to improve their achievement at school (Brandt, 1989). Storey (1989) points out that the home is probably the most convenient place for parents to be involved with their children from the point of view of both space and time. Lamm (1986) is even more emphatic when he states his belief that a child’s education cannot be exclusively the responsibility of the school; that children will not be able to reach their full potential without cooperation between the home and the school. Taking that idea one step farther, if the family is the child’s first teacher, it seems only logical that the family
should continue to be involved in the education of its young throughout the developing years (Ostlund, et al., 1985).

Whether schools accept the concept of parent involvement in instruction at home or not, it appears that parents most definitely do accept the idea. Epstein reported research verifying that parents helped their children at home regardless of whether or not they received direction or assistance from the teacher (Epstein, 1987). The willingness of parents to work with their children was also apparent when Epstein discovered that more than eighty-five percent of parents were already involved with their children’s schoolwork at home when asked to do so by the teacher; but more strikingly, that they would be prepared to spend up to forty minutes daily if they were to receive instructions regarding how to help. Only twenty-five percent of those parents, however, did receive frequent or regular requests to help. Teachers reported, in the same survey that they offered suggestions to parents only “as the needs arise” (Michel, 1985, p. 24). And as early as 1978, the Gallop Poll of that year found that eighty percent of parents would be willing to spend one evening a month at school learning how to improve children’s behaviour and interest in schoolwork (Moles, 1987). This is clearly a resource that schools are barely tapping.

Epstein (1985) determined that there were three factors that influenced teachers to employ parent involvement practices. The first of these was the grade level. Teachers were progressively less inclined to employ parental assistance as the children moved up through the grades. The second factor was the influence of parents already active in the school. This activity seemed to provide a measure of proof to teachers that parents would be willing to lend assistance. The third factor was the teacher’s preparedness to devote time and energy to developing a parent involvement program.
There is a vast array of ways in which parents can work with their children at home. To date, however, the largest number of these have been in the area of reading instruction (Epstein, 1987), though Joyce Epstein also argues that there is a need for teachers to expand parent involvement beyond that subject area. Epstein (1986, pp. 282-283) identified the twelve techniques used most frequently by teachers:

1. reading aloud or listening to the child read
2. signing the child’s homework
3. giving spelling or math drills
4. giving help on worksheets or workbooks
5. talking with the child about the events of the school day.
6. using things at home to teach the child
7. playing learning games
8. visiting the classroom to observe teaching techniques (that is, to see how the child is being taught)
9. taking the child to the library
10. borrowing books from the teacher to give extra help
11. entering contracts to supervise homework or projects
12. watching and discussing TV shows for learning

A number of successful programs have been implemented. Truby (1987) reported on a successful program in Idaho entitled “Parents in Reading” which required parents to read with their children for fifteen minutes a day. Davies (1987) reported a Washington State program designed to involve parents in the mathematics program. In this project, the school provided a “Sourcebook” to explain the mathematics program, and to give directions for games and activities that parents could pursue with their children. Lueder (1989) cites another mathematics program instituted in Tennessee entitled “Family Math” which provided activities that parents and children could work on together to enhance each other’s understanding of the mathematics concepts being presented in the classroom. One further scheme for enhancing learning at home was developed in St. Paul, Minnesota. Under this plan, mothers, fathers, and grandparents were provided with specific training to enable them to work with their youngsters in mathematics as a supplement to the regular school curriculum. As a result, student achievement improved significantly (Fantini, 1980, in Fullan, 1982).
Many other ideas for facilitating parent involvement in learning at home are contained in the literature: “Monthly Reminders” to highlight for parents the topics being studied in the classroom each month (Truby, 1987); Homework Helper programs on local television (Davies, 1987); and the provision of book lists for parents to assist them in choosing suitable reading material for their children (Truby, 1987).

The advent of the personal computer appears to be opening up many new possibilities for allowing parents to work with their children. Computers could dramatically change the way homework is designed, with more individualized work able to be provided to students (Epstein, 1985). As well, the interactive nature of the computer should mean that parents will be able to work more closely with their children on computer guided instructional programs (Epstein, 1985; Ostlund, et al., 1985). Epstein even goes so far as to suggest that the computer may provide greater opportunities for parents to be “co-learners” with their children as they explore the possibilities of the computer for learning and for problem solving.

It is also apparent from the research that family socio-economic status, marital status, and whether or not both parents were working, have little or no bearing on either the families’ willingness or ability to work with their children. What appeared to be the pivotal factor, was the attitude of the teacher. Indeed, teachers who used parent involvement extensively made equal demands on single and married parents, and on working parents, and these parents responded equally to the demands placed upon them (Epstein, 1985). Epstein does suggest however, that the school should consider developing activities designed specifically to involve parents, and assigning them on the weekends when parents are more likely to have the time to work with their children (Brandt, 1989).
If parent involvement with the instructional program is the type of involvement that has the greatest bearing upon student achievement and learning outcomes, then parent involvement in governance must have the least connection with educational objectives since it is the level of involvement that is farthest removed from the learner (Brandt, 1989; Fullan, 1982).

One of the strongest proponents of parent involvement in decision-making in schools is Don Davies, the director and founder of the Institute for Responsive Education and a professor at Boston University School of Education. It is his belief that “Many [Americans] are frustrated with slow-moving, unresponsive bureaucracies....They are suspicious of politicians and professionals and experts.” (Davies, 1976, p. 7). He states further that “Citizens and educators are recognizing that improvement in the schools and community support for education occurs only when schools and communities are open to each other—when the educational consumer (student, parent, and community member) has a strong, honest part in setting policy and making decisions.” (p. 8). Robinson (1977) and Storey (1989) also highlight this frustration with institutions that have become excessively bureaucratized, unresponsive, and in which people have developed mistrust. Thus, it was that during the decades of the sixties and the seventies, the demand for public participation in school decision-making was increasingly heard in education.

Participation in planning, policy development, and decision-making is considered by some parents to be a parental right (Storey, 1989), and certainly it is difficult to refute the argument that involvement in decision-making is a fundamental right of all citizens in a democracy. Davies (1976) takes the position that democracy involves more than just voting and using resources. It also means participating in decision-making and he cites many instances where democratic participation is effective. He describes democracy as
operating on two levels: representation (or delegation of responsibility by citizens) and participation (playing a part in the decision-making process). His argument for the latter as being the preferable form of governance for schools is based on the notion that "...people affected by decisions of institutions and government agencies should have a voice in making those decisions." (1976, p. 145). Jennings (1989) adds a further dimension to this argument with the assertion that participation by parents in school committees will ensure that the decisions made will bring the schools into closer alignment with the desires and needs of the community. Lamm (1986) presents the case for Effective Schools in which, research tells us, everyone (teachers and parents) works together for clear and specific goals to enhance the functioning of the school. Finally, Davies supports his thesis with reference to studies that show that the individual school is the most important unit for educational planning and change, and he includes in this process, a collaborative role for parents. The concept of parent involvement in governance appears very logical and can be very appealing.

A number of cautions are included in the literature on parent involvement in governance, however. Wiles, et al., (1976) point to the fact that before any involvement is implemented, the roles of each of the players, particularly parents, must be clearly defined, both in their relationship with other members of the organization, as well as the issues in which their involvement would be appropriate. Storey (1989, pp. 246-248) suggests twelve basic principles that must be in place if advisory structures are to be successful:

1. Understand the guidelines.
2. Clarify the expectations of parents and the school.
3. Work toward teacher understanding and commitment.
4. Identify the pressure points.
5. Provide assistance for the group to get started.
6. Help the group move beyond entry level activities.
7. Help the group to move beyond response to initiative.
8. Maintain open dialogue.
9. Involve teachers with the advisory group.
10. Give the advisory group a presence in the school.
11. Identify issues early.
12. Ensure balanced representation.

Jennings (1989) emphasizes the need for school councils to have a written constitution and for specific training and orientation to be provided for participants to ensure that they are able to play a truly effective role in the organization. He also goes so far as to suggest an appropriate size and composition for a school committee: nine to eighteen members including four staff members, four parents, one to two community members (who are not parents), the principal, and four students. Jennings is very firm in his belief that both non-parents and students should be included in any school-level decision-making body; that is to say: “All stakeholders are necessary to complete the equation for school improvement.” (p. 44).

Davies has provided a list of some of the responsibilities that school committees might assume (1976, p. 149):

- selecting and evaluating the principal
- selecting and evaluating teachers
- identifying goals, priorities, and needs
- setting budget priorities
- evaluating the curriculum and extra-curricular activities
- approving new school programs
- improving community support
- investigating student or parent problems and complaints.

Unquestionably, many administrators or teachers will not feel comfortable with such a list of responsibilities assigned to citizen groups, and Davies recognizes this fact when he indicates that reform movements have often widened the gulf between professionals and parents rather than yield the kind of cooperative partnership that he and other educators would prefer to see develop. Robinson (1977) also provides a warning that when parent groups cross the boundary between what he terms “administrative participation” and the realm of political intervention in the school, conflict may arise. The cautions are well-advised.
Davies (1976) reported that in the mid-seventies in excess of three thousand school councils were in existence in the United States. He cited Florida, South Carolina, and Massachusetts as states where school committees had been mandated in legislation, with varying levels of responsibility assigned to them. Robinson (1977) cites U.S. reports that ninety-five percent of school districts in the United States had some form of parent advisory committee in place by that time. In Canada, the Quebec legislature mandated Parent Advisory Committees for all schools in the province, and in British Columbia, the 1989 School Act facilitated the establishment of parents’ advisory councils with authority to "...advise the board and the principal and staff of the school...respecting any matter relating to the school...."

School advisory councils, however, have not experienced a high rate of success. Lucas et al., (1978/79) conducted a revealing examination of the minutes of Parent Advisory Committees in Quebec and the results of their study did not shed a very favourable light upon these committees. They found that the committees played only a minimal role in real consultation, that the majority of their time was expended in receiving information, and that by far the largest proportion of their activities was directed by the school principal. It would appear that these committees really gave only the illusion of participatory democracy and worked in only a very small proportion of cases (Lucas, et al., 1978/79; Wiles et al., 1981; Storey, 1989; Fullan, 1982).

Another major difficulty experienced with the implementation of school advisory committees is the low rate of participation and the potential that these groups will not represent the entire spectrum of parental (or citizen) opinion. Typically it is only a very small group of parents who become involved in school committees (Brandt, 1989), and most parents are not interested in being involved in such organizations. Storey (1989), Fullan (1982), and Levin (1982) all cite a 1979 Canadian survey in which 63.4 per cent of the respondents indicated that they did not wish to serve on a school advisory committee,
in spite of the fact that more than half of those surveyed indicated that the public had too little say in the operation of the schools. In fact, the majority of parents really want only to be kept informed of what is happening in their children’s school and are content to allow knowledgeable professionals to make the necessary educational decisions (Cattermole & Robinson, 1985).

In spite of the lack of participation in school advisory or governance models, and in spite of surveys that reveal that the majority of parents would not wish to serve on such committees, the conclusion must not be drawn, that parent involvement in governance should be abandoned altogether (Fullan, 1982). The motivation of parents is simply to ensure that the best is provided for their children, and for a number of parents, participation in school consultative committees is a viable route for them to achieve that objective (Storey, 1989). Such involvement can serve a number of important and positive functions, but educators must ensure that they maintain a realistic perspective of the role that such committees can play in the total life of the school.

**BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

In her 1981 Maryland study, Joyce Epstein ascertained that only about four percent of parents were actively involved in their children’s school (defined as being in the school more than twenty-five days per year) (Epstein, 1984), and that seventy percent of the parents surveyed were never involved in any school activities. In view of the fact that the research is dramatically consistent in its findings that parent involvement has a substantial effect upon student learning and educational outcomes, and that parent involvement strategies are valued by both parents and teachers (James, 1989), it must be questioned why so few parents are involved, in such limited ways, in so small a number of schools. What are the barriers that mitigate against parents playing an effective participatory role in their children’s education?
Definitive research has been unable to discern any specific and consistent factors that would account for the variations in parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987) though it is possible to identify some potential reasons for the lack of parent participation models.

James (1989) identified five major causes for the break down of collaboration between the school and the parent:

1. the organizational structure of schools
2. conflict between the family and schools as social systems
3. teachers' attitudes and practices
4. lack of appropriate training
5. territorialism

To these factors, might also be added:

6. student age, and
7. student grade level.

Davies (1987, pp. 158-159) lists eight characteristics of schools that impede parent involvement. The first four are characteristics of organizations in general:

1. They are bound by routines or standard operating procedures.
2. They try to avoid uncertainty and seek stable internal and external relationships.
3. Procedures and repertoires of activities change only incrementally and new activities typically consist of only marginal adaptations of existing programs and activities.
4. Organizations will usually allow only a limited search for alternative solutions to problems and usually accept less than the optimum course of action that would require higher risk and more change.

There are also four other characteristics, unique to schools, that serve to thwart efforts to involve parents:

5. School goals are diffuse, multifaceted, and subject to wide variation in interpretation.
6. Responsibilities for achieving goals are fragmented among a variety of personnel (administrators, counsellors, classroom teachers, specialist teachers, families, students).
7. "Informal norms" are powerful (eg: professional autonomy) and there is a unique language (jargon) in use in the school.

8. There is a unique formal structure in the school system (the variety of levels of decision-makings: provincial, district, school, classroom which often operate quite independent of each other—the "loosely coupled" system).

Thus Fruchter (1984) points to the fact that the avenues that schools offer for parent involvement are often formal, symbolic, or supportive, rather than vehicles to create a true partnership. The school controls the relationship and as such is able to effectively manipulate such structures as parent advisory committees, and even parent involvement in classrooms, such as to cause frustration and ultimate withdrawal of parents from the enterprise. If however, educators consider parent participation as vital for the school to provide the most effective education for children, then educators must find ways of moving the ship of education to a new course. It may be a slow turn, but it is essential for the success of student learning.

The family as a social unit has undergone some dramatic changes in recent years. The considerable increase in the number of single-parent families as well as in the number of families in which both parents work outside the home, would seem to work against many parents being involved in education; indeed, many teachers often point to these two factors as reasons for not attempting to involve parents in schools (Ostlund, et al., 1985). Research however, does not bear this out. Single parents, married parents, and working parents, all share the same interest and willingness to help children with learning activities at home (Moles, 1987) and Epstein's research (1987) in fact, showed that single parents spent more time helping their children than did married parents. She also believes that only about two to five percent of parents may have problems severe enough to interfere even part of the time, with their ability to work with their children (Brandt, 1989). Unquestionably, many of today's parents do face pressures that may hamper their efforts to be of assistance, but that does not mean that the school should avoid seeking
their involvement. Instead, schools must accept and understand the special circumstances of these families and seek alternative ways and means for them to be participants in their children’s education.

Another apparent myth that seems to interfere with efforts to involve parents with school personnel, is that parents from poorer communities, parents with lower levels of education, and parents of minority groups, are less willing and less able to participate in the education process. Fruchter (1984, p. 33) appears to contribute to this view when he says that “...most low-income and minority parents are too consumed with the demands of work and caring for the family’s needs to manage the time and energy for sustaining involvement in schooling.” However, Lindle (1989) refers to University of Pittsburgh research that refutes this contention. That research indicates that all families, regardless of income or status, have similar desires for communication with the school. Epstein goes even farther when she relates the results of her research that show that:

Teachers who had organized the frequent use of parent involvement were able to get good results from all parents—not just those who are traditionally thought to be helpful to teachers and to children.

( Epstein, 1987, p. 131)

She states that what is required is clear, useful information about what parents can do to help their children. The difference then, appears to be one of teacher attitude, and not parent socio-economic status, education level, or culture.

This is not to say that such factors should be ignored. Far from it. Among these peoples, are parents who themselves had poor experiences at school and approaching the school in the role of a parent serves to rekindle those negative feelings from their own childhood (Fruchter, 1984). As well, schools have often fostered the idea that the lack of success of these children is the fault of the parents (Fruchter, 1984). Fruchter refers, however, to the Effective Schools Research, and to the work of Ron Edmonds in particular, who found that there were schools in poor and minority neighbourhoods which
were effective, and in which students did succeed; and Edmonds suggests that the problem does not belong with the parents, but is rather a political issue. Dembo and Gibson (1985 in Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987) propose that the lower levels of parent involvement that is apparent in such neighbourhoods may in fact result from the "...frustration and inefficacy resulting from teachers' reactions to characteristics of low-achieving students' parents." Again, the problem appears to reside within the school.

Schools must also be aware of the cultural differences that will exist between an essentially white, European school system, and a community whose racial and cultural backgrounds are different. Again it would appear that variations in success rates result more from the stance of the school than an inherent lack of ability and commitment within the community. The task of the school is to recognize these differences, develop an understanding of them, and work to overcome the barriers so that all parents can join in the school-family partnership.

As already suggested, teacher attitudes contribute much to the inability of schools and parents to come together in a partnership for the ultimate benefit of the students they share. Wiles et al. (1981), refer to the "professional expertise" and "formal role" which promote a professional-client hierarchical relationship between the school and the parent. Schools frequently put considerable effort into establishing a business-like relationship with their clients, but this is precisely the attitude that turns parents away from the school (Lindle, 1989). Henderson (1988) uncovered an even more disturbing finding: that while many schools favour parent involvement in the traditional ways, "...a substantial majority of teachers and principals do not view the parental role in educational or personnel decisions as either useful or appropriate." (p. 150). He found many experienced, sincere, dedicated teachers who openly admitted to their feeling that classroom learning is best left to the professionals. To be sure, to work closely with parents requires a high degree of mutual respect and trust, but too often the teacher utilizes his or her position as
controller of communication and information, to manipulate the school-family relationship and therefore, reinforce the barriers between the two institutions. Hoover-Dempsey, et al. (1987), offer a further explanation for the reluctance of teachers to involve parents, and that is the level of efficacy felt by the teacher. An efficacious teacher, confident in his or her own teaching abilities, will more readily open the classroom to parents and view parent involvement as something that enhances his or her teaching, rather than undermines the teacher’s professional authority and autonomy.

Unquestionably too, teachers are busy people with frequent, often conflicting demands being made on them from various quarters. For many teachers, the significantly increased planning and organization requirements of preparing to involve parents in the classroom or in instructional activities at home, may be more than they are able or prepared to put forth (James, 1989). James also suggests that including other adults in the classroom substantially alters the “ecology” of the learning environment, and cites a study by DeVault, Harnischfeger, and Wiley (1977) that found that when there were additional adults in the room, teachers actually spent less time with students (in James, 1989).

Fullan (1982) points to another barrier to parent involvement and that is the almost complete lack of training teachers and administrators receive on how to include parents in the education process. Few teacher training institutions explore the research into, and theories of, parent participation with their pre-service teachers, or offer suggestions as to how programs might be implemented (McAfee, 1987, and others). James (1989) refers to research by Spriggs (1984) which showed that only thirty-seven percent of teachers and administrators had received any formal training in working with parents, and Epstein (1985) contributes the idea that much of the present training teachers receive actually results in attitudes and practices that work to keep parents out of the learning process.
Teachers are not the only people who lack specific training, however. McAfee (1987) suggests that support personnel also need to be apprised of ways to work effectively with parents in view of the fact that these people are an integral part of the school’s organization. Parents too, need training so that they will feel adequately prepared to work with the school and their children in order to enhance the education process.

Seeley (1989) considers there is an even more fundamental reason for the rarity of effective parent involvement structures. He refers to the delegation model of running schools which, over time, has tended to solidify the disparate roles of the school and the family and has erected a barrier between the two institutions. By delegating responsibility for education to the school, citizens essentially cut themselves out of the learning enterprise and this attitude colours the outlooks of both teachers and parents to this day. “Reliance on the delegation paradigm has created a fundamental gap between families and schools.” (Seeley, 1989, p. 46). This model also gives rise to the “Territoriality” referred to by James (1989), as teachers work to protect their own professional status, authority, and autonomy as the providers of education, as opposed to the family’s responsibility for providing socializing experiences.

A final factor that influences the involvement of parents is the age and grade level of the students. Epstein (1986) points out that as children move up the grades, their parents feel increasingly less able to offer help with their studies, and teachers too appear to offer less assistance to facilitate parents’ efforts with their children. She also indicates that it may be more difficult for teachers in the higher grades to involve parents due to the more diversified needs of these students, and the increasing complexity of course content. Nevertheless, it is also Epstein’s experience, that when teachers and administrators develop parent involvement programs in the upper grades, parents do respond (Brandt, 1989).
Clearly there are many factors that can interfere with the implementation of parent participation ventures. None of these barriers, however, are beyond being breached. Storey (1989, p. 200) poses the question: “Is it worth the effort?” His answer: “The evidence suggests that it is.”

THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

Whatever the structures that a school attempts to put into place to draw parents into the education enterprise as partners, it is clear that the key figure will be the principal (Davies, 1976). To begin with, it is most likely the principal who will take the initiative to involve parents in the school. To do so, he will need to have developed a substantial knowledge base of pertinent and current research to ensure he possesses a complete understanding of the value of parent involvement in schooling, and the roles that parents can perform in the education of children. Beyond acquiring that knowledge, however, the principal must also hold very clearly defined goals and expectations regarding how parent involvement will enhance school-family relations, and the significance of such involvement upon student achievement (James, 1989). It is necessary too, for the principal to broaden his own thinking about parent involvement and to break away from viewing parents in the roles in which they have traditionally been cast (Berninger, et al., 1989). Administrators must always be searching out new resources to employ in the fulfillment of the school’s mission, and parents are one such resource that has been little tapped to date (Chavkin & Williams, 1987). The commitment of the principal is crucial (Powell, 1986): his is the pivotal role in “...initiating, nurturing and maintaining what is sometimes a fragile enterprise.” (Storey, 1989, p. 200).

To begin with, it will be necessary for the principal to assess the present level of parent participation in the school through surveys, interviews, meetings, and discussions; and from the basis of that assembled information, begin the development of both short
and long range plans to implement and strengthen parent involvement programs (Brandt, 1989). The principal then must direct his efforts to working with his staff.

There is no doubt that not all teachers approach the subject of parent involvement with enthusiasm. For many, the suggestion that they should be working more closely with parents will be just one more requirement among the myriad of demands already made of them. It will be incumbent upon the principal then, to plan activities that will help the staff develop an full understanding of parent participation and its impact on student learning. This task will be facilitated if the staff has already worked through a process to reach consensus on the school’s mission and goals. Once these have been established, the principal, through sharing his knowledge of the significance of parent involvement, will need to assist the staff, through collegial processes, to develop understanding and support for the concept. If the relationship between parent involvement and school mission is clear, there should be no dispute regarding the question of bringing parents into the shared enterprise of education (Storey, 1989). Seeley (1989) emphasizes that what is required is a substantial paradigm shift and that considerable effort will be required to undertake the additional planning, trust building, and program revision necessary to create a new model of schooling. He points to the basic ingredient as the will to do it and that will must originate with the principal and be transmitted to teachers. “Few things are as critical as the stance of the principal.” (Storey, 1989, p. 232). If he is not committed to the concept, there is little hope that parent involvement will become an integral part of the structure of education in the school (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 1987).

Collaboration will need to be fostered through a developmental process (Berninger & Rodriguez, 1989), and a team approach to the effort will ensure that the enterprise will continue and gain momentum as peer support—and pressure—work to draw in all the participants (Seeley, 1989) and to ensure an on-going program. Ost (1989)
counsels however, that unless the effort to involve parents is school-wide, the effect will be only marginal.

Thus the role of the principal becomes even more critical. One role that the principal can fill in assisting with the incremental development of a parent involvement model is to work with teachers to increase their knowledge of, and skills with, parent involvement programs. As mentioned earlier in this paper, few teachers have ever received any formal training in working with parents. The principal can either organize or support training workshops to overcome this deficit (Michel, 1985). Such training might also need to include skills and understandings necessary for working with people from differing cultural backgrounds (James, 1989). Parents too will need assistance as they become increasingly involved in education, and the principal should take the lead in helping them become more active in the school (Moles, 1987).

Administrators and teachers must take the initiative to break down the barriers to parent involvement, establish a level of trust, and reach out to parents to enlist their support and cooperation (James, 1989). Administrators will need to work to create a less formal atmosphere in the school, and create the kind of personalized, open, and caring school climate that clearly signals to parents that they are not only welcomed in the building, but also accepted as performing an important collaborative role in the education of their children (Eicholtz, 1984; Storey, 1989; Wiles, et al., 1981). Parents need to know that they should help, and can help, with their children’s learning; and the school will need to work with them to identify the degree and type of involvement they wish to have and work cooperatively with them to define goals, roles, and programs for that involvement (Chavkin & Williams, 1987; Berninger & Rodriguez, 1989; Storey, 1989).

It is also clear from the literature that there is a need for someone to assume coordination of parent involvement programs if they are to move from the kind of
intermittent activities that so often characterize current practice. That person might be the principal, though more often than not, the examples cited in the literature identify specific members of staff as “lead teachers” (Epstein, 1987), or even parents (Seeley, 1989), as filling the organizing role. The work of this person would be to provide a liaison between the school, the teachers, and the home, (Lueder, 1989); to organize the scheduling of parents into classrooms and activities (Hunter, 1989); to coordinate different aspects of the program; to become the “expert” to advise the principal and staff members; and to provide resources, develop materials, and plan workshops for both parents and teachers (Epstein, 1987, Brandt, 1989). To provide a coordinator such as this, with the time and facilities with which to work, may require some carefully considered reallocation of resources, but provision for a coordinating function appears to be a vital component of an effective parent involvement program.

Once launched, however, the principal will need to remain an important figure in the program, offering continuing support in the form of resources, time, money, and most of all, encouragement (James, 1989). That encouragement must come from regular recognition of the work of both teachers and parents in the school, must emphasize the value of the collaborative efforts on behalf of children, and be widely and publicly acknowledged (Storey, 1989).

In regards to the implementation of programs for the involvement of parents in governance responsibilities, the role of the principal is also critical. In spite of the rather negative research findings about the success of parent advisory committees, the fact remains that they can have a role to fill in the school, and in many areas of the country, legislative provision is now made for them. How they function at the school level will be determined by the position the school administration takes. Recognizing that the home and the school are vastly different cultures, the school will need work with parents to help them understand how schools function, translate its mission and goals (and its language),
and provide opportunities for parents to learn how to effectively seek and present parent opinions. An open atmosphere is also important if parents are to feel that their opinions really do matter and are really listened to and acted upon. With the assistance and guidance of the principal, parent advisory councils will need to ensure that the positions they present accurately represent the full spectrum of opinion among the parent body. Finally, the administration of the school must make sure that the parent organization makes a positive contribution to the school’s goal of providing the best education for each and every child in its care. Parent involvement in planning and organizing school activities and in contributing to important decisions about the school can considerably enhance the climate of the school (Haynes, 1989). Implemented prudently, parents’ committees can be an important adjunct to the school organization.

CONCLUSION

Parents are an important thread in the fabric of education. Too often, however, schools have not only ignored the part that they can play, but have even worked actively to keep them out of the school. Research over the last two decades proclaims emphatically that educators are woefully wrong to ignore parents as a resource in education (Storey, 1989). If it is accepted that the overriding mission of educators is to secure the very best education for students, then they must look again at this enormous untapped resource called parents. Yes, there will be barriers to cross and obstacles to overcome in the quest for a collaborative partnership with parents, but school personnel have to believe the research that clearly demonstrates that it is worth the effort (Fullan, 1982).
Williams and Chavkin (1989, pp. 18-20) reported on the seven elements that the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) found were common to successful parent involvement programs.

1. They had written policies.
2. They had administrative support in the form of funding, materials, and personnel.
3. They included training for staff as well as parents.
4. They approached issues as a partnership with planning, goal setting, role definition, program assessments, support efforts, and needs identification, all done collaboratively.
5. They maintained frequent, open, two-way communication.
6. They networked with other schools and shared experiences, expertise, and information.
7. They maintained an on-going evaluation program.

These factors provide a useful framework for implementing effective parent involvement programs.

Relationships between schools and families must be improved if schools are to optimize the educational opportunities for children under their care. The research evidence is clear.

Working in collaboration with parents, school administrators can establish and put into action a partnership that enhances the input and resources necessary for improving the quality of education in our schools....developing and maintaining a vital partnership that is needed in the drive toward excellence in schools and education.

(Chavkin & Williams, 1987, p. 183)

Henderson (1988, p. 148) tells us:

Parent involvement in the educational enterprise is neither a quick fix nor a luxury....It is absolutely fundamental to a healthy system of public education.

Vernon Storey (1989, p. 193) however, states it most emphatically of all:

The growing body of research on parent impact faces us squarely with the need to act. If parents’ attitudes and practices can affect learning in important ways, there is for school people an ethical imperative—we are challenged to do something to take advantage of the potential.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The literature clearly shows that parent participation in education has a positive impact upon parent and student attitudes as well as upon student achievement. This premise was first evident in the Effective Schools Research which identified parent participation as one of the major factors common among effective schools. Current research has also revealed that parents are able to assume a broad variety of roles in the school, from intermittent volunteerism to active participation in the instructional program.

In view of the fact that a key figure in the school is the principal, this study focuses on the principal and his or her role in the implementation of effective parent participation activities and in strengthening the bond between the school and the home.

The purpose of this study therefore, is to identify those practices that principals employ that increase and enhance parent participation in education. The ultimate aim is an attempt to codify such behaviours, and to produce an inventory of administrative strategies that appear to be effective in encouraging, increasing, and enhancing parent participation in education.

SOURCES OF DATA

In order to achieve the stated objective of the study, the initial requirement was to identify schools in which parents were already involved to a significant degree. Once
these schools were selected, it would then be necessary to determine the precise extent of that involvement, the areas in which parents were drawn into the education process, and to determine what attributes and/or actions of the principal contributed to that high level of parent participation.

After first seeking and being granted permission to conduct the necessary research in School District No. 41 (Burnaby), the task of determining the set of schools for investigation was undertaken. A nomination or reputational technique was employed to ascertain five schools in the district that enjoyed a strong reputation for involving parents to a significant degree and in a variety of facets of the school. To accomplish this task, six senior education officials in the district office, all of whom were considered to be knowledgeable of the elementary schools in the district, were each asked to nominate five such schools (See Appendix A). From the four responses received, five “high-involvement” schools were clearly identified and these schools became the field of study.

THE SAMPLE

Once determined, the five schools presented a range of variables, several of which might have been considered as factors having an impact on the involvement of parents. Included in the group were two designated community schools and three which might be termed “standard” elementary schools. The schools were centered in a variety of socio-economic areas. Three of the schools were situated in the eastern one-third of the district while two were more centrally located. Three schools were located in the northern sector of the district, while the remaining two were located towards the southern part of the district. School sizes ranged from two hundred to six hundred students. Finally, the sample included one recently-established school as well as others that had existed for varying periods of time.
Amongst the principals, there were two female principals and three male principals. The group included a variety of ages and various stages in career development, both as teachers and as administrators. They brought varying backgrounds of experience to their present positions, and had been principals in their schools for periods of time ranging from one year to six years.

SCHOOL A

School A is a long-established school, having first opened its doors to the community in the mid-1900’s. The present building however, was constructed in the mid-1950’s and while its population peaked at approximately 725 in the 1970’s, it is today a smaller school of only 215 students.

The school serves a neighbourhood of middle to low-middle and working class families, a majority of whom are either families with both parents working outside the home, or single-parent families. This community has been very stable for at least the last two decades, with little movement either into or out of the area. It is a community that is now beginning to grow however, as many new homes are currently under construction in close proximity to the school. These new developments consist of very large, expensive homes, and it can be anticipated that students coming from these new areas will dramatically change the complexion of the school.

Along with the students from its own catchment area, School A also houses a district program for behaviourally disordered students whose disruptive and/or aggressive behaviours have made it impossible for them to function in the regular classroom setting. These students, who are drawn from a broad area of the district, remain in the school for up to a year while being assisted to learn control of their behaviours, and to improve their academic standing. As they are ready, they are slowly integrated into regular classrooms
in the school prior to returning to their home schools. There are sixteen students included in the program, aged six to eleven.

As is true of so many other areas of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, School A’s English as a Second Language (ESL) component has begun to grow substantially in recent years, doubling in the last year alone, and this ESL population adds a further dimension to the school’s program and to its parent community.

The staff of the school consists of eleven regular teaching staff as well as a teacher-librarian and learning assistance centre teacher as well as a complement of itinerant personnel. The special program includes two full-time teachers together with three associated personnel.

School A’s principal has been in the school for the past six years and is scheduled to retire at the end of the next year. He brings to this position a broad-based community school background and openly acknowledges that a primary goal for him has been the involvement of the community in the school, in spite of the fact that this is not a designated community school.

SCHOOL B

This is a school of approximately six hundred students. While it was opened only four years ago, it is already undergoing the construction of an addition but its continuous steady, rapid population growth means that by the time the addition is completed, the school will remain cramped for space.

The school is situated in a relatively new, but highly-transient area. Approximately eighty-five per cent of the students live in cooperative housing units. Between sixty and seventy per cent of its families are single-parent families and a large number of families are dependent upon welfare for their existence. There is a fairly high
incidence of child abuse in the community so the school must work in quite close cooperation with the Ministry of Social Services and Housing. The school also serves a small area of very large, expensive homes. Thus, the physical and emotional needs of its students vary greatly.

The school building also serves as a community centre for the area, and the Burnaby Parks and Recreation Commission maintains an office in the building, and offers a variety of out-of-school programs. These programs however, are operated entirely separately from the operations of the school.

The school's student population includes a broad range of abilities and alongside its program for gifted students, it is making provision for Educable Mentally Handicapped (EMH) and Trainable Mentally Handicapped (TMH) students together with some physically handicapped. Its English as a Second Language (ESL) component is also a significant factor in the school population, and of course, the large number of children from economically poor families presents additional considerations with which the school must deal.

During its four years of operation, the school has maintained its staff, adding to it annually, though losing very few of the original members. A large number of part-time teachers are included on the staff and these people appear able to add a spark of enthusiasm and vitality as they appear in the school at various times throughout the week, thereby helping to maintain the high energy level of the group.

The principal has been in the school for all of its four years, and came from a community school background. He is a well-established, experienced administrator. This principal is in his early fifties and displayed an enthusiastic pride in his school, its programs, and the involvement of parents as an integral part of the life of the school.
SCHOOL C

School C in contrast is centred in a largely well-to-do neighbourhood and while it serves a couple of fairly discrete neighbourhoods, the major portion of its students come from upper middle class homes where the father earns a fairly substantial living and the mother remains at home in the role of mother and care-giver. These families live in moderately large homes all of which are well-maintained and kept up-to-date. As in many higher socio-economic communities, the families of this neighbourhood maintain a strong, active interest in the school, its programs and its standards, and show no hesitation in questioning or criticizing what the school is doing. As the principal described their attitude towards the school: these are parents who "...are sending their children to a public school but they’re treating it like their own little private school.” They maintain a close relationship with the school.

A second area served by the school is an area of condominiums. Unlike the neighbourhoods of School B, this is an area of relatively expensive condominiums and the families are primarily professional people. Though frequently both parents will be working outside the home, they maintain a high level of interest and concern for their children’s welfare and schooling and so they maintain close contact with the school and the teachers.

The school has a student population of 260 students, kindergarten to grade 7, and a staff of thirteen regular staff as well as several part time and itinerant teachers. Included within this teaching staff are a beginning teacher together with teachers who are approaching retirement. Thus there is a variety of ages, a variety of experience, and a variety of approaches to education. The principal expressed the view however, that there is a strong sense of teamwork amongst the members of the staff, and that they shared a genuine concern not only for their students, but for each other as well. For the past two
years especially, the staff has remained quite stable and only one or two changes were anticipated for the coming year.

For the principal of the school, this is her first assignment as a principal, having been appointed to this position four years ago. In her mid-forties, she has spent her entire career in this school district and has taught in a variety of schools during her tenure in the district.

The reputation that this school enjoys in the district for its high level of parent involvement is relatively recent however and has been established only under the present principal. It appears from the comments of both the principal and the parents who were interviewed, that under the previous administration, parents played only a minimal role in the school; the relationship between the school and its parents was very much an arm’s length, formal association. It also seems that there was only a very small clique of parents who enjoyed access to the principal and who sought to represent the interest of the community. Through her first year, the present principal had to work hard to overcome the residue of animosity that seems to have pervaded the school’s community, and to establish a viable role for parents in the school. This resulted in a new group of parents rising to leadership positions, though to her credit, this principal has been able to maintain a role for the members of the former leadership in the school.

**SCHOOL D**

School D is one of two designated community schools included in the study. Situated in the north central portion of the district, the school enrolls approximately 500 students.

The surrounding neighbourhood from which the school draws its students consists mainly of single-family, family-owned residences. This middle to upper-middle income area, while a fairly stable community, includes a number of single-parent families
(approximately ten percent) and a fairly significant number of people of East European origin as well as a recent influx of Asian immigrants.

One result of this mix came to light in a recent survey conducted by the school which indicated that almost forty percent of the students speak a language other than English at home. In addition, there is a very high percentage of working parents with almost sixty percent of the students coming from homes either with a single parent who works, or in which both parents work outside the home. The student body includes very few Special Education students or behaviour problems, however.

School D's staff is a mixture of young teachers together with a number of teachers with considerable experience. Among the primary staff, at least half have less that three years experience and as a team, these teacher are keen and enthusiastic as they approach the implementation of new curriculum in the school. The intermediate staff on the other hand, is much older on average, and includes teachers who are much more traditional in their attitudes and approaches.

Bringing these two groups of teachers together to work as a cohesive team is a challenge for the school's principal. This is only his first year in the school, and he is the third principal in four years to take over the helm. In spite of this turn-over in administrators, the school has maintained its reputation for a high level of parent involvement, and the present principal has already established a strong presence in the school and the community and elucidated his strong bias towards involving parents in the education enterprise. Coming from another community school in the district, he is in his early forties and has been a principal for approximately six or seven years.

A key figure in the school, and the person who has probably provided the continuity necessary to maintain the school's reputation for parent involvement through the various administrations is the Community School Coordinator. This person, who has
filled this position in the school for a number of years, has played a continuing significant role in the school and was identified as such by all of the people interviewed.

**SCHOOL E**

The last of the schools in the study is also a designated community school. The school is a well-established institution in a geographically quite well-defined enclave in the eastern portion of the district and has been a community school since its inception.

The school’s community consists mainly of townhouses and apartments, with very few of the students living in single-family detached houses. One major development immediately adjacent to the school, was originally constructed as low income housing, though the population of this project has slowly been changing as rents steadily increase and families are forced to move out.

The school enrols approximately 250 students from kindergarten to grade seven, and includes in its numbers a fairly regular mix of special education and special needs students all of whom are totally integrated into regular classrooms. Almost fifty percent of these students come from single-parent families and a large number of students come from families where both parents go out to work.

The staff is made up of nine regular classroom teachers along with a complement of ancillary, part-time and itinerant personnel. It is a fairly young staff for the most part, and during the past two years particularly, has remained quite stable. In addition the staff includes a community school coordinator, and, as with the previously described school, this person performs a number of key functions in the school.

In her early forties, the principal has been in her school for the past six years, and while the district considered transferring her this year, she has expressed the desire to
remain in order to see a number of projects through to completion. She is an experienced administrator, both in Burnaby and in another district.

School E went through a period of considerable tension between unionized teacher aides and parent volunteers in the early 1980's. Under the provincial government's restraint program of that time, many paid teacher aides lost their jobs as the school board sought to pare costs from its budget. This in turn led to charges that parent volunteers were being used to do the jobs that had formerly been performed by paid employees. The stress that this situation created, resulted in many parents feeling uncomfortable in the school setting and therefore seeking other avenues to participate in the school rather than in direct in-school volunteering. While circumstances are today considerably different from ten years ago, there is still a residue of the stress of that earlier time, and a cautiousness that is felt by both the school staff and the parent body.

One further note of interest: Schools B, D, and E were also designated as three of the six “lead schools” selected by the district to pilot the implementation of the new primary program being introduced in the province at this time.

THE PARENTS

Fifteen parents were included in the study. Of the fifteen, seven of the parents, or almost half, work at least part time outside of the home, including one who is presently attending school to complete high school graduation requirements. Their length of involvement with their respective schools ranged from one year to thirteen years, with a mean of six years. The children of these parents spanned all the elementary grades with the exception of Kindergarten, with eleven children in the primary grades, and sixteen in the intermediate grades. The families also included eight students at the secondary level, many of whom had attended the elementary schools under study. All but two of the parents held executive positions in their parents' associations. Without exception, all of
these parents have made, and continue to make, notable contributions as volunteers in a wide variety of capacities in their schools, and have done so throughout their associations with these schools (See Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL/ PARENT</th>
<th>YEARS OF ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT</th>
<th>CHILDREN PRESENTLY IN SCHOOL</th>
<th>WORKING OUTSIDE THE HOME</th>
<th>POSITION IN PARENTS' GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 SEC</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Co-Chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Co-Chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Volunteer Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X X X X X X XX</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Past Chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Co-Chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
<td>Yes *</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>X XX</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Vice-Chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Chairperson-designate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Attending school part time
DATA COLLECTION

Once selected, the principals of the five schools were each contacted by letter. In that correspondence, the selection process was outlined, the purpose of the project explained, and the assistance of the principal enlisted (See Appendix B). This letter was followed, approximately one week later, with a telephone call during which a mutually convenient time was arranged to conduct a personal, in-depth interview.

During the course of the interview, the principal was asked to identify the president or chairperson of the school’s parents’ association. That parent was subsequently also contacted by letter, with a follow-up telephone call made a week later to arrange a time to meet at the school for a private interview. The chairperson in turn, was asked to identify two other parents who might be agreeable to being interviewed, with the criteria including their knowledge of the school and parents’ roles in the school, as well as an attempt to include a balance of parents of primary and intermediate students. These parents too, were contacted by letter, and subsequently phoned and a convenient interview time arranged (See Appendix C).

It is noteworthy that without exception, all of the five principals contacted were very enthusiastic in their willingness to participate in the project and to give generously of their valuable time. As well, with the sole exception of one parent who was leaving shortly to travel, all the parents who were contacted were most cooperative and extremely willing to contribute to the study. All the participants also expressed interest in knowing the findings of the project once it was completed.

The interviews were conducted at the respective schools during the month of June, 1990. The interviews ranged in length from one hour to one and one-half hours, and were conducted in private so that the respondents could be candid in their responses. The interviews were recorded on audio-tape with the interviewee’s consent, and these tapes
were subsequently transcribed for summarizing, analysis and interpretation of the data. In each case the interviewee was assured of confidentiality in regards to identification of the school, the principal, or the parent.

**INSTRUMENTATION**

A structured interview technique was employed in order to gather information from each individual. Each of the five principals was interviewed privately, using the same schedule of questions (See Appendix D), although the order in which the questions were posed varied, dependent upon the principal’s response to the initial general question.

Similarly for the parents, an identical interview schedule was employed (See Appendix E), which included questions paralleling those asked of the principals, but which also sought to add the dimension of a parent’s perspective to the data.

The questions were designed to be “open-ended” so as to allow the interviewees the opportunity to react openly, and on the basis of their own real knowledge base. Questions were couched in such a manner as to avoid leading the respondent to reply in a certain way, and when clarifying questions or statements were employed, they were phrased in such as way as to avoid injecting the author’s own perceptions, or signalling his own opinions.

Joyce Epstein’s classification of types of parent involvement (see pages 4 & 5) provided the framework for the schedule of questions. Each interview opened with questions that asked for some general background or setting information. In the case of the principals, they were asked to provide details about the school, the students, and the community. Parents on the other hand, were asked to tell about their own involvement in the school, as well as about their own children attending the school.
The main body of the interview opened with a general question that sought an enumeration of the broad variety of ways in which parents participated in the education of their children. Utilizing the information provided in the response to this inquiry, the interview then proceeded to seek elaboration of those areas that had been voluntarily disclosed. Once these areas or types of involvement had been thoroughly explored, attention was directed to the types of parent involvement that had not been specified. Each of these topics was opened with a very general question, expressed in such a way as to avoid the suggestion that there would, or should, be some involvement in that realm. The interview concluded with questions that attempted to determine the effects of parent involvement upon student, teacher, and parent attitudes, and upon student achievement; recognizing of course that this type of forum lent itself to subjective evaluations only of such effects. The interview concluded with some further questions of a general nature, as well as some that endeavoured to draw attention specifically to the role of the principal in parent involvement.

The schedule of questions for principals was piloted with two principals in the writer's home school district, following which some fairly substantial revisions were undertaken. These including some modifications to the content of the questionnaire, clarification of some of the questions, and some adjustments to the timing of the interviews. It was not practical to pilot the schedule of questions for parents however, though experience in conducting the principal interviews, served to give clear direction for the parent interviews that followed.

**TREATMENT OF THE DATA**

Upon completion of the interviews, verbatim transcripts were made from the audio-tapes. Once transcribed, the responses of all twenty interviewees were classified and organized according to the two main problems and forty-eight sub-problems outlined
in Chapter One. The responses were then collated, indexed and cross-referenced, and finally analyzed in order to determine responses to the problems posed and to isolate indicators of principal practices that yielded the high level of involvement found in these five school.

SUMMARY

Following the initial identification of "high-involvement" schools by knowledgeable officials in the district, the principal and three parents in each school were interviewed employing a structured interview technique. The objective of the interviews was to identify:

a) the level of parental involvement in the school,

b) the variety of roles parents play in the school,

c) a subjective evaluation of positive parental attitudes that may accrue as a result of this level of parent participation,

d) a subjective evaluation of the impact of parent involvement upon student attitudes and achievement, and

e) an evaluation of the techniques the principal has employed to facilitate this involvement.

The schedules of questions were designed using Epstein’s five classifications of parent involvement, and the interviews were audio-tape recorded for later analysis and interpretation.

It is recognized that the sample used in the study is limited, comprising only five schools, their principals, and only fifteen parents. The selection of schools itself, led to a set of schools that should not be considered "average" in reference to parent involvement. Similarly, the sample is restricted in that all of the parents who were interviewed, were people who themselves are heavily involved in their schools, and who are also very enthusiastic about the participation of parents in education. Thus it would not be possible
to project the status of parent involvement in other schools in the district from an examination of these schools.

The validity of some of the parent data might also be questioned as not being representative of the entire parent body of the schools, due to the nature of the sample of parents. These parents were asked to express their own views and opinions, based on their own knowledge and experience, and those ideas may not be truly reflective of the sentiments of the parents in general in the school. To verify such data, a widely-distributed questionnaire would need to have been utilized, but such a task was not considered necessary in order to accomplish the objectives of this particular study which was to examine the practices of administrators.

The findings of this research are reported in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

INTRODUCTION

The data from the interviews of the five principals and the fifteen parents from the five selected schools are herein presented and interpreted.

As indicated earlier, Joyce Epstein’s five areas of parent involvement were employed to structure the interviews and to examine and interpret the responses to the questions. The analysis in this chapter of those responses will follow a similar format. Those areas of parent involvement are as follows:

Type 1 - The Basic Obligations of Parents (Parenting)
Type 2 - The Basic Obligations of Schools (Communicating)
Type 3 - Parent Involvement at School (Volunteering)
Type 4 - Parent Involvement in Learning Activities at Home
Type 5 - Parent Involvement in Governance and Advocacy (Representing Other Parents)

In addition, three other areas will be discussed:

The Impact of Parent Involvement
General Issues in Parent Involvement
The Role of the Principal

Within each of the sections, there is a brief definition of that area of involvement, an analysis of the findings from the research of each of the sub-problems in that area,
followed by a discussion of those findings. In total, forty-eight sub-problems are examined.

It should be noted that throughout the paper, all principals are referred to in the male gender in order to ensure their anonymity.

ANALYSIS

LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

At the outset, it is advisable to examine the actual levels of parent participation in each of the five schools included in the study. This group of schools had been initially identified on the basis of their reputations within the district for having high levels of parent involvement. Both principals and parents were asked to quantify the involvement of parents in their schools. For most, this proved to be a difficult task, especially for parents who tended to know only about the parents with whom they participated and were not always aware of parents participating in other areas of the school or in other activities. There was also some confusion in the definition of "involvement" for this purpose, especially when the question was posed at the end of a comprehensive interview when all the facets of involvement had been explored and discussed. As several of the participants pointed out, the vast majority of parents will be involved at least at the level of attending a parent-teacher interview.

For these reasons, the data are difficult to deal with. However, taking the range of figures presented by the two groups of interviewees, and expressing this figure as a ratio in comparison with the student population of the school yields the results as shown in Tables 2 and 3 (page 70).
### TABLE 2

**PARENTS ACTIVE AS VOLUNTEERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Principals’ Responses</th>
<th>Parents’ Responses *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>50:215 23%</td>
<td>30:215 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>200:600 33%</td>
<td>125:600 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>100:260 38%</td>
<td>100:260 38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>170:500 34%</td>
<td>80:500 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Levels of participation are expressed as a ratio of the number of parents involved compared to the student population of the school.

* Reported as a general averaging of the three responses for each school.

### TABLE 3

**PARENTS ACTIVE AS MEMBERS OF THE PARENTS’ ASSOCIATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Principals’ Responses</th>
<th>Parents’ Responses *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>25:215 12%</td>
<td>20:215 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>55:600 9%</td>
<td>35:600 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>23:260 9%</td>
<td>25:260 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>23:500 5%</td>
<td>20:500 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td>23:250 9%</td>
<td>18:250 7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Levels of participation are expressed as a ratio of the number of parents involved compared to the student population of the school.

* Reported as a general averaging of the three responses for each school.
Discussion

The statistics indicating the participation of parents in voluntary capacities within each of the five schools (Table 2), would appear to support the reputation of these schools as “High Involvement Schools”. In each, a reported one-quarter to one-half of the parents involve themselves in a wide variety of capacities in the school. The earlier stated comments related to parents’ lack of first hand knowledge of the activities of other parents in the school would appear to be borne out by the somewhat reduced participation levels reported by the parents as compared to those reported by principals. This dichotomy might also be explained by a possible propensity on the part of principals to inflate the level of participation in order to enhance the reputational standing of their schools.

That such a level of involvement is atypical of other schools is also corroborated by the statements of two parents. In one case, a parent cited the experience of her sister-in-law whose children attend school in another district. In this case, the sister-in-law expressed amazement at the amount of involvement parents were able to enjoy in the school. A second instance was a parent whose children had earlier attended a neighbouring school in the same district. In her own words: “...I had been involved at ______ to a certain degree, well actually very little. I went there to one parent meeting and I got such a cold reception that I never went back. That was my last one.” Clearly this is a parent who feels that her contribution and involvement are welcomed and appreciated at her present school.

All those interviewed made reference also to a “hard core” of parents who are always there, and who volunteer for each and every activity that requires parent support; what one principal referred to as the “Super Moms that just about live at the school.” Such a group probably exists in the majority of schools. It is however, the parents beyond
this core group who serve the school that sets these schools apart from other schools with lower levels of involvement.

A number of interviewees also reported on the number of parents who either did not participate at all or who participated to only a very limited extent. Among the reasons cited were single parent families, working parents, and mothers having to remain home with small children. One principal also alluded to a degree of apathy on the part of some parents, even in a school where there were numerous opportunities for parent input and involvement.

Attention was also drawn to the fact that very few fathers participate in schools. Fathers are often the forgotten or ignored members of the school community and schools might do well to address the issue of their involvement in the school.

Parent participation in the parents’ associations (Table 3, page 70) displays a significant similarity among four of the five schools. With the exception of School B, all reported a participation level of between twenty and twenty-five parents, regardless of the varying sizes of the schools which ranged from 250 to 600. It would appear therefore, that the number of parents who are involved on such committees may be governed more by the number of positions to be filled and tasks to be performed (which will be the same in all schools), rather than the student population of the school. A number of parents also remarked on the decline in attendance levels from the beginning of the school year to the end, as interest appears to wane and other Springtime activities begin to take precedence.
PERCEPTIONS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

0.1 TO WHAT EXTENT ARE ADMINISTRATORS AND PARENTS AWARE OF THE MULTIPLE FACETS OF THE INTERFACE BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND THE HOME?

During the course of each of the twenty interviews, each person was first asked a general open-ended question which sought to establish the broad areas in which parents were involved in the life of their particular school. (See Appendices D and E) This question also served to elicit from each interviewee, his or her knowledge of the full variety of avenues through which parents are involved in the education of their children. How broad a perspective is held by each of these groups of people of parent involvement?

Findings

The Principals

Among principals, by far the greatest number of examples of parent involvement, and the first area mentioned in each case, were instances of parents serving in volunteer capacities (Type 3). (See Table 4, page 74)

The second most frequently mentioned area among the principals was parent involvement with a parents’ association or consultative group, and the activities of that group (Type 5). Such activities as fund raising, bringing in special speakers, acting on community concerns (local park development, road crossings, and day care) as well as involvement with the school staff in the development of a school philosophy (mentioned in one response) were identified as ways in which parents were involved in the school.

One principal made reference to parent in-service or parent “professional development” (Type 1), though this arose in reference to undertakings of the parents’
group rather than as an endeavour of the school to provide activities to enhance parenting skills and knowledge.

No principal made mention however, of parents helping with their own children’s school work (Type 4) or of communication (Type 2) as being avenues through which parents were involved with the school or the education of their children.

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**TABLE 4**

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:**
**AS REPORTED BY PRINCIPALS IN THEIR INITIAL RESPONSES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>preparing hot dogs/hot lunches</td>
<td>4 references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in classrooms</td>
<td>3 references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(teacher assistance and tutoring)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>driving for field trips</td>
<td>3 references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the library</td>
<td>2 references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>driving for sporting events</td>
<td>2 references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the computer laboratory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Call Back” program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Block Parents”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coaching a track team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directing a choir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as audiences:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assemblies</td>
<td>2 references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open houses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curriculum nights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer nights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>productions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>classroom presentations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visiting performers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at meetings:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new kindergarten parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>art activity days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Parents

As was the case with the principals, by far the greatest number of responses from the parents were in reference to parents serving in volunteer capacities (Type 3), and this too was most frequently the first area that came to mind when the question was posed. (see Table 5)

| TABLE 5 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| **PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES AS REPORTED BY PARENTS IN THEIR INITIAL RESPONSES** | |
| classroom aides (includes the learning assistance centre) | 13 references |
| driving for field trips | 9 references |
| library | 8 references |
| hot dog/hamburger days | 7 references |
| getting/making materials | 5 references |
| computer laboratory | 4 references |
| sports program/sports day | 4 references |
| pancake breakfasts | 4 references |
| “Call Back” program | 3 references |
| parent meetings | 2 references |
| art activity days | 2 references |
| directing the choir | |
| fund raising | |
| block parents | |
| outdoor school | |
| lunch hour programs | |
| attending assemblies | |

Parents also referred frequently to service on the parents’ group (Type 5) as an avenue for involvement, and this participation often included working to raise funds for the school although this might also be considered essentially a volunteer activity. Among the tasks performed by these groups, mention was made of work with the staff in developing a school philosophy, and involvement with community concerns such as traffic and safety, youth issues, and out-of-school programs.
Communication from the school to parents (Type 2) was recognized only by way of detailing the activities of one school's community council, and this was primarily by way of a community newspaper dealing with community issues, rather than through the school's newsletter. No mention was made in these initial responses to the school's role in support of parents in their capacity as parents (Type 1) or of parents working with their children on school work (Type 4).

Discussion

Even in these schools which are noted for a high level of parent involvement, both parents and principals would appear to have a relatively narrow view of the full spectrum of parent involvement. Both groups, principal and parents, recognized that parents serving as volunteers in the school and parents serving on the school's parents' group, were important avenues for involving parents in the education process. Only one principal recognized that the school had a role to play in assisting parents become better as parents, and only one parent acknowledged communication as a facet of parent involvement.

Nevertheless, both groups emphatically recognized the important role parents play in education. As the principal of School B put it, "I mean, without the parents in the school we could not run the nature of the program we run. There's absolutely no way!" And certainly the parents who were interviewed felt that not only was there a wide variety of ways in which they could contribute, but that their contributions to the school were enthusiastically welcomed in each of these schools.

It should be noted however, that subsequent questions in the interviews unveiled many more areas of involvement than were at first elucidated. It would be inaccurate therefore, to assume that the aforementioned activities comprise the only avenues through which parents in these schools are involved in the education of their children.
Nevertheless, it is important to note that these were the only areas recognized, without prompting, as comprising areas of parent participation in education.

**TYPE 1: THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF PARENTS (Parenting)**

It should go without saying that the education of children is not confined to the school: parents play a primary role. They are the child's first teachers, and they continue to play a vital teaching role throughout the child's development. Beyond what might be termed "traditional school learning", schools do have a part to play in working with parents to enhance their role in the upbringing of their children. Indeed, many would suggest the schools have an *obligation* to assist parents in fulfilling their responsibility to be the most effective parents possible.

Among the basic obligations of parents are:

- The provision of food, clothing, shelter
- The assurance of health and safety
- The provision of child rearing and home training
- The provision of school supplies and a place for school work
- The building of positive home conditions for learning

( Epstein, 1987)

To assist parents enhance their role as parents, schools can be expected to provide such services as parenting skills courses, child development programs, information meetings on drug and alcohol abuse, forums on sex-education issues, as well as information regarding how parents can assist their children with their learning. It might also be anticipated that a school would maintain a parent library wherein individual parents would have available, books on child-rearing and other related parenting issues.
1.1 WHAT EFFORTS DO THESE SCHOOLS UNDERTAKE TO ASSIST PARENTS IN FULFILLING THEIR ROLES AS EFFECTIVE PARENTS?

Findings

In regards to effective parenting skills, all five principals reported on programs provided by outside agencies that are sponsored by the school’s parents’ group. Such programs as “Developing Children’s Self-Esteem”, “Raising Drug Resistant Children”, “Developing Children’s Understanding of their Sexual and Physical Development”, and “Developing Children’s Study Habits” were reported to have been sponsored by the schools, most often through the parents’ association. One principal reported, however, that his school had tried offering such programs in the past, but that the turn-out had been disappointingly small, and he questioned whether or not the programs reached the parents most in need of the help and information. In no case, however, did a principal report the presentation of a school-developed program; they were all sponsorships of programs provided by other agencies.

Another program, sponsored by a community school council, “Children of Alcoholics” was directed to the whole community and at students rather than just the immediate school parent population. Again, however, this is an example of the school sponsoring another agencies’ program.

It is evident from the data collected however, that a great deal of the work the school does with parents in regards to parenting skills and child management is conducted on an individual basis between school officials and parents, and is related to specific problems being faced by parents and their children. All of the principals reported on procedures in place in their schools for dealing with individual cases of child neglect or of less than satisfactory home situations.

The school newsletter was also reported as a vehicle for parent education. Three principals provided specific examples of articles they had published in their newsletters,
either gleaned from educational periodicals or written themselves, that gave information to parents to assist them in understanding and raising their children. The effects of television on learning, and tips on how to help your child with homework were two topics offered as examples.

The school’s parent handbook distributed at the beginning of the year to all parents, as well as parent orientation meetings in September, provided avenues through which the school informed parents of the school’s expectations and offered suggestions of what the home might do to support the child’s learning. Such suggestions as providing a quiet place to study, supplying appropriate resource materials, and setting aside specific homework time, are offered in this manner.

One of the schools provides a Parent Library, a section in the school library in which periodicals and books on parenting and child-rearing issues are available for parents to borrow. The parents’ group in this school contributes five hundred dollars a year for the purchase of such materials, and the distribution of the resources is handled entirely by the parents.

Another principal reported on the availability of a variety of pamphlets on parenting, and while these are presently available only in the counsellor’s area, plans are being made to develop a “parent centre” so such materials would be readily available for parents dropping into the school.

For the most part, parents supported the principals in their description of the part the schools play in working with parents. It is clear however, that parents are much less knowledgeable about the activities of the school in this regard, due to the fact that so much of this work is done individually as needed. Hence, while parents were aware of programs that had been offered at the school, they were not aware of all the resources available, or of ways in which these resources could be accessed unless they had dealt
with the school on an individual basis. The majority of parents however, did mention information contained in the school bulletins as well as information sent home to parents by teachers through class newsletters, offering suggestions of ways in which parents could work with their children. The schools' parent handbook was also mentioned frequently as a source of suggestions for parents as were student homework books provided by the schools.

1.2 WHO HAS ASSUMED THE MAJOR ROLE IN MOUNTING PROGRAMS OR PROVIDING ADVICE AND GUIDANCE IN THIS REGARD?

Findings

As mentioned above, the majority of group programs offered by school in regards to parenting skills are produced by outside agencies and the role of the school is to select the programs, provide the space, and advertise the meetings. When schools sponsor programs from such agencies as family life institutes and recreation commissions, it is most often the parents' association (through its Education Committee) that makes the choice of programs to be presented. Clearly, however, the principal has substantial input into the making of those choices and this input is based upon his or her knowledge of the individual students and parents of the school.

These principals do however make use of a variety of other vehicles for transmitting information to parents in regards to working with their children. The school newsletters, parent handbooks, and school calendars are all used by principals to provide information and "helpful hints" to parents. Teachers too, make use of classroom newsletters to inform parents of the curricular expectations of their classes, and suggest ways in which parents can be involved with their children.

When intervention with individual parents is necessary, principals and teachers provide assistance specific to the particular child's situation, and refer the parent to other
agencies or to appropriate programs as necessary. Similarly, a school counsellor or school nurse might work with a parent on a specific issue. The data collected in the interviews makes it clear that the school counsellor is a pivotal figure in working with parents in need of help. The relationship that this individual is able to establish with the parent together with the skills his or her training has afforded, is probably more critical in this area of working with parents than that of the principal. The principal however, needs to be fully cognizant of the needs of his or her students, and the opportunities and resources that are available to help them.

1.3 WHAT OPINIONS DO PARENTS AND ADMINISTRATORS HOLD REGARDING THE SCHOOL'S ROLE IN MONITORING THE HOME SITUATION OF ITS STUDENTS AND ACTING WHEN IT DEEMS IT NECESSARY?

Findings

Principals were unanimous in accepting the concept that the school had an important role to play in working to ameliorate unsatisfactory home situations of their students. One principal referred to the procedure of working through a school-based referral process to identify the most appropriate action to take in a given situation, while a second principal referred to the variety of cases in which the school has assisted students through providing free lunches, renting instruments for the band program, purchasing running shoes for gym, and subsidizing outdoor school and field trips for needy students.

The principals also agreed that the schools had to work closely with such agencies as the Ministry of Social Services and Housing, mental health departments, and youth services branches; that cases were not simply referred and forgotten, but that the school worked in close cooperation with these agencies in helping students and families in distress.
One principal however, makes a point of being pro-active in working with these agencies. He explained it as follows:

...the social worker’s office. I go once a year and have coffee with the folks over in their office and we set up a liaison that I would basically work with one social worker. So that if a phone call came in from my school it went to that worker, whether they were really the formal person that was on the intake board that day, it went to that person. So I would, you know, we started having communications. And they could phone up on an informal basis and say, “Hey, _____, what do you know about _____” Or I could phone and say, “Gee, I’m not sure, Have we got something here. Have you got something on your files?” “I’ll check.” So we didn’t have to formalize a report or something like that oftentimes. And gee, it makes work a lot easier if you get that informal communication going.... We work hard at developing that informal stuff because it solves lots of problems before they get to class.

Liaison and close cooperation are established and maintained in order to achieve the maximum benefit for the student, in the shortest possible time, and through the most appropriate channels.

With only one exception, all parents agreed that the school does have a responsibility to ensure that its students were properly cared for, though most realized that they were not totally aware of all such situations in their schools due to the confidential nature of such information. As one parent expressed it however, when asked if this was a school responsibility:

Who else would know? I mean the school is one place they always come to.... I think that we owe it to the children to be there for them.

Another parent suggested that it has increasingly become a school responsibility in recent years with the increase in the numbers of working parents. In such situations, since the child spends a good part of the day at school, the school often sees the child more than the parent and is in a better position to evaluate the child’s needs. Societal changes are transferring family responsibilities to the school.
One parent suggested that it was a joint responsibility of the school and the community.

I believe it’s a school responsibility and a community responsibility. I don’t think it’s just the school. It’s everyone’s responsibility if there are children who are being neglected.

Accordingly, in this school, the provision of day care has become a major goal for the community school council.

That’s one reason [increasing numbers of single and working parents] why we want to put a day care in here; because we know there are a lot of kids in the community who are just sort of dumped with anybody and there’s no real quality control over what goes on. And so we figure if we could just provide some kind of resource.... We’re also looking at the before- and after-school day care. There’s some provided right now but we’re trying to improve that as well to try and reduce the number of latch-key kids because that is a real problem.

Several parents expressed some reservations about the school’s involvement however. One parent suggested that the school’s interest in the family might be misunderstood.

If parents think the school is interfering in such a way, the parents could take the child out and the child suffers more in the long run.... So there’s a fine line....

Another parent felt that the school should get involved only in extreme cases, while a third parent pointed out that the school would be overstepping its role if it based its actions on hearsay, or if it was a case of a differing life-style that was not particularly interfering with the child’s school progress. These parents asserted their feelings that the school would need to research issues very thoroughly before becoming involved, and in cases where they did decide action was necessary, these cases should be turned over to the proper authorities, and the school should withdraw from the situation. Clearly there are some concerns about the school’s involvement in family situations, and some divergence of opinion.
The single parent who expressed the opinion that it was *not* the school's responsibility to monitor the home situation of its students appeared to disagree more with the meaning of the word "responsibility" than with the concept of school involvement. It was apparent from her subsequent comments that she *did* feel that the school should be knowledgeable of the home life of its students but that the school should not take it upon itself to remedy poor situations. It appeared that this parent felt that the school needed to refer such situations to other authorities and to let other agencies deal with them. In this particular regard, she was not alone.

**Discussion**

All five of the schools included in this study have assumed a role in working with parents to ensure that students are well cared for and that they have the resources necessary to be successful students. As well, that this should be a role of the school is agreed to by both principals and parents. In this regard principals have enlisted the resources of the parents' associations to provide workshops, meeting, and forums for the discussion of relevant parenting issues, and are therefore able to ensure parental support for these programs, both moral and financial. None of the participants however, neither parent nor principal, could offer any suggestions as to how the school might ensure that the parents most in need of the type of advice and information offered by parenting programs would in fact attend and receive it. This is probably the major problem encountered by group programs of this nature and a solution would appear to be beyond attainment.

Confidentiality is an important factor in helping parents, and such facilities as parent libraries and parent centres may assist in overcoming the fears that some people might feel in admitting the need for help. Only one school reported having such a facility in place and yet this should be a primary consideration in the development of means for assisting parents in understanding and fulfilling their obligations as parents.
The relationship between parents and such staff members as the counsellor and the nurse is also critical if the school is to be able to effect positive changes in the home life of its students, and principals need to be aware of this factor when selecting people for these positions.

It is also evident that these principals are not only very aware of the needs of their students and their parents, but are also very knowledgeable of the resources available to help students and families in distress. Beyond this, they appear to be working to establish and maintain close links with other agencies so that they can accesses these resources quickly and effectively.

These principals are also making effective use of such vehicles as the school newsletter, calendars, and school-opening orientation meetings to deliver information to parents regarding such issues as child-rearing, child development, school expectations, and things parents can do to help their children.

In spite of the fact that few of the interviewees initially recognized this area as one type of parent involvement, it is clear that these five schools all recognize and accept this responsibility and are making some effort to address the needs of their parents.

**TYPE 2: THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF SCHOOLS (Communicating)**

One of the most commonly-heard parent complaints about schools is that many parents feel that they do not know enough of what is transpiring in their children’s education. That such complaints are so wide-spread is indicative of the number of schools which are not fulfilling their obligation of communicating with their parent bodies. Storey (1989) alerts us to the fact that parents want but two things from the education system: they want the very best for their children, and they want to know what their children are
doing in school. It is the school's responsibility therefore, to keep parents regularly and fully informed of both student progress and school programs.

Communication will be both overt and covert. Such vehicles as newsletters or bulletins, parent handbooks, and school calendars keep parents informed of the programs and activities offered in the school as well as providing means for providing parents with child development and child-rearing information. Report cards and parent-teacher conferences give parents direct information about their own children's activities and progress. Such instruments are found in most of today's schools.

Less obvious, and yet in many ways perhaps more powerful, are the informal communication links that exist. Casual conversations between teachers and parents as well as among parents, often transmit important information about the school. In addition messages carried from the school by school personnel other than teachers, and by the children themselves supply information that many parents often consider more credible than the formal communications they receive. This is an issue that schools must address.

This study seeks to examine the communication links that are in place to inform parents, and looks at each of the major means of communication in an attempt to discover how effective each is, and what principals do to influence the messages conveyed by each.

2.1 WHAT METHODS ARE EMPLOYED BY THESE SCHOOLS TO INFORM PARENTS OF THE SCHOOL'S PROGRAM AND ACTIVITIES?

Findings

A variety of means of communication were identified by the five principals. Four out of the five mentioned the school newsletter as an important instrument for communicating school information, and three of them listed personal contacts between themselves and parents and between teachers and parents as important liaison links. Other
methods presented included meetings (for example, Meet the Teacher Nights, meetings to explain the new Primary Program, Kindergarten parents’ orientation), parent handbooks and calendars, and student homework books which are in use in several of the schools. Two principals explained that they make a point of encouraging classroom newsletters and one principal referred to frequent phone calls made by classroom teachers to communicate “good news” to parents about their children’s achievements at school. Less obvious as information links were four other school-parent contact points mentioned: parents invited into the staff room for coffee at recess and lunch; parent participation as members of the audience for concerts; parent attendance as regular school assemblies; and the inclusion of parents in the process of developing a school philosophy statement. These occasions were acknowledged as opportunities for the parents to gather information about happenings in the school as well as occasions to open up communication links.

Parents too were quick to mention the regular school newsletter as an important means for them to garner information about the school with eleven of the fifteen mentioning it before identifying any other sources. Similarly, these parents were quick to point out that their own regular and frequent presence in the building provided them with valuable opportunities to keep informed about the school. It must be remembered however, that these were all highly involved parents and they should not be viewed to be representative of the majority of parents.

Parent meetings, social events at the school, and the parent handbook were also mentioned, though the latter appeared to be more useful as a general reference than for an enumeration of current activities in the school. Parents also identified other parents and their own children as important sources of information. The open invitation to come in at any time and talk to the teacher which appears to be common among these schools was
also referred to, as were notes and phone call from teachers. A large outdoor notice board available at one of the schools was also recognized as a useful communication tool.

Finally one parent suggested the installation of a local school community television channel as a possible future means of communicating information about the school and community events.

**Discussion**

Amongst the vehicles mentioned by principals, it would be expected that newsletters and parent handbooks would be amongst the first ideas suggested. That these principals included in their listings such less obvious means as coffee at recess and casual contacts between school personnel and parents displays a broader understanding of the variety of levels of communication that can and do exist between schools and their parent communities. Nevertheless, even these principals tended to view school-to-home communication in relatively simplistic and concrete terms and failed to recognize the full variety of informal points of contact between the school and the home through which important information and ideas about the school are conveyed.

While parents agreed with principals that the regular school newsletter was an important information source, parents did not appear to consider the parent handbook distributed each September as a particularly important source. Certainly it contains useful information, but parents tend to want information that is more current as well as information that is more directly related to their own children and so turn to more immediate sources of data.

Parents also appear to be more aware of the less formal communication links that are open to them and certainly viewed their own children as very important sources of information. It is also interesting to note that even though these particular parents spend a considerable amount of time in the school themselves, they continued to look to other
parents as one of the ways to learn about the school and its activities. School principals therefore, must consider more carefully these less-structured lines of communication in their endeavours to manage the communications to parents about their schools.

It is noteworthy too, that it is a parent who has first considered the use of some new technology beyond the printed word as a means of conveying information about the school and the community.

THE SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

2.2 IN WHAT WAYS IS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL'S NEWSLETTER ENHANCED AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION?

Findings

There is really very little uniformity among the newsletters of the five schools included in the study, particularly in reference to the frequency of issue or in style. In one school, the newsletter is published regularly every week. At two of the schools they are issued bi-weekly. At yet another school they are issued on an “as needed” basis ranging from once a week to three or four times a week. Finally, the remaining school publishes its newsletter only once a month. There is also no agreement of which is the preferable day of the week to issue newsletters, and every day of the week was mentioned in one school or another.

In style there is also considerable variation. In one of the schools, considerable attention was paid to the layout and organization of each page of the newsletter with thought given to such publishing techniques as the framing of important items, the inclusion of graphics, and the use of various fonts and letter sizes. In another, the style is very formal and signifies a very business-like approach to the dissemination of information. In yet another school, the principal writes relatively lengthy newsletters in a “chatty”, almost friendly-letter style of writing. The length of the newsletters also varied from only one or two short pages to several legal size sheets.
The contents of these newsletters however, displays somewhat greater congruence. All of newsletters include important dates to be noted, accounts of school activities both past and up-coming, as well as articles and tips on how parents can work with their children at home. Four of the schools include agendas of parents’ association meetings or provide details of association discussions. Three of the newsletters include community news items and announcements, and are also made available for parents to advertise (for example, babysitters needed or available, houses for rent, lost and found, etc.). Samples of children’s work, “good news” items, and special recognitions also appear in various of the newsletters. It should be noted too, that each of the designated community schools (Schools D and E) also produces a community school newsletter which was published three to four times a year and is distributed throughout the entire community, not just to school parents.

Each principal was asked to identify what he or she considered the unique qualities of their own school’s newsletter, and it was clear from their responses that all of them had given some thought to the style of their newsletters and were comfortable with the frequency, contents, and format they were using. That these newsletters were all effective communications in spite of their often wide differences, is borne out by the fact that virtually all of the parents agreed that they were indeed an effective means of delivering information about the schools, and that they could offer no suggestions for improvement. The only suggestion that did surface, was the possibility of using a system of colour-coding to delineate among notices from the school, the parents’ group, the parks and recreation commission, and from classroom teachers.

Parents were asked to identify what they particularly liked in their school’s newsletter. Overwhelmingly, two features were identified: the calendar of important dates, and the enumeration of events occurring throughout the school. As one parent described it, “The newsletter is my lifeline...” to the school, and another pointed out that
"...if you don't come into the school often or you don't come to the association meetings, that's pretty much the only way of finding out what's happening." To accommodate the former, these principals make it a point to either attach a calendar of events as a separate sheet of the newsletter thereby allowing parents to tear it off and retain it for the month, or to list important dates in a box of the front page where it would be readily noticed.

In schools where examples of student work are a feature of the newsletter, parents expressed pleasure in having these shared with them. And several parents indicated that they were pleased with the entire newsletter and did not feel that they could separate any particular items as more outstanding or important than the others.

Both principals and parents identified as one of the major problems of school newsletter, ensuring that they did in fact reach the home. Among the five schools, a variety of techniques were employed in an attempt to ensure that school information reached parents. One principal attaches the newsletter to a hot dog order form thus encouraging the pupils to make sure the notices are delivered to avoid the consequence of not having lunch on Hot Dog Day. In two of the schools, newsletters are issued on the same day of the week and parents are encouraged to look for a notice on that day even if the child fails to offer it. Several of the principals make it a point to date and number the notices consecutively so parents can tell if they have missed one. Another principal includes in the heading of his newsletter the statement: "This newsletter is being delivered by _____" and though he realizes that this may not guarantee delivery, at least the school knows which families have not received the information. Having the oldest child, the youngest child, or all children in the family responsible for delivering the notices is used in several schools. Requiring the parent to sign and return a tear-off acknowledging receive of the notice was attempted in one school but soon abandoned as a "logistical nightmare" with teachers required to use class time to check-off the return of
the acknowledgements. This technique is now reserved for only very important notices in this school.

Principals and parents also recognized that once delivered, the next difficulty encountered is in ensuring that the newsletter is in fact read by parents. None of the interviewees was able to offer any real solutions to this problem though several of the principals make an effort to make the newsletter eye-catching and attractive, and include information that they know parents (and students) would want to know, for example, items of community interest.

A further difficulty encountered with newsletters as a form of communication is the proliferation of paper that reaches the home. As one principal expressed it:

They read the newsletters but the community schools have a lot of paper going out. I'm sure it just drives them nuts. We try to get a handle on it but it's far too much. But we have to put it out weekly, there's just so much going on.

This was the school where a parent was already beginning to think of alternative delivery systems for school information. Indeed several parents recognized that the newsletter could not serve as the only means of communication between the school and the home.

Discussion

While there was agreement among both the principals and the parents that school newsletters were in fact effective tools for communicating school information to parents, there was little agreement as to the best format for the newsletter. All parents felt the newsletter was an important facet of their communication links with the school regardless of the frequency of its issue, the specific contents, or the precise style. What does appear to be the case however, is that these principals have carefully considered the form of their newsletters and have found ways to direct attention to the information contained in them and they have each have imprinted their own style—and, by extension, the style of the
school—onto the newsletter. The newsletter has become, therefore, an important ambassador for the school.

It is interesting to note that even though three of these schools reported relatively large non-English speaking populations in their school communities, there was no mention made of providing school information in languages other than English. Apparently these non-English speaking parents are left to their own devices in having school information interpreted for them. On a district basis, however, information is made available in several languages and it is likely the case that the individual school is too small a unit to provide translation services for these minorities of parents. It is an issue that these schools will need to maintain a watch over, however, and may have to address in the future.

**SOLICITING PARENT OPINION**

**2.3 WHAT TECHNIQUES ARE EMPLOYED BY THESE SCHOOLS TO SOLICIT PARENT OPINION AND INPUT INTO SCHOOL ISSUES?**

It was one of the principals who made a point of stating that one major failing of the school newsletter was that it was one-way communication: that it was not a vehicle for the parents to communicate with the school. How then, do these schools seek parent ideas, concerns, and opinions? How do they facilitate a two-way dialogue between the school and the home through which parents are able to communicate their ideas to the school?

**Findings**

All five principals reported that they had at various times employed formal processes to gather parent input and opinion. Two principals described the use of formal surveys or questionnaires on various issues important to the school including such topics as library services. In addition, one of the principals described a process for soliciting
parents’ questions as the basis of the format for an information meeting for parents regarding the new primary program.

Three principals mentioned the use of tear-offs at the end of newsletters soliciting parent input, though as one of the principals asserted in reference to the return on these surveys, “They don’t tend to do that well.” The principal of School C however, makes it a regular practice to include at the end of every newsletter a tear-off for parent response with the headings: “Something I want you to know,” and “An area of concern to me.” Responses to these items are returned to his office for action and he then responds in person to each replay, generally by a return phone call. He reports a fairly good return on these and receives commendations as well as criticisms and concerns. The principal of School B however, made an extremely valid point in reference to surveys and questionnaires when he asserted:

...I think there’s nothing more frustrating to parents than to have a survey come in and nothing ever happens, you know. So we try to make sure that if it’s worth the effort for them to send the survey in, then it’s worth the effort for us to contact...to get back to them.

The principal of School C also employs another technique to gather information from parents. He regularly makes spot phone calls to three or four parents each week to ask in general terms how they are feeling about the school, and how their children are feeling about their time at school. Occasionally he will use the occasion of delivering some “good news” about the child, but more often than not, the phone call is made with no particular agenda in mind beyond hearing what the parent has to say about the school.

Two of the principals also felt that the item on the parents’ association agenda where they presented their report, provided parents with another opportunity to put forth their ideas and opinions and that this provided an important forum for the exchange of ideas between parents and the school.
All five principals however, recognized the importance of the casual, unplanned, and informal contacts between themselves and parents and between teachers and parents, as providing valuable opportunities for parents to express their opinions and for the school to hear parent input. These principals all made regular efforts to be available so parents could talk to them, be that while they are dropping off or picking up their children, preparing hot dogs, attending track meets and games, chatting in the hallways, participating in “work bee” evenings, or just generally whenever parents are in or around the school. The principal of School D put it this way:

…the informal stuff. Trying to be.... You know, the Peter’s “management by walking about” kind of things, you know. Being visible so that there are opportunities there you know. Sometimes that means isolating yourself so that you are sticking out like a sore thumb but because nobody’s there, somebody can approach you and say, “Gee, you know, just while you’re by yourself right now, can I ask you about...?” You know, giving people the opportunity.

In other words, setting a climate and creating the opportunities that allow for open dialogue, and maintaining an open door policy so parents feel free to speak up and express an opinion.

The comments of parents corroborated the statements made by the principals. Without exception these parents described their schools as open and readily accessible, and accepting of their ideas and opinions. These parents felt less of a need for a lot of formal surveys and questionnaires because they felt that they could easily approach the school on their own volition.

*School A parent:* “This is a fairly open school and if there’s any concern or anything, it’s always...you’re so comfortable to come into the school — at least I do, you know. I think other parents think the same way too.”

*School C parent:* “...he’s always looking for involvement. He’s always looking for ideas. He’s always open to hear what everyone has to say.”

*School D parent:* “It’s open and easily accessible and you can come in and talk anytime you want.”
Discussion

It is evident from the information provided by both principals and parents that these schools do seek and accept parent opinions and suggestions. While principals tended to identify formal information gathering processes as important means for gathering parent input (surveys, questionnaires, tear-offs on newsletters), parents felt that the most important aspect of their schools was the openness they felt and the welcoming atmosphere that pervaded the schools. In these schools, parents felt their ideas were accepted and valued, and thus they felt that they had an important role to play in the school.

This is not to say that principals did not recognized that an open atmosphere was important. The principal of School A expressed it this way:

...first of all setting the climate so the parents know that they can.... They feel comfortable that they can pick up the phone or they can drop in, or they can come....

These principals also recognize the importance of making themselves available to parents. But more than that, they seek out and create opportunities to speak with parents and demonstrate that they do in fact listen, and that they do in fact hear what parents have to say. The number of times that these principals would phone parents either in response to enquiries or simply to “touch base”, and the frequency with which they would put themselves in positions where they were easily available to parents to speak to them, attests to the value these principals put upon the attitudes and opinions of parents, and of maintaining a two-way dialogue between the school and the home.
TEACHER-TO-PARENT COMMUNICATION

2.4 WHAT EFFORTS DO THESE PRINCIPALS MAKE TO ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT TEACHERS IN THEIR EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN COMMUNICATION WITH THE HOME?

For most parents, their major point of contact with the school is their own children’s teachers. This provides the link through which much information about the school with flow; but more importantly, this is the interface that will give rise to much of a parent’s general feelings about the school. It is an important point of connection and one with which principals must be concerned as they work to establish the relationship between the school and the parent community.

Findings

Each of the principals included in the study took a different approach to the issue of teacher/parent contact but all expressed the desire that phone calls be made when there are positive things to say about the child, as well as when there are problems to be dealt with.

In one school, the principal openly encourages class newsletters. He stated his approach as follows:

I feel that they’re more meaningful to the parent that what comes from this office. The majority of the teachers, and again I don’t put pressure on and say you have to do this, but the majority...all the primary teachers send a class newsletter home on a regular basis. Not more than once a month, certainly once a month, to outline the themes, the special events, don’t forget this, come to this, or can you send this for our unit, that kind of thing.

Another principal spoke of “constant clarification” of the importance of teachers maintaining open communication with their parents.

I think if you can sell teachers on the idea how much easier their job is if it’s a two-way street, if they’ve built the cooperation with parents.
A third principal emphasizes the importance of teachers being at their classroom doors to welcome students when parents drop their children off or pick them up after school. Being available at these times provides an opportunity not only to establish a more comfortable relationship between the teacher and the parent, but also affords each the opportunity to exchange messages and ideas. In this school, the principal pointed with some pride to the fact that he had few “stragglers” in the staff room after the bell had sounded. While he did not state as much, it is probable that this has come about more by way of example rather than through administrative directive and is indicative of the attitude of the teachers who work in this school as much as the direct actions of the principal.

Finally another principal not only encourages his teachers to make themselves available and speak openly with parents, but makes use of these contacts as a sort of non-threatening kind of message system. With the teacher delivering messages to parents on behalf of the principal, and to the principal on behalf of the parent, many doors can be opened without there being the stigma of the formal phone call. This principal is leading by way of example, and openly praises teachers for their communication efforts.

Discussion

All these principals appreciate the power of the informal contacts between teachers and parents in establishing the character of the school’s communication, and each in his or her own way works to enhance that avenue of communication. Whether through the formal vehicle of class newsletters, or encouragement of teachers making phone calls home or making themselves readily available to parents, these principals are emphasizing and exemplifying for their teachers, the importance they place on establishing close relationships with the parents of the children they teach.
REPORT CARDS

One form of formalized communication between the school and the home is the report card, mandated in the School Act. How effective do parents feel these report cards are in conveying information to them about their children’s progress?

2.5 HOW DO PARENTS VIEW THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE REPORT CARDS CURRENTLY IN USE?

Findings

Three of the five schools reported using the new primary report card which became available for use in selected schools during this school year in which this study was conducted. This report form is exclusively anecdotal, and includes an area for the parent to use in returning a response to the report card to the teacher. In all three of these schools, very little use was reportedly made of this provision by parents, and the principals expressed the view that there were already many other avenues for parents to communicate with the school and they did not feel the need to utilize this opportunity. All principals reported a positive reaction from parents to the new form of reporting, though one principal expressed concern for the amount of effort put into preparing the reports by his primary staff.

In the intermediate grades, all schools used letter grades for reporting pupil progress, though at least one school had apparently ceased to use letter grades for grade four students. All schools anticipated that they would be required to use an anecdotal form of reporting in the intermediate grades the following year and recognized that both teachers and parents will encounter some difficulties adapting to the use of this form of reporting and that there will be a need for considerable teacher and parent education as it was implemented.

In general, this group of parents was satisfied with the report cards they had been receiving, though the level of satisfaction ranged from relatively satisfied, to extremely
happy with the reporting procedures. Their comments ranged from "Oh, I really like a written one;" through "I don't have any problem with it;" to "I hate primary report cards." Their attitudes appeared to be influenced by a number of factors. The level of satisfaction appears to be higher where the quality of the anecdotal comments is high: where the comments give considerable, explicit information about the child's work; and if it is a parent who prefers letter grades, the report clearly reports the child's standing in relation to others in that grade. Similarly, if it is a parent who favours comparative standings, then the purely anecdotal report does not fulfill the function of adequately informing them in the eyes of the parent. All of these parents, however, felt that while the report card was an effective vehicle for reporting their children's progress, they also required the support of parent-teacher interviews to expand and elaborate upon the information contained in the written form.

Similarly, there was a variation in the opinions of parents regarding the use of letter grades, particularly at the intermediate level. Six parents expressed the desire to have letter grades remain as a major component of the report card; six other parents however, were pleased that they were not used in the primary grades and were to be phased out in the intermediate grades. The remaining three parents appeared to be ambivalent regarding the issue.

In general, too, these parents recognized the efforts that teachers had put into writing the reports. A School A parent remarked, "It's very, very informative I find.... There's a real effort made to describe fully how they're doing." And a School E parent exclaimed, "Boy, what a lot of work for teachers!" Several parents remarked on the thoroughness of the comments and when criticisms were voiced they often had to do with comments that were too general in nature and did not contain sufficient specific information to fully detail the child's progress. These remarks were directed mainly to the intermediate report card presently in use.
Finally, the parents verified the impression given by the principals regarding the space for parent responses on the new primary report form. These parents stated that they did not feel the need for this space to write comments because they had lots of personal contact with the school. One of these parents however, reported that she did in fact use the space, but to give the teacher a "pat on the back" rather than comment on her child's report per se. Two of the parents qualified their statements however, with the suggestion that perhaps this opportunity might be extremely valuable for parents who were not able to spend much time in the school because they worked during the day.

2.6 WHAT GUIDANCE HAVE THESE PRINCIPALS PROVIDED TEACHERS IN THE PREPARATION OF REPORTS TO PARENTS?

Findings

All principals reported that they had devoted varying amounts of time in working with staffs on the writing of anecdotal reports. In one school this was simply a matter of discussing the topic in rather general terms at a staff meeting. In another school, the principal has given a couple of sessions on report writing, and has distributed a variety of articles for reading by staff members and these have formed the basis for further discussions at both the primary and intermediate levels. In yet another school, a total of a day and a half has been used by the primary staff to learn about writing anecdotal comments, particularly comments that are written with a positive perspective as required by the new primary program. This school anticipated dedicating considerable time in the following year for intermediate teachers to improve their skills in developing written comments to replace letter-grade reporting procedures presently in place.

One principal has taught his primary staff to use the computer for writing and printing reports and this has eased some of the stress arising from the production of written reports for the primary teachers. This principal has also encouraged the sharing of comments written by teachers and has provided samples of effective report comments.
Finally, in the fifth school the principal and primary staff have devoted considerable time as a group in developing report card comments. Using the kindergarten report as a model, these teachers have worked to develop sample comments, and have used their collective efforts to ensure that the comments they proposed using were clear, precise, free of educational jargon, and in tune with the philosophy of both the school and the primary program. Once they undertook the task of writing the actual reports, these teachers worked in teams of two to ensure that the reports they wrote were the best models they could produce and actually said what they wanted them to say.

Discussion

Clearly, the quality of the written comments—the thoroughness with which they describe the program and detail the progress that each student is making—has a marked effect upon parents' views of the effectiveness of the report card. All of the principals in the study recognized that there was a need for in-service education for teachers in the writing of effective comments, though different approaches were taken and different amounts of time devoted to the topic.

A similar concern for the education of parents however, has not yet resulted in any particular efforts being undertaken by these schools to provide parent education in the philosophy of reporting as it is being employed in the schools. The considerable variation in opinion among parents regarding the use of letter grades, is an issue that schools must address. If educators believe that anecdotal reports that describe the child’s progress along a continuum are preferable to comparative reporting, then considerable effort must be put into educating parents to that belief.

It is also evident from a number of the comments, that considerable time is required for the preparation of this kind of report to parents, and principals would do well
to monitor the time spent in preparing those reports as it impacts upon the time and energy the teacher is able to devote to the instructional program.

**PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES**

A number of researchers, Cattermole and Robinson (1985) and Lindle (1989) among them, point to the fact that parents prefer to receive information about their children’s schooling on a first-hand, personal basis. The parent-teacher conference can be just such an opportunity for the exchange of information about the child.

### 2.7 HOW DO PARENTS VIEW THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE?

**Findings**

All five schools reported parent-teacher conferences as a regular element of their procedures for reporting student progress to parents, and in all schools, a conference was arranged for every parent in conjunction with the issuance of the first report card of the year. In four of the five schools, this is the only time that conferences are specifically scheduled for every parent. At other times in the year, they may be held at the request of either the parent or the teacher. One of the schools however, is considering offering a second interview for all parents in connection with the second report for the following school year.

All schools utilize an early dismissal to free-up some additional time for the interviews and children are dismissed an hour earlier on one day in three of the schools, and on two days in two schools. In one of the schools, an additional hour if provided by the principal together with teachers who do not register classes, taking all the students into the gymnasium for the first hour of the afternoon, thus allowing teachers to commence their interviews an hour earlier.
In four of the five schools, parent-teacher interviews are fifteen minutes in length while in the fifth school, they are scheduled at ten minute intervals. In this school, the staff attempts to complete all its interviews within one day, whereas the other schools schedule conferences over two days. In all five schools, interviews are scheduled into the evening on at least one day, finishing at 8:30 or 9:00 pm. In one of the schools, the principal reported that he prepared dinner for the staff on conference days, and another principal recounted how some members of his staff are including students in some of the conferences. He reported that the reaction of parents has been very positive.

Most parents spoke highly of the interviews and offered a number of reasons why they particularly liked this type of communication. One parent stated, “I’ve really found them to be a really positive experience.” Two parents felt that it provided an opportunity to expand upon the information given in the written report card and provide more specific information. Another parent welcomed the chance to discuss her child’s progress without other distractions as would occur during a casual conversation at the door of the classroom or in the hallway. Two other parents mentioned as positive aspects of the conference, the opportunity to get to know the teacher better and establish a relationship, and still other parents suggested that it was a chance for the teacher to gain “...a better insight into the child, and understand sometimes a lot better...how the child is doing and why they’re progressing the way they are....” As well, another parent suggested, “...the teacher gets more of a feel of the parent, how the parent wants to be involved and the interest level of the parent.” It also places the child in the context of a family. Several other parents welcomed the opportunity to look at the child’s work and ask questions of the teacher. Finally one parent proposed that it was a time when more sensitive or confidential matters might be discussed, issues that could not be addressed in a written report.
One parent however, felt that a formal interview was not necessary as she was quite satisfied with the information contained in the report card. Another parent related an instance of a teacher who apparently was not prepared for the conference and therefore had little to say. Accordingly, this parent felt that her interview had been a waste of her time.

Five parents remarked that they would like their interviews to have been longer, three of whom had children attending the school which scheduled its conferences for only ten minutes. As one parent remarked,

Parents with a genuine concern don’t have enough time. If they’re working all day long, they don’t have any other time when they can approach the teacher and talk about the problems their child is having in school.

All of these parents however, recognized the impact longer conference times would have upon the teachers; that it could be an unrealistic demand. One parent also observed that parent-teacher conferences were very tiring for the teachers, and could be emotionally draining.

For several of the parents, however, a formal scheduled parent-teacher interview was not felt to be essential. Three of the parents specifically mentioned the open atmosphere of their schools which allowed parents to come in and speak with the teachers at any time; that there was not a need for a formalized conference. Some of their comments included:

School C parent: “...with the open door here, you really don’t need a parent conference after November...you can always come in any month and talk.”

School D parent: “But I really feel that the teachers are open to speaking with parents any time. I mean you can set up a parent-teacher conference any time through the year. They’re open to that.”

School E parent: “And the thing is we don’t have to wait for that; we can phone up a teacher any time and leave a message for them to call us and be assured that they will return the calls.”
Two parents also observed however, that their views of the necessity of an interview were probably influenced by the fact that they personally spent a fair amount of time in the school, and that other parents who were not as involved might feel differently.

2.8 WHAT GUIDANCE HAVE THESE PRINCIPALS PROVIDED TO TEACHERS IN THE CONDUCT OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES?

Findings

In general, very little is done by any of these principals in formally preparing their teachers to conduct effective parent-teacher conferences. One principal reported that he distributed a sheet on “Conference Tips” provided by the district. Another suggested that he just talked about it generally at a staff meeting, while a third stated, “We’ve talked about it and I’ve, you know, given them hand-outs on various things that they can do. Strategies,” and offered that some teachers might send something home with the report card suggesting areas that parents might like to think about in preparing for their conference. A fourth principal stated that he sent a sheet home to parents with suggestions for parents for parent-teacher conferences and that he provided the same information for his teachers together with some printed material outlining how to prepare for a conference (for example, selecting a suitable site, assuming an appropriate posture, having samples of student work available to support the remarks on the report card). The remaining principal reported no special efforts on his part to provide guidance to his teachers on the conduct of parent interviews.

2.9 HOW IS INFORMATION PROVIDED BY PARENTS DURING THE CONFERENCE DEALT WITH?

Findings

It is evident from the data that, in the eyes of parents, the parent-teacher conference affords an important opportunity not just to learn about their children’s progress at school, but also to provide the teacher with important information about their
children. Without exception, all parents agreed that, yes, they did give the teacher information about the child, and related examples of type of information they had shared with the teacher. There was, however, variation in whether it was the parent or the teacher who initiated this aspect of the conference, though a number of parents expressed the opinion that they would not wait be to asked before they shared information. One parent gave as her reason for the importance of broadening the discussion beyond the child’s progress in school, “...because I want her to have a really good idea of what my child’s doing and what she’s about.” Another suggested that it gave “…a better, more complete picture of the child.” A different parent related how during a parent-teacher conference she and the teacher had been able to jointly solve a problem and had been able to develop and agree on strategies for dealing with a particular situation. Most parents too, felt that what they had to say was in fact listened to by the teacher and that it did influence that teacher’s dealings with their children. Only one parent recounted an instance when the information she had relayed to the teacher, appeared to have been generally ignored.

2.10 HOW DO THESE SCHOOLS ACCOMMODATE WORKING PARENTS OR PARENTS WHO DO NOT SPEAK ENGLISH?

Findings

All five schools offer parent-teacher interviews during at least one evening thus providing more convenient times not only for working parents to attend, but also so that fathers can attend even if the mother is available during the day. Mention was also made of the fact that these schools are prepared to schedule conferences at times other than the prescribed conference period in order to accommodate different parent schedules and early morning, lunch hour, and later afternoon times are offered. “The teachers go out of their way to make sure that they’re...there for the parents,” stated one parent in School E.

In four of the five schools, parents are asked to indicate the range of times they would prefer and/or were available to attend a conference prior to the schedule being
made up, and in the fifth school, scheduling is done by the school, taking into account the staff's prior knowledge of parents' work commitments.

The increasing English As A Second Language component of the school population is a factor that these schools are beginning to address. School A however, offered that they had very few non-English speaking parents and so offering translation services was not a factor currently being considered. Schools B, C, D, and E all referred to the translators the district makes available for such occasions as parent-teacher conferences, and these schools schedule interviews around the availability of these personnel. School B also makes use of older children in the family, members of staff who possess facility in other languages, and pointed to the fact that several families will bring their own translators with them to the conference.

It is School D that appears to be making the greatest strides in accommodating non-English speaking families in its school community. In this school, the initial notice announcing the conferences is translated and distributed in the language of the family, and parents are able to request the services of a translator if they feel it is necessary. Additionally, this school has identified a parent of Chinese descent to serve in the capacity of liaison between the school and the increasing Chinese population. This parent not only provides translation at conferences, but also acts as a “greeter” in September when the families first arrive at the school and at such functions as assemblies and concerts, thus extending the school’s welcome to this group of parents.

Discussion

With the parent-teacher conference serving as one of the most important communication links between schools and their parents, it is essential that schools devote considerable thought, time, and energy to ensuring that they are as effective as they can be.
All of these schools appear to be relatively, successful in the conduct of parent-teacher conferences. Several parents referred to an open atmosphere which allowed for a free exchange of information and ideas between classroom teachers and parents; these conferences provide an opportunity for a two-way dialogue and are not limited to a discussion of the child's progress in school. These principals appear to appreciate the importance of these interviews. By providing a modest amount of class time through early dismissals so that interviews can take place, by scheduling conferences into the evening to accommodate working parents, and through recognition of the need to provide translations services for non-English speaking parents, they signal to their staffs and to their parents, the value these interviews afford to enhance the liaison between the school and its parents.

It would appear however, that all of these schools need to re-examine the time they are making available for parent-teacher conferences. While parent consultation does take time and energy away from the instructional program, the fact that a third of the parents interviewed expressed a wish to have longer times available for their meetings with the teacher, indicates that reconsideration must be directed to the ten or fifteen minute time-limit presently in place in these schools. Perhaps schools need to consider more flexible timetabling with varying lengths of time available for varying parent or student situations.

That these principals all value this liaison has not however, translated itself into a recognition by these administrators that conducting parent-teacher interviews is a high level skill and that the vast majority of teachers graduate from teacher education programs with little or no training in the conduct of such consultations. That these teachers are successful is more likely through chance than by design, and principals must therefore direct attention and effort to providing in-service training for their teachers in the development of successful interviewing techniques.
OTHER MEANS OF COMMUNICATING PUPIL PROGRESS

The report card and the parent-teacher conference are the most common, formal methods of reporting pupil progress to parents. A variety of other, less formal though at least as powerful, avenues are available however. Interim reports, tests sent home for parental response, folders of student work sent home, informal notes from teachers or from the principal, special certificates and “Good News” phone calls, can all transmit significant information about the child’s school progress.

2.11 WHAT OTHER MEANS, BEYOND THE FORMAL REPORT CARD AND THE PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE, ARE EMPLOYED TO INFORM PARENTS OF THEIR CHILDREN’S PROGRESS?

Findings

Amongst the five principals, by far the most frequently mentioned vehicle for communicating information to parents was the telephone. One principal summarized it as follows:

But I think the telephone in the school is probably the most important thing. We are constantly telling teachers...for both positive and negative things....

In one of the schools, teachers make a point of phoning each parent in September to introduce themselves, gain some insights about the child and the parent, and generally establish the lines of communication that will be so vital for the balance of the school year. Three of the principals pointed to the phone as a means of communicating both positive and negative information about the child—phone calls from both teachers and principals—and the fact that a telephone call was more personal and less threatening that a letter or note from the school.

Notes from principals and teachers were however, mentioned in one school and took the form of “Happy-grams” that highlighted the child’s achievements, be they academic progress, good citizenship, or improved attitudes.
Three of the principals referred to the importance of the less formal contacts between teachers and parents in school-home communication. Casual contacts at the classroom door when parents deliver or pick up their children, impromptu conferences, and invitations to observe in the classroom, all provided opportunities for parents to gain knowledge of their children’s standings in school. One principal goes to far as to meet parents in their own homes, rather than requiring them to attend at the school:

I often meet with parents in their homes, rather than bring them up to school. There are a lot of parents who feel very uncomfortable coming up here, particularly parents with major problems. So I’ll go down and meet in their homes. And I think they appreciate that as well. There are some families here for example, who are just recently out of prison, or whatever, and they don’t even...they don’t want to come to school and they feel very uncomfortable and what not. Any kind of people like that.... If I have a problem with them and they don’t want to come to school, no problem. I’ll go down and meet them and talk to them....

In one of the schools, interim reports had been used the previous year, but neither teachers nor parents felt that this provided a necessary or effective way of delivering information about student progress. In all likelihood, the sketchiness of information that is contained in such mid-term reports, left more questions unanswered than answered.

Two principals mentioned work being sent home as a means of keeping parents informed. This might take the form of portfolios containing examples of a student’s work, or in the case of intermediate students, completed tests that parents are asked to peruse and sign before returning them to the teacher.

Lastly, one principal mentioned the use of the “Student Planner”, a type of homework book/daily diary with which the school equips each intermediate student, as a convenient means of keeping parents informed of the work the child is doing in class. Teachers frequently asked parents to initial these books to indicate that they were aware to some degree at least, of how the child is performing and both teachers and parents used
the planner as a place to write notes to each other; a convenient two-way communication link.

Parents too, recognized the importance of the opportunity to talk openly and frequently with teachers as an significant means for them to keep knowledgeable about their children in school. All parents remarked that their preferred means of finding out how their children were doing was to speak with the teacher personally, and few of them waited for the teacher to contact them but went directly to the teacher on their own volition. Two parents even went so far as to suggest that it was the parent’s responsibility to keep themselves informed about their child’s progress; that it was not exclusively the teacher’s duty but rather a shared obligation. One parent however, noted the weakness of dependence on this kind of informal communication and suggested that it often appeared to be the case that unless the parent was physically present in the school, that parent probably would not hear the news the teacher had to give them about their child. The dependence on informal methods may mean that some parents may never hear from their child’s teacher.

The telephone appeared to be somewhat less important to this group of parents, with only four parents including it in their list of methods for finding out about their children in school. The fact that they rank the telephone lower on the scale, might be explained by the fact that the parents included in this study are ones who are frequently in and around the school and are therefore readily available to the teachers and have ready access to them. One parent however, related an instance of a particular teacher who would phone parents in the evenings to discuss the child’s progress. However this same parent admitted that it would be an unfair and unrealistic expectation to require of all teachers.
Test papers and examples of student work sent home, classroom newsletters, open houses (both school-wide and classroom), and the aforementioned student planner were other frequently identified means of learning about the child’s progress. Several parents also noted the availability of the child’s books and work for perusal as well as the opportunities that working directly in the classroom as a volunteer afforded to know and understand the student’s progress.

Finally, one parent felt that just by talking to her child, she gained a fairly good understanding of how her child was progressing.

Discussion

The fact that parents identified personal contacts with teachers either through casual contact or via the telephone as important means for finding out about their children’s schooling, confirms the findings of Cattermole and Robinson (1985) and Lindle (1989) that parents prefer the one-to-one, personal, and less formal contacts with teacher for learning about their children in school. Indeed, the variety of means identified and the readiness with which parents identified them, would appear to bear out the concept that these informal contacts are exceedingly powerful avenues of communication. Accordingly, principals and teachers need to carefully consider these communication links and work to implement them so that the messages conveyed are complete and accurate.

These schools all appear to have established and maintain an open and welcoming atmosphere that facilitates parents’ contacts with their children’s teachers. The openness of the school is plainly indicated in the comments of three of the parents:

“I feel quite comfortable in asking...”

“I just go and ask the teacher. Open communication...you can drop in at any time to any classroom and say, ‘How is he doing?’”

“They let it be known that you can talk to them any time.”
Yet another parent mentioned the fact that the principal’s “...door is always open.” It appears that the “open door policy” professed to be in place in so many schools, is a reality in these particular schools: their doors are open and parents do feel free to enter, to participate, to question, and to be informed.

2.12 IS THERE A BALANCE BETWEEN SCHOOL-TO-HOME CONTACTS OF A NEGATIVE NATURE, AND POSITIVE COMMUNICATIONS TO PARENTS ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN IN SCHOOL?

In her considerable research into parent involvement, Joyce Epstein (1986) found that teachers made few direct contacts with parents, and Lucas and Lusthaus (1977) reported that few attempts were made by teachers to communicate “good news” to parents about their children in school. In the five schools included in this study, all of which were noted for the involvement of their parents, is there a balance of positive and negative communications with parents?

Findings

In the preceding discussion (question 2.11, page 110), principals and parents identified telephone calls, notes from both principals and teachers, so-called “Happy-grams”, and pupil work sent home as means of communicating information about the child. That this information should be positive as well as negative was emphasized by all principals. One principal expressed it this way:

...I have a philosophy about this. I think if you have seven strokes for every poke in the school...you’ll turn a school around overnight. If you can give positive feedback to parents about their kids; if your newsletter is filled with children’s names who belong to clubs and activities; if their pictures are on the board; if you’ve got your art projects up; if you’re phoning home when something good has happened during the day (so often we don’t do that); then the pokes are not a major problem if you have to phone home [about a student in difficulty].

This principal recognizes the power of the positive word while acknowledging that this was something of which schools did not do enough.
A second principal suggested:

If things have gone really good [sic] for a kid and they've done something they think the parent needs to reward the child for, they’ll phone the parent and say, “Gee, this neat thing happened....”.

Parents were asked if they agreed with the following statement as it applied to their school:

Many parents express the feeling that the school makes contact with the parent only if there is a problem; that little communication about their own child at school is positive.

Their responses confirmed that these schools indeed did make an effort to tell parents about the good things their children were doing. Twelve of the fifteen parents interviewed disagreed with this statement as it applied to their school and their experiences in the school. Several of them elaborated on their reply by describing examples and programs to encourage and acknowledge positive actions on the part of students. One parent cited the newsletter which regularly highlighted the good things students were doing. Another parent pointed to a teacher who regularly made phone calls to the parents of difficult students to tell them when things had gone well for the child. A third parent described a school-wide program designed to recognize and reward students who made positive contributions to the school. One parent went so far as to say, “There’s a very positive attitude toward children that when they do things right it’s acknowledged. More so I think, when they do something right than for discipline.” A parent recounted an instance of the principal phoning students at home to commend them on their performance in an inter-school competition. And finally two parents commented that their schools “accentuated the positive” through the newsletters, pictures in the halls and notes from teachers.

One parent who felt that the school did keep her informed about the good things her child was doing, wondered aloud if that was true only because of her frequent
presence in the school and the fact that she was therefore easily available for teachers to speak to her. She questioned whether all parents would feel the same way she did.

Of the three parents who agreed with the statement—that they generally heard from the teacher only when there was a problem—one suggested that there was really very little that the school could do in that regard, and that there was an onus on the part of the parent to contact the teacher to find out how things were progressing for the child. Another parent agreed with her, that there was a responsibility on the part of the parent to keep the lines of communication open, especially in a large school with large classes. A third parent felt that unless she were specifically around the school to hear about it, she would not hear about the positive things related to her child.

Discussion

It is evident that these schools do make an effort to balance the negative with the positive. In each of the schools a variety of approaches is taken. Some schools have organized formal recognition programs such as “Students of the Week”, and the regular distribution of the “Happy-grams” described earlier, as well as good behaviour certificates. Others are much less formal and include phone calls from teachers and principals, letters to parents, and notes written in the student diary. The fact that even in these schools there are a number of parents who apparently have not experienced such positive contacts, is an indication that schools must somehow develop mechanisms to ensure that some students are not overlooked. For these students, seeing others receiving positive acknowledgments while their own efforts go unnoticed may be worse for them than receiving a negative recognition.

OTHER AVENUES OF COMMUNICATION

If informal contacts between parents and teachers as well as with students and other school personnel are such powerful avenues of communication as research would
indicate, and if they are so appreciated by parents as an important source of information about the school and their child’s progress, how then does the school ensure that the messages conveyed along these lines are in fact the messages they wish conveyed?

2.13 HOW ARE THE INFORMAL CONTACTS BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS MANAGED BY THESE SCHOOLS?

Findings

While all of the principals agreed that informal contacts were an important avenue of communication, and that they were an essential element in their own schools, none of them reported having had any specific discussions with staff members about such contacts. Principal B reported that, “After school...you should see the number of parents standing around talking to the teachers in this building. It’s just phenomenal.” That he welcomed this type of contact was evident from another of his comments. “I think another key here is that the teachers themselves do a lot of personal contacts with parents as well. They are constantly in touch with parents in the school.”

The principal of School C also acknowledged the impact of these kinds of contacts when he related,

We talk a lot here about the importance of the parent as a partner in education and I think that a lot of the teachers feel that this is part of being successful with that kid that we share with this parent. And when the parent shows up at the door, you know that that’s what they want to talk about.

When asked about the casual contacts between teachers and parents, the principal of School E described the situation in his building as follows:

We don’t have a lot of discussion about that. I think, oh...you’d have to spend some time around the school I think, to get a sense of, I guess the levels of collaboration that happen amongst the staff. And when I’m talking about that I mean cross-age, team teaching, resource team planning and working with every teacher in the school, as a matter of the school program for instructional improvement. Um.... What you hear in the staff room is a tremendous amount of professional talk. It’s...I mean it’s just a remarkable amount and a lot of parents are in there and hearing that and become a part of it.... I think...the teachers are really aware of the informal collaboration and informal planning and the informal communication, that
they do as well as formal, and I think that they really take advantage of the
time that they have with parents. They're very tuned in to helping parents
by being responsive....

He goes on to explain:

I model that [establishing informal contacts with parents] and I think the
people are definitely attracted. Well, you know, I think if you model
certain values and you hold them strongly and make them really well-
known, then people see that that's important and if they don't then they
[teachers] tend to move somewhere else.

The principal of this community school unmistakably discerns important benefits to be
gained from establishing these contacts with parents, and through being a role-model
himself, he is able to encourage his teachers to do likewise.

The remaining principal openly acknowledged encouraging his staff in these
contacts with parents, and described a situation in which a teacher would come to him to
discuss a conversation they had had with a parent and display some hesitation about
whether or not it had been the correct thing to do, he gave them his assurances that not
only did he agree with their actions, but encouraged them to do more. Here again, a
principal was openly condoning and supporting his teachers in their contacts.

Out of this particular group of parents, eight indicated that they did not consider
casual conversations with teachers as important sources of information and most of these
parents suggested that they would not discuss matters of substance in this type of forum.
One parent felt that to do so, would put the teacher at an unfair disadvantage while
another stated, "I try not to out of respect for the teacher's time because I know that they
often have a lot of things [to do]." This sentiment was echoed by another parent who felt
that some parents tended to take advantage of the availability of teachers at the expense
of class time when keeping them engaged in conversations at the classroom door after the
bell had sounded. Finally, one parent referred to the student's daily planner as a more
suitable means of communicating with the teacher.
Nevertheless, it is evident that the majority of parents interviewed felt that the opportunity to talk with the teacher was there if and when they needed to make use of it but that they would be more inclined to arrange a specified meeting time to discuss major concerns or important items. It is also clear from their responses, that all of these parents consider their teachers to be very open, friendly, and approachable so that while not necessarily exercised, this could be an important avenue for communication for some parents outside of this distinct group.

2.14 WHAT EFFORTS ARE MADE TO MONITOR OR INFLUENCE THE MESSAGES TAKEN HOME BY STUDENTS?

The single point of contact between the school and the parent that is available for all parents, on a daily basis, is the student. Everyday, this child is in a position to relay important information, impressions, and attitudes about the school. Do parents regularly consult with their children about school? Do schools make any particular endeavors to manage or influence the messages that the child carries out of the school building?

Findings

All of the principals accepted that children do in fact talk to their parents about school and relay information about the school. “They are our best ambassadors, obviously, in any school....” said one principal.

Nevertheless, two of these principals stated unequivocally that they believed there was no way they could direct what a child would say when he or she met the parent or was questioned about school upon reaching home. “We don’t really have any control over that. And some very mixed, misunderstood messages get home,” stated one principal, and these sentiments were echoed by one other principal. A third principal did suggest however that if there had been a problem at school involving a child, misunderstandings could be avoided if the school phoned the parents and alerted them to the situation before the child reached the home.
Two principals suggested however, that changes in the nature of school programs in recent years have had an impact on the messages children take home. One suggested that with integrated programs and the implementation of such approaches as learning centres that children nowadays were less aware of the subject areas in which they were working. Thus for example, a child might not realize that when reading and writing about a grasshopper, he was in fact learning science. And the parent who asks the question, "What are you doing in science?" would be met with a negative, albeit inaccurate, response.

On the other hand, a second principal suggested that changing approaches in education in fact enhance the messages children take with them about their learning at school. He stated,

I think our kids, because they...do so much talking, because there's such an emphasis on cooperative learning and a lot of talk, that they tend to talk more about what goes on in school....

He also suggested that:

...we spend a lot of time reinforcing with kids what it is they're doing to learn. I mean, for example, journal entries, learning logs, all of those things that they do, helping them to understand what strategies they're using and why they're effective. A lot of self-evaluation. A de-emphasis on right and wrong, and more of an emphasis on process. Choices. And I think when kids really start to think about learning as a process rather than as strictly a product, or being a processor of information, they tend to talk to people more about it.

With only one exception, every parent interviewed stated that they made it a point to ask their children about school each day, be it when they pick them up at school, when they arrive home, or at the dinner table. For several of the parents, this provides a valuable opportunity for opening a dialogue with their children and school which accounts for a major portion of their children's lives, is an important point of departure for discussion of a wide variety of issues. For these parents, such occasions are important
in establishing the parent-child rapport that needs to be in place for the child to be able to approach the parent in times of need.

Most of these parents also recognized that what they heard from their children usually did not represent the complete picture of happenings at school. They suggested that children would relate only what was important or interesting to them at the time, and several pointed out that what they heard were often little anecdotes about events in the classroom, rather than a details about the learning that had transpired during the day. These parents felt that what they did hear from their children was in fact accurate, if not complete, and that they needed to exercise some judgement in accepting all that the child reported. In several instances, parents remarked that if they did hear something from their child that they considered disturbing or a matter of concern, they would contact the teacher or the principal directly to verify the facts.

No parent reported any awareness of efforts on the part of the school to influence what the child told them. All of them indicated that the schools and teachers included matters of importance in notices or newsletters rather than relying on students to deliver such messages to the home, and there was no indication of teachers providing the children with specific information regarding such things as what they had learned during the day so as to be able to report it to their parents.

2.15 WHAT ROLE DO NON-TEACHING PERSONNEL SUCH AS SECRETARIES, CUSTODIANS, NURSES, TEACHER ASSISTANTS, ETC., PLAY IN COMMUNICATING INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL; AND HOW ARE THE MESSAGES CONVEYED BY THESE NON-TEACHING SCHOOL PERSONNEL INFLUENCED BY THE SCHOOL?

Children and teachers are not the only people in a position to report events and demonstrate attitudes to the community. Auxiliary school personnel may also be available to parents as a source of information and impressions about the school.
Findings

All principals and parents recognized the importance of the school secretary and the pivotal role that this member of the school staff plays in interpreting the school to the community. One principal described his secretary as "the front line," and several parents commented on the friendliness, cheerfulness, and helpfulness of the secretary. One parent suggested that her school's secretary was, "Worth her weight in gold. She's always there to try to answer any questions, or she will find out what she can [for you]," and several parents used adjectives such as "wonderful", "great", "pleasant", and "accessible" in describing the secretary. All parents commented on the fact that the school secretary was knowledgeable about activities in the school and was approachable for information and assistance. While these parents would seek information of a factual nature from the secretary, none of them felt that this was a person with whom they would discuss the merits of a particular issue. The secretary is a source of information and assistance, but not of opinion.

In the two designated community schools, the coordinator was seen as an equally vital person in the school, "...our right hand person, she's so valuable," to use the words of one parent. These individuals too make themselves readily available to provide information and assistance for parents.

Only six parents made mention of the custodian as a member of the school staff with whom they had contact, and in all cases, he was depicted as a friendly individual, who willingly offered assistance with such things as obtaining tables and chairs and opening doors, but none of these parents felt that he was someone she would consult for information about the school.
Discussion

Informal communications with teachers, information relayed by students, and contacts with non-teacher personnel are all avenues of communication along which information and impressions of a school might be conveyed. A number of researchers including Cattermole and Robinson (1985), Lindle (1989), and Storey (1989) have all pointed out that parents value these contacts. Nevertheless, in the five schools included in this study, these links do not appear to assume the expected level of importance.

Perhaps as a result of the open atmospheres pervading these schools, or perhaps due to the high level of involvement of these parents on a variety of levels in the school, this particular group of parents does not appear to need to make use of such contacts in order to gain information about their children or about the program of the school. They all appear to be well-informed parents and most likely are able to gather the information they need from other sources. Nevertheless, it is possible that while individual, casual conversations are not a particularly important source of information for parents in general, and for this group in particular, the availability of such opportunities may contribute in a synergistic way to the general atmosphere of the school, and to the parents' level of confidence in the school.

Similarly, while all these parents regularly engage in conversations with their children about school, they appear prepared and able to maintain an accurate perception of what their children say, and use these opportunities more as a means of opening communication between themselves and their children rather than a source of information and impressions about the school.

In spite of research that suggests that non-teaching personnel such as school secretaries, custodians, nurses, and teachers' assistants can be important sources of information and opinions about the school, it would appear that within this set of five
schools, these people do not fill that role. From their comments, such support personnel as these while providing assistance of a general nature, are not viewed as people who “know what really goes on” as Storey (1989) would suggest.

Nevertheless, these principals and parents appear to be aware of the critical role the secretary plays in the school. Since this is the first person an individual will come in contact with whether over the counter or through the telephone, it is critical that careful consideration be given to the selection of people who project an open, friendly visage and who will act as the welcoming liaison for parents and visitors to the school. To a somewhat lesser extent, the custodian too, must be a friendly cooperative individual since he will often be called upon to provide assistance to parents. Both of these individuals contribute to the “visage” of the school and will impact upon parents’ views of the school. In designated community schools, the Community School Coordinator is an equally critical member of the school staff in creating the friendly, open atmosphere that so many of the parents mentioned and obviously valued about their schools.

That these avenues of communication are of somewhat diminished importance in these schools should not however, lead principals and teachers to ignore the potential, both positive and negative, that these avenues have for establishing and maintaining a school’s reputation. While at this juncture, these principals have not felt a need to discuss these possibilities with their staffs, they would be advised to consider opening discussions of these facets of the interface between the school and the community in order to avoid any of the possible pitfalls resulting from neglecting to either utilize these links or to manage the information and impressions leaving their buildings along these routes.
2.16 DO PARENTS FEEL THAT THEY RECEIVE SUFFICIENT COMMUNICATION FROM THE SCHOOL AND ARE KEPT ADEQUATELY INFORMED ABOUT THE SCHOOL AND ITS ACTIVITIES, AS WELL AS ABOUT THE PROGRESS OF THEIR CHILD?

With the myriad of ways by which parents can receive information about the school and their children’s progress, and the efforts these school expend in disseminating information to parents, do parents feel satisfied that they are kept fully aware of what’s occurring in their schools? Do they feel that the school keeps them informed and therefore involved in their children’s education?

Findings

Without exception, every parent agreed that yes, they did feel that they were able to get all the information they wanted about the school and their children’s progress in school. Several parents responded in a very definite, positive way while one parent qualified her reply by suggesting that this was probably facilitated by the fact that she was around the school almost daily.

When asked if they felt that communication was more frequent at certain grade levels than at others, all but one parent agreed that there was more regular communication in the younger grades though of these, two suggested that this extended to the early intermediate grades as well.

Two parents however expressed the idea that with the current revisions in programming taking place at the intermediate level, the level of communication was now about equal for both the primary and the intermediate divisions.
Several opinions were expressed as to why there would be more contact with parents in the lower grades. One parent suggested that it is a factor in the maturing process:

I think when the kids are smaller, they probably need more help and more guidance from their parents. I mean, not that they stop needing it, but I think as they get older, you’re not required because the kids are more capable of doing a lot of things on their own and given responsibility in the classroom. But at the primary level, they’ll go to maybe a parent volunteer.

Another parent proposed that as children grow older they naturally seek more independence:

I think grade 6 and 7 students themselves really figure it isn’t “cool” to have their parents dropping in the school or coming by the school to watch them play band or things like that. I think it’s more of a peer pressure kind of thing than anything. It’s not “cool” to do that... I don’t think many grade 6 or 7 students want their parents at the school at all...involved in anything.

While a third parent advised that expectations of students change in the intermediate grades:

I think that it’s part of the growth process for the students actually. As they reach intermediate years, they are expected to, you know, have some more responsibility.

Finally, another parent remarked that it was a function of the program at the lower grades that brought parents in closer contact with the school and the teacher:

Partly because of the program that was going on in the classroom maybe, the age, the teachers are more likely to get in touch with the parents and maybe because they want you to come and do something as well. I mean that’s when they’re looking for volunteers then you tend to hear from them more often. And they’re doing things at that age level, more parents are needed to help. So it may just be that. And maybe part of it is just the personality of the teachers.

Discussion

The fact that all these parents feel they are kept well informed about their children’s schooling is likely a direct result of their own substantial involvement in the school. Indeed one of the parents offered that very suggestion. It is also apparent from the
remarks of these parents, that their involvement has resulted in a very positive outlook toward the school. They feel they know what their school is doing, they are pleased with what they see, and they are proud of the accomplishments of their children, their school, and themselves. Such attitudes support Fullan’s findings (1982) of a positive relationship between the quality of school-to-parent communication and parents’ attitudes towards the school.

It is regrettable that there continues to exist, even in these schools with their reputations for high levels of parent participation, a difference in the frequency of communication at different grade levels. That there would be more communication with parents at the primary level would be the traditional expectation. That there appear to be signs of this degree of communication beginning to extend into the intermediate grades augers well for these schools in particular and elementary schools in general. Principals and intermediate teachers must become more aware of the need to continue to involve parents in their programs through maintaining open channels of communication along which messages and information travels in a continuous flow.

**TYPE 3: PARENT INVOLVEMENT AT SCHOOL (Volunteering)**

Parent participation in schools as volunteers will occur in a number of forms. Probably the most obvious area will be parents involved with teachers in the classroom setting. Such tasks as marking books, preparing materials, and putting up bulletin board displays are common assignments performed by volunteer parents. Parents also participate by driving students on field trips, providing assistance in libraries, computer laboratories, and learning assistance centres, as well as serving food either on hot dog/hamburger days or in school cafeterias.
Parents may also be found performing instructional roles in the classroom. In such instances as these, parents may be found reading to children or listening to children read, tutoring, teaching art projects, sharing special skills or talents, telling of their experiences, or showing slides of their travels. In these cases, parents are working much more closely with students and are contributing more directly to the instructional program in the classroom.

Parents also fulfill a volunteer role when they come to the school to participate as members of an audience. In this way they are able to demonstrate their support for the school and its activities by their attendance. Often these types of activities will occur in the evening, and for working parents afford a major opportunity for them to participate in some measure in the education of their children. Attendance at plays, concerts, sports events, open houses, and assemblies is a signal to both the child and the school that the parent is interested in, and supportive of, the school and its program (Storey, 1989).

Fund raising is another activity that is dependent to a large measure on the volunteer efforts of parents. Often these undertakings are sponsored and directed by the parents' group, but participation in such endeavours is yet another facet of volunteerism in the school.

For the many parents who want to contribute something to the school and to participate in activities with their children, volunteering in the school is an important outlet and a preferred means of involving themselves with their children. As a volunteer, parents maintain control over the degree of involvement they have and over the times when they will make themselves available (Storey, 1989). In addition, there are other benefits that accrue to parents as well as to children. For many parents, volunteering provides an opportunity to get to know the teacher better and to develop deeper understandings of the education process, as well as of their own children's progress.
(Powell, 1986), and Hunter (1989) cites evidence that parents develop a deeper appreciation for teachers and the job they do through working alongside them in school. Teachers too appear to develop feelings of an increased level of efficacy when they have parents working with them in their classrooms (Powell, 1986).

Furthermore, such participation appears to have significant benefits for children. Parent involvement as volunteers in the classroom has been shown to positively affect students’ attitudes and achievement. Fullan (1982) points to the impact of parents involved with children in the learning process in the classroom as a contributory factor in school progress and academic achievement though he draws a distinction between parents working with children as opposed to general paid teacher aides whose effect is substantially less.

Finally, Joyce Epstein (1986) advances the proposition that parents serving as volunteers is the level of participation that receives the greatest level of support from both teachers and administrators.

3.1 WHAT PROPORTION OF THE PARENT BODY PARTICIPATES AS VOLUNTEERS IN THE SCHOOL?

Findings

Table 2, reproduced on the following page from page 70, indicates the proportion of parents participating in volunteer capacities in each of the five schools included in the study as reported by both principals and parents.

From this data, it can be interpreted that approximately one in three students is represented by a parent serving as a volunteer in the school. Much of the data was gleaned from information offered during the interviews of the numbers of invitations sent out by the schools to the annual volunteers’ recognition function and included parents who participated on a wide variety of levels of involvement. Included in these figures
therefore, will be parents who volunteer on a regular and frequent basis; as for example parents who work in classrooms, run the Call Back programs, or who work in the library—those who can be expected to be on duty generally once a week. Included also, will be parents who volunteer only occasionally such as for monthly hot dog days or who drive on the occasional class field trip. As well, the figures are reported to include parents who had participated in only one event throughout the year.

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**TABLE 2**

**PARENTS ACTIVE AS VOLUNTEERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Principals' Responses</th>
<th>Parents' Responses *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>50:215</td>
<td>30:215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>200:600</td>
<td>125:600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>100:260</td>
<td>100:260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>170:500</td>
<td>80:500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td></td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Levels of participation are expressed as a ratio of the number of parents involved compared to the student population of the school.

* Reported as a general averaging of the three responses for each school.

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Not included in these figures however, will be parents whose voluntary participation was limited to attending school functions such as open houses, plays, music concerts, and sporting events. The participation of these parents will be discussed in question 3.6 (page 152). Similarly the number of parents who take part in fund raising
activities cannot be enumerated as that participation may be limited to the level of simply buying raffle tickets or merchandise at a plant sale, and is therefore less evident.

In two of the schools, the reported figures represented an increase over the last several years. In School A for example, the principal reported that he had in fact witnessed an increase in the number of parents involved during the six years he had served in the school and this suggestion was echoed by two of the schools' parents. The principal of School E also reported his opinion that the number of volunteer parents had increased during his tenure. The parents of School C reported a marked increase in the number of parents participating in the school and lay the credit for this increase entirely at the feet of the most recently appointed principal. In the remaining two schools, a high level of participation was reported have always been the case. Two parents did highlight one difficulty in maintaining a high level of participation however, and that is encouraging parents who are new to the school to become involved, but these particular parents were unable to offer any suggestions as to how this might be more effectively accomplished.

The principal of School C reported that there were not as many parents serving as volunteers in classrooms as there were in other areas of the school. As a reason, he offered the suggestion that many parents do not feel comfortable working in such close proximity with children and teachers, and cited a figure of about twenty parents who do work in the classroom (as compared to a total of one hundred volunteers). Similar sentiments were voiced by the principal of School E, a designated community school. This principal suggested that not only were parents more frequently involved in other parts of the school rather than directly in the classroom (he suggested a figure of approximately five percent), but that they were also more involved through the parents’ council in the community as a whole, than in the school in particular.
To facilitate mothers particularly, in volunteering for such activities as hot lunch programs, one school makes it a point to provide child-minding. Thus when the committee is struck to prepare and serve the hot dogs or whatever, one member of the committee is assigned the task of supervising the younger children of the other committee members. In this way, the circle of available parents is enlarged and more people are able to participate directly in the school. Such a solution is not possible for all types of activities however, but it represents attention being directed to one factor that acts as a hindrance to some parents—being restricted by the responsibility for pre-school-aged children.

**Discussion**

While it is not possible to interpret from the data gained through the interviews, whether these figures represent only the female parent, and it is not possible to relate these figures to the actual number of parents in the schools, it is evident that volunteers do fill an important role in these schools. These figures represent a significant segment of the parent populations of these schools, and both principals and teachers are apparently making effective use of the resources available to them in the form of parent volunteers.

The fact that the number of parents involved in recent years has increased was spoken of in respect to three schools. By way of explanation, the principal of School A suggested that the increase was due to specific efforts on his part to bring parents into the daily operations of the school, and represented a major element of his educational philosophy. He stated:

I came into the school, with that as one of my objectives; to build a strong, involved base because I firmly believe that children benefit by having that liaison and communication. And...if one comes into a school with that objective, with that philosophy, then there are certain things you start to do to break down barriers and to open doors.
The principal of School E suggested another reason for more parents becoming involved in the school. He remarked:

I think the awareness has increased about what the school’s doing. I think that parents are a lot clearer about what the school’s goals are and what it stands for and values and that sort of thing.

He would appear to be suggesting that an increase in volunteerism follows from a greater understanding of the school’s efforts, rather than the reverse which some of the research suggests (Powell, 1986). Perhaps it can be more accurately stated therefore, that an increase in volunteerism occurs concomitant with an increase in an understanding and appreciation of what the school is doing.

That these people provide a valuable—and valued—service to the school and the students is evidenced by the fact that each of these schools enjoys a high level of parent involvement in volunteer capacities, and that the numbers are either remaining at a high level, or are increasing. If parents don’t feel welcome and don’t feel that their efforts are appreciated they will not continue to work in the school. These parents are continuing to make an important contribution to their children’s schooling.

3.2 WHAT TASKS DO PARENT VOLUNTEERS PERFORM IN THESE SCHOOLS?

- IN CLASSROOMS:
  - as clerical assistants?
  - as part of the instructional program?

- IN OTHER AREAS OF THE SCHOOL?

Many of the parents who volunteer in these schools serve in capacities that bring them in direct contact with children and that therefore allow them to make direct contributions to the education of their own children. Other parents serve in areas that, while not directly assisting their own children, serve important functions in day-to-day operations of the school. What tasks then, do such parents perform?
Parents Working in Classrooms as Clerical Assistants

Findings

Table 6, on page 133 following, indicates the variety of clerical tasks performed by parents in these schools.

Discussion

It is evident from the non-instructional types of activities reported to be performed by volunteer parents in classrooms that most of the traditional uses of parent help are still firmly in place. Assistance in creating or procuring materials for teachers remains a major function of parent volunteers, as does the creation of bulletin board displays and a broad variety of miscellaneous tasks.

Parents driving on field trips is another common use of parent volunteers. From the number of reports of parents driving on class trips and to sporting events, it would appear that this is one way schools are able to save money through avoiding the high costs of hiring buses for the transportation of students. It is probably a reasonable conclusion as well, to assume that more trips out of the school can be planned when the costs of transportation do not have to be included. It is interesting to note that one school reported the coordination of transporting students and preparing of teaching materials with the parent drivers spending their wait time during skating lessons, cutting out materials for the teacher.

The assistance of parents in the computer laboratory is a relatively new phenomenon. With the advent of instruction in the use of the computer in schools, many teachers feel somewhat inadequately prepared, and lacking in adequate knowledge. The use of parent volunteers is one way that this learning can be presented to students (see also Table 7, page 139). Additionally, the preparation of the computer laboratory for a
group of students can be a time-consuming task, and parent assistance is greatly appreciated by already busy teachers.

### TABLE 6

**CLERICAL TASKS PERFORMED BY PARENT VOLUNTEERS:**
**AS REPORTED BY PRINCIPALS AND PARENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASKS PERFORMED</th>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting out materials prior to class</td>
<td>P I I I I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing materials (cutting; colouring; pasting; laminating; preparing flash cards; making charts)</td>
<td>I PII P PII II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mounting bulletin board displays</td>
<td>II II P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working at home to prepare materials for teachers</td>
<td>P P P PI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in evening “Work Bees” to prepare materials for teachers</td>
<td>PI III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting materials from the district resource centre</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing computers (loading programs, preparing materials)</td>
<td>II II II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marking papers</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making costumes for plays and outfits for concerts</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting with stage productions (sets, props, etc.)</td>
<td>PI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving on field trips and to sports events</td>
<td>PI PI P II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting with sports day</td>
<td>PI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclassified clerical assistance as needed</td>
<td>PI PI PI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P—as reported by the principal  
I—as reported by a parent
Many of the parents mentioned the work-load of teachers when describing how parents were involved, and several suggested that one of the important aspects of parents completing these kinds of clerical tasks for teachers was not only to reduce their out-of-class work load, but also to allow teachers more time and energy to devote to instructional matters. By taking on such time-consuming tasks, parents felt that teachers could be better prepared for the instructional part of their responsibilities. This was not meant to suggest however, that these teachers were not already doing a good job of teaching; in fact it is a recognition of, and respect for, the difficult job teachers have, that accrues from parents working alongside teachers as volunteers (Hunter, 1989).

That the duties performed by parent volunteers are many and varied is evident from the data. Principal B described the volunteer’s responsibilities when he said:

When you come in as a volunteer into the classroom situation, you do...you basically do...whatever is necessary to do for that particular day or that particular week or whatever you are doing.

This principal also recognized however, that, even though there were a large number of parents working in these capacities in classrooms in his school, their use was not distributed evenly throughout the school.

...different teachers handle it in different ways. It depends. Some of the teachers don’t feel comfortable having parents working sort of as a teacher aide in the classroom; they would just rather have them do clerical kinds of things [elsewhere than in the classroom]. And that’s fine too. Whatever...it sort of depends on the teacher.

Parents will undertake whatever tasks they feel most comfortable in performing. For some, that will involve cutting and pasting activities. For others however, direct involvement with children in the instructional program is their preferred level of involvement in the classroom. Teachers therefore, must be able to determine the parent’s comfort level when requesting that they perform certain tasks, as well as to identify the reasons the parent wants to be involved. For the parents who want to work with children in general, or to see their own children functioning in the classroom, there will be little
satisfaction to be gained from cutting out pictures for example. Similarly, for the parents who are unsure of themselves in working with children, helping children write their stories may be an overwhelming experience, and result in their withdrawing from future volunteer service.

The principal of School C described something of a developmental process that operates with parents beginning to be involved in the classroom when he spoke of his kindergarten teacher.

...and it's interesting because at the beginning of the year when the parent is new in the classroom, they sit and they watch a lot and just wander around not sure what to do. Then the mother instinct takes over and they kind of do all the things that moms like to do with kids, and that's wonderful....

While the variety of tasks performed by parents in School E is similar to that reported by the other schools, the involvement of parents in this school was reported to be substantially less in terms of numbers of parents involved. This can be traced to difficulties experienced by the school during the early 1980's when teacher aide positions were largely eliminated and teachers continued to use parent volunteers in their classrooms. Many teacher aides felt that these parents were taking their jobs from them, and a residue of bitterness still remains and many parents find satisfaction in working on the parents' committee and at the community level, in preference to working in classrooms. It is this school, however, that identifies its teachers' staff room as the "Community Room", and it is not uncommon for teachers to leave materials on the table sometimes with a note attached explaining what needs to be done and have parents drop in on a casual basis, (perhaps while waiting to pick their children up), help themselves to a cup of coffee and set about completing the work that had been left. That teachers and parents can work in easy harmony like this is a clear indicator of the comfortable rapport that has been established in this school, and has developed as a way of teachers and parents working around the issue of job descriptions.
Finally, two schools mentioned evening "Work Bees" when parents would be invited in for an evening of cutting, pasting, mounting, laminating, and whatever else needed to be done for teachers. While these had not been held during this current school year, when they did occur they provided a way for parents who are not available during the day to contribute to their children's classrooms, and also provided a social function among parents, and between parents and teachers. In both schools, some measure of regret was expressed that they had not been able to be organized during the current school year.

Parents Working in Classrooms as Part of the Instructional Program

Findings

Table 7 (page 139) details the roles parents in these schools play in the instructional program in the classroom.

Discussion

As with assistance with clerical types of tasks, there is a wide variety of activities in which parents in these schools assist students directly within the instructional program. While the number of activities is extensive, it is not possible from this set of data, to determine how frequently any particular activity occurs in the school. Nevertheless, parent involvement in the instructional program is unquestionably an important facet of these schools. It is noteworthy as well that the greatest number of responses identified reading as the most common area in which parents worked with students, supporting the research of Joyce Epstein (1987) and others that the vast majority of efforts to involve parents with the school's academic program is in this subject area.
TABLE 7
PARENT VOLUNTEER ASSISTANCE AS PART OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM IN THE CLASSROOM: AS REPORTED BY PRINCIPALS AND PARENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASKS PERFORMED</th>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading to children/listening to children read</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drilling multiplication facts or word lists</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervising and assisting students in the computer laboratory/Providing instructions in the use of the computer</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with children in the writing process (scribing, editing, printing, binding)</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervising/directing students in a classroom centre</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing art activities</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing enrichment activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering general assistance to students in the classroom</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with ESL students</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with special education students in the learning assistance centre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor School: directing study groups such as beach and forest studies</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting with conducting a choir/teaching songs to classes</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching “Odyssey of the Mind” teams</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching sports teams</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing noon hour programs</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement, through the parents’ group, in school-wide projects (e.g., salmonid programs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P—as reported by the principal        I—as reported by a parent
While none of these tasks is particularly unique when compared to suggestions found in the research, two areas are especially notable. Assistance with outdoor school programs and the coaching of athletic teams are both areas in which fathers are involved. Those male parents who are able to exercise some flexibility with their jobs and their time, have been able to accompany students on residential school programs, and to coach teams that could otherwise not be formed were it not for the assistance of these fathers.

Similarly, the one school in which a parent is involved with the school choir is somewhat unique. It is not uncommon for parents to act as accompanists for school choirs, but in this particular instance, it is the teacher who plays the piano and plans the program, while the parent conducts: a good example of making the most effective use of the available skills. This parent too, has gone to some lengths to increase her musical skill, through attending workshops and conferences on her own time and at her own expense in order to enhance her contributions.

In two of the schools particularly, parent assistance with the writing process is an important aspect of the school’s program and a significant component of parent volunteerism. School B runs what they call the “Publishing House”. Operated entirely by parents with equipment bought by the parents’ group, the “Publishing House” allows children to have their writing printed, bound, and placed in the library for other students to read. Parents fill the roles of scribe for the younger students, editor, printer, and binder, making use of a laser printer and a plastic binding machine bought by the parents’ group for this purpose. The enthusiasm of students in having their work “published” and actually checked out of the library by other students is high, and serves to make writing an interesting and dynamic activity. That the “Publishing House” could not operate without the considerable assistance of parents is probably self-evident.
Once a month, School C runs an interesting Activity Day program which involves a large number of parents. For the Activity Day program every student is assigned to a group which includes students from all the grades from kindergarten to grade 7. With a different theme each month (the Olympic Games or kites for example) activities are developed to be pursued in groups of ten to twelve students. Some of these groups work directly with a teacher, others work with a parent volunteer under the direction of a teacher. Both the principal and the parents reported positive outcomes from this program. Many parents are involved (so many are reported to have offered their services that a roster system had to be instituted), the students are developing a strong sense of identification and community in their school, older children take on a revitalized concern and responsibility for younger children, and both teachers and students get an opportunity to work with people they don’t normally have dealings with. All in all, it is reported to be a very positive endeavour.

For many of these volunteer responsibilities, parents make a regular commitment of time to work with children, though it is interesting to note that mention was made by several principals and parents of the number of parents who would drop in on a casual, or intermittent basis. That these schools and teachers would still make use of these volunteer efforts, speaks highly for the attitude these schools hold towards the use of volunteers, and the comfort with which these parents feel they can approach and participate in the school.

As mentioned earlier, School E continues to feel the effects of labour strife on parent involvement in the school. The principal of School E also suggested two other reasons why he felt that there was only a limited amount of parent involvement in the instructional program in his school.

...I think one of the reasons is, that a lot of our parents work and that’s not the kind of involvement they can do on a consistent basis. And the other thing is I think that because of the type of program we’re running, the fact
that the teachers are doing a lot of the new thinking and learning strategies in the classroom, and there’s a high degree of team teaching, and the resource team being in the classroom—fairly complex collaboration amongst staff members—it’s not quite as easy for parents to get involved in the actual classroom activities.

Finally, as will be noted later in this paper, the largest number of parents working in these types of instructional activities will be found in the primary grades.

Parents Working in Other Areas of the School

Beyond the classroom, parents also perform a number of important functions in these schools.

Findings

The findings regarding the participation of parents as volunteers in other areas of the school are presented in Table 8 (page 143).

Discussion

Apart from areas of the school already mentioned—English As A Second Language (ESL) centres, learning assistance centres, and computer laboratories mentioned under instructional activity—parents serve in a variety of other capacities somewhat farther removed from the students.

All five schools appear to be dependent to varying degrees on parental assistance to operate library services. Such clerical tasks as checking out books, shelving returns, and seeking out over-due resources are tasks that can ably be handled by parent volunteers thus freeing the teacher-librarian to pursue instructional endeavours. In addition, when parent volunteers and the teacher-librarian are in the library at the same time, the number of people from whom students can seek help is increased, and service to students is thereby enhanced.
### TABLE 8

**PARENT VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY ELSEWHERE THAN IN CLASSROOMS: AS REPORTED BY PRINCIPALS AND PARENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREAS SERVED</th>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting in the library (checking out books; shelving books)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running noon hour programs</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving hot lunches (hot dogs, hamburgers, soup, sports day refreshments)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating a daily snack counter and hot lunch program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing and serving pancake breakfasts/“Breakfast with Santa”</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International dinners/Potluck suppers</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easter Egg Hunts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pocketbook sales/Book Fairs</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block Parent Programs</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call Back Programs</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*X* Identified by the principal and/or one or more parents as functioning in the school.

All five schools provide some form of occasional hot lunch program. Hot dogs and hamburgers are served every two weeks in four schools, while the fifth provides a daily snack counter service and serves soup which for a number of students is provided free of charge. Each of these programs is operated solely by parent volunteers and provides students with a variation in their daily lunch menu.
As well, four of the schools operate personal safety programs. Manned by volunteers, the Call Back program mentioned as functioning in three schools ensures that parents are informed if their children do not arrive safely at school. Similarly, two of the schools identified Block Parent programs as volunteer functions, providing children with safe havens on their way to and from school in cases of emergency.

It is clear that in these five particular schools, parents play a large and vital role as volunteers. Many provide valuable clerical assistance to teachers; still others work directly with students in their instructional programs; while others provide services peripheral to the classroom. In all cases, this help is highly regarded and sincerely appreciated by the teachers, and it is obvious that the principal of each of these schools not only supports such volunteer assistance, but seeks to create an atmosphere in which parents feel comfortable and feel rewarded for contributing to the education of their children.

3.3 TO WHAT EXTENT ARE SPECIAL SKILLS, TALENTS, OR KNOWLEDGE OF PARENTS EMPLOYED IN CLASSROOMS?

Findings

Principals and parents from all five schools referred to a large number of examples of parents being brought into the school to share their skills, talents, and knowledge. A number of cases were cited of parents being invited into classrooms to teach various arts and crafts activities, as well as to demonstrate such talents as martial arts, flower arranging, dancing, and the teaching of music accompanied by the guitar. Another example of a parent sharing her skill and knowledge, was a parent who was an author in her own right. This mother was able to describe for the students the process through which an author writes and publishes a book. Another parent with a substantial background knowledge of pioneer life, brought a variety of pioneer artifacts to the school
and using these implements, graphically illustrated life during this period of history. Yet another parent was able to share her collection of Inuit soapstone carvings.

A number of examples of parents talking about their occupations were also presented. In one case, a lawyer spoke to a class, and in another, a father who drove an ambulance came to the school with his ambulance and told the children about his job. School B was able to capitalize upon the presence of the new construction occurring in the school, and invited both the architect and a number of the construction workers to tell about their jobs as related to the addition that was being built.

In two of the schools, special mention was made of the multi-cultural aspects of their communities, and particular efforts were made to have representatives from the various ethnic groups come to the school and share something of their cultural background. In one case, this took the form of a “Multi-Cultural Fair” at which representatives of fifteen different cultures established stations at which they demonstrated some aspect of their national traditions. Included were such elements as dances, foods, crafts, dress and pictures. In the second school representatives of the different national groups were invited into the school, sometimes to individual classes, at other times to a whole school assembly to share some facet of their heritage. Such activities provided a vehicle for establishing the validity of the nationalities represented in the school and served to help establish tolerance of cultural differences.

School E goes one step further however. Both the principal and all three parents who were interviewed referred to the fact that the school frequently included the broader community in seeking out experience, knowledge and special skills. Accordingly, members of the local business community are invited into the school to speak to students about their businesses and industries, and groups of children are often invited to tour neighbourhood work sites. Members of various community-based organizations also
come into the school to speak to classes, and the school’s salmonid project mentioned
earlier, brought members of the local fish and game association and the federal
Department of Fisheries into the school to expand the students’ knowledge.

Discussion

It is evident that all five of these schools share an appreciation of the resources
that their parents—and their communities—offer in expanding the horizons of their
students. This is particularly true of three of the schools, where it appeared to be a school-
wide focus to include the community as an adjunct to the school’s program. School B
which accessed the presence of construction on the site, the two schools in which the
multi-cultural nature of the school was highlighted and celebrated, and School E which
included the broader community in the school’s programming, each demonstrate a
recognition that learning can come from many sources other than teachers and texts.

In the other schools, the utilization of parents as resources appears to occur more
on an ad hoc basis at the classroom level, and while certainly supported by the principal,
this has not become a focus of the school at large. Thus certain students are able to
benefit from the expertise of parents and community members, while others appear to
have teachers who as yet have not tapped the support and talent that is available to them
through their parents.

In summary it appears that, while parents are involved in a variety of roles in each
of these schools, the number of parents who are invited to contribute their skills and
talents or to share their interests and knowledge is somewhat limited and the number of
occasions rather sporadic. It should be expected that there will be a considerable range of
talents among the parent body of a school. The school therefore needs to develop
effective strategies for identifying and utilizing that resource for the benefit of its
students.
3.4 HOW ARE VOLUNTEER PARENTS IDENTIFIED?

Findings

All five of the principals indicated that some form of formalize process for identifying potential parent volunteers was utilized in their schools. Three of the schools distributed a request form at the beginning of the year, seeking volunteers. In one school this form listed the areas for which volunteers were required and parents were asked to check off those areas in which they were interested. In the other two schools, the request was phrased in the form of a general question asking if there was an area in which the parent would like to work. In the two schools which are designated community schools, the community school coordinator is often the liaison between teachers and parents. In one school, he is the individual who sends out the request form; in the other community school teachers will often approach the coordinator with a need for assistance, and it is the coordinator who will then set about locating the volunteers. In yet another of the schools, the position of "volunteer coordinator" is an elected position on the parents' group executive. This person is responsible for locating and placing volunteers throughout the school. Teachers let this parent know their needs and the volunteer coordinator will match parents with the jobs, or will provide the teacher with a list of names of parents who indicated on the survey that they would be available, and the teacher would make the contact.

None of the schools that employed a circulated request form as a device for soliciting parent volunteers found it particularly useful, however. In fact, it was reported that few parents actually responded to requests in this form. Such a formal process would appear to be most useful when seeking assistance for such tasks as preparing hot dogs, fund raising, etc., rather than for identifying classroom volunteers.

More often than not, however, the most effective avenue for locating volunteers was direct, personal contact between teachers and parents. Indeed, all five schools
reported that the majority of volunteers working in classrooms were identified through personal conversations between teachers and parents and that these were more often incidental and unplanned than organized attempts to locate volunteers. Parents might offer assistance to their own children’s teacher; or would see what was being studied and suggested that they had materials, knowledge, or skills that might be useful in the class. Similarly, a teacher might approach a particular parent that he or she feels would work well with them in a given situation and initiate the request; or teachers might circulate requests through their own classroom newsletters. All of the parents interviewed who worked in classrooms stated that they had approached their child’s teacher and offered to help, and had not just responded through a questionnaire.

Principal C issued a caution however, when widely circulating a request for volunteers. In one case where the school was overwhelmed with offers of assistance, the teachers were faced with the difficult task of choosing some parents and not others. Faced with this dilemma, he realized that:

...we couldn’t afford to have parents offer to help and not use them.... I felt that it was working against us to have parents volunteering and then we couldn’t use them, because I felt they might not volunteer again.

That they were successful in dealing with this situation is indicated by the continued high level of volunteer support in the school.

Personal contacts were also most often identified as the means for locating parents who had special skills, talents, or knowledge that could contribute to the curriculum being studied. While one school’s parents’ group circulated its members in order to create a file of skills and interests and another school made the request through the September petition for volunteers, it was most frequently a personal contact between a teacher and a parent (or a principal and a parent), or a child suggesting that his mother of father had some particular skill, knowledge or resource, that resulted in parents coming into the classroom to share their expertise with the students.
One issue that needs to be dealt with when bringing volunteer parents into the classroom to work with students is the issue of confidentiality. None of the principals felt that this had ever presented a problem in their schools, though most stated that they made it a point to broach the issue with parents prior to their working with the students, rather than wait for a problem to develop. Thus as part of an orientation for parents working with students, the issue of access to confidential information about children is dealt with in an open, honest, matter-of-fact way, and it is made clear at the outset what the expectations are in this regard.

Discussion

While formalized questionnaires are a common vehicle employed by schools to identify parent volunteers, it is the personal contact that is most frequently, and most effectively, the avenue through which parents become involved in the school as volunteers. For this contact to function, there needs to be a good rapport established between the parents and the staff of the school, if the identification and solicitation of parent volunteers is to be facilitated. The principal of School B offered his approach as one way of initiating that relationship.

One thing I do...each new family that registers here, I meet them, I greet them, I take them on the tour of the school, you know, I try to make that personal contact. It doesn't matter what I am doing, when they first arrive.... I take the children around and so on and so forth. And I think that personal contact when they first arrive is really, really important.

This is a good starting point. It will also however, be incumbent upon the teacher to establish a similar rapport on the classroom level and to demonstrate a desire to have parents become an integral part of the classroom program. Principals therefore, as well as working to establish a relationship between the school and parents, must work with teachers to encourage the use of parents in a variety of capacities in the classroom, and to help them implement programs that include parent participation. Only in this way will
schools be able to achieve Fullan's assertion that parents working directly with students in the classroom contribute significantly to student development and achievement (1982).

3.5 IS THE USE OF PARENT VOLUNTEERS MORE PREVALENT AT CERTAIN GRADE LEVELS THAN AT OTHERS?

Findings

While no statistical data are available from the interviews, all principals responded to this question by offering opinions regarding the prevalence of parent volunteer use at various grade levels. All principals agreed that there was more involvement of parent volunteers in the school among parents of primary children. They offered a number of reasons why they thought this to be true. For many parents, there is a level of anxiety when their children first enter the school system, and volunteering in the school is one way of monitoring how their child is functioning and being treated while at the school. Another explanation for the contrast may be the differences to be found between the primary and the intermediate programs. Primary programs which tend to be more open and flexible may offer more opportunities for parents to participate. Intermediate programs on the other hand, tend to be more subject-oriented and fewer parents may feel comfortable in their ability to contribute at that academic level. One of the principals also suggested that younger teachers were more likely to include parents in their programs, even at the primary level, as he felt that they tended to display greater confidence in what they are doing in the classroom than more traditional teachers who may be labouring under a cloak of guilt that they are not keeping up with changing approaches.

It was also suggested that there may also be a maturity element that reduces the desirability of parents being involved in the classroom at the intermediate level. As students get older, they seek greater independence from their parents, and school becomes part of their own individual worlds. They are therefore less enthusiastic in having their
parents present while they interact with their peers. Or as one principal expressed it, "...it's not cool to have Mom in the classroom with you." Similarly, parents sense a need for greater independence on the part of their children and thus may be more inclined to leave them on their own in school, knowing that their children are becoming better able to cope with their own situations. The involvement of intermediate parents also appears to occur in different types of situations than that of primary parents. Thus, while the degree of participation may be less, it will also occur in different forms. Intermediate parents will therefore, be involved to a greater degree in such roles as driving for field trips, attending sporting events, helping with fund raising activities, and coming to the school when all parents are invited to attend, not just when one or two are helping.

There appears to be a developmental factor among parents as well. As their children grow older and enter the intermediate grades, especially when the last child has entered the school, more and more mothers think of returning to the work force. As a result, their interests and priorities change, and there is a tendency to withdraw from the heavier involvement they had as parents of primary students.

While the questions was not posed directly to parents, several of them volunteered information that tended to confirm the opinions of principals: that parent involvement is more prevalent among parents of primary children than intermediate students. The reasons advanced by parents also confirmed the impression of principals that students at the intermediate level are seeking a greater degree of independence and having one's own parents in the room, particularly on a regular basis, can prove to be a source of embarrassment for students at this level.
**Discussion**

Considering the emotional and social development of children as well as the changing interests and priorities of parents as their children mature, it should not be surprising that more parents are involved in their children's classrooms at the primary rather than the intermediate level. That parents should find other avenues to be a part of their children's education as they grow older is also not surprising. Parents continue to want to be a part of their children's development, and as certain involvement avenues cease to be viable, alternatives need to be found. Thus parents will increase their participation on an ad hoc basis as their children reach the intermediate grades, will work in different areas of the school, and will seek opportunities to come into their children's classrooms at times when all parents are invited such as at the culmination of a unit of study, or for a special celebration.

Intermediate students do, however, continue to need parental approval of their efforts, and need to know that their parents support what they are doing. They also continue to need to know that their parents are interested in what they are doing and value the education they are receiving. It should be evident that other avenues need to be found to satisfy these needs at the intermediate level. Intermediate teachers need to re-evaluate the involvement of parents in their programs, and while not simply attempting to duplicate what occurs at the primary level, find strategies to include parents in their programs, strategies that satisfy both student and parent needs and desires. Unfortunately this does not appear to be happening in the majority of schools at this time.

3.6 **ON WHAT OCCASIONS ARE PARENTS INVITED INTO THESE SCHOOLS TO BE MEMBERS OF AN AUDIENCE OR AS SPECTATORS?**

**Findings**

For those parents unable to participate in the school's program during the day, attendance at such events as open houses and concerts, and invitations to attend
classroom functions provide an avenue to show support for the school, its program, and for their children's efforts. The events to which parents are invited in the five schools included in the study are listed in Table 9 (page 155).

Discussion

Each of these schools includes within its repertoire of special events, many that may be considered traditional school functions. The Christmas event, be it a Christmas concert in the conventional sense of the word or a multi-cultural “Winter Celebration” as it is described in one school, most schools mount some kind of event at the end of the first term to which parents are invited, and these five schools are no exception. They also have their choir and orchestra performances, their sports days, and their open houses (which also may occur in various forms). Four out of the five schools also mentioned meetings at which the new primary program was presented and explained as a current and important opportunity for parental involvement in education.

What sets these schools apart from others however is the inclusion as the most frequently mentioned function, the regular school assembly. These may be once a week or bi-weekly, but in all five schools, parents are invited to attend, and do so in varying numbers. While occasionally a special announcement of an assembly will appear in the school’s newsletter, more often than not, it is understood that parents are welcomed at any of the regular school assemblies. That this is a departure from the accepted norm is indicated in the comment of one parent from School C whose child had originally attended another school. In School C the invitation to parents to attend the regular assemblies has also been in place for only the four years that the current principal has served in the school.

I remember in the beginning I didn’t really feel comfortable coming to the assemblies, like the first year, because I mean, [the principal] had just started, but now, I mean, you can walk in...you can walk down the hall and feel pretty comfortable you know, the teachers say, “How are you?” making you feel very welcome.
This same sentiment was echoed directly by at least one other parent and alluded to by several others. These schools make it quite clear that they welcome parents to their activities.

It is also evident that at least three of these schools put substantial effort into inviting parents to visit classrooms, especially as part of the culmination of a unit or theme. In one school, each grade level holds a "Theme Night" or open house at some time during the year, so every parent receives at least one invitation to attend his or her child's classroom during the year. Parental comments indicated that such opportunities are highly appreciated by parents and will go a long way to ensuring that parents feel that they are included in some measure in the education of their children. The opportunities for students to display their efforts and for parents to show their appreciation for those efforts, are also the kinds of endeavours that help overcome the problem with the involvement of intermediate parents identified in question 3.5 above (page 150).

The principals of two schools also made specific reference to their encouragement of the attendance of pre-school children as such events as visiting performers and the annual sports day. These principals recognized opportunities to extend the hand of welcome to these children and their parents even before they formally enter the school, and the children have a chance to begin becoming familiar with the school and its teachers.

In addition, one school makes an effort to reach those parents who are unable to attend functions even in the evenings. In School E, the Christmas production was videotaped and parents are welcome to borrow the tape, copy it if they wish, and enjoy it with their children in their own homes. Such action indicates the importance that this school places upon maintaining the involvement of parents, whatever steps need to be taken to accomplish that.
### TABLE 9

**EVENTS TO WHICH PARENTS ARE INVITED TO THE SCHOOL:**
**AS REPORTED BY PRINCIPALS AND PARENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENTS</th>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular assemblies or school meetings</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special assemblies</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas-time events</td>
<td>PIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student performances (choirs, bands, plays, talent shows, spring productions)</td>
<td>PIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting performers</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open houses</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Meet the Teacher” nights</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum nights</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer nights; “Kite Night”; special events nights</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Fairs; Evening art displays; Writing Fairs</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School and community social functions (pot-luck suppers; multi-cultural dinners; “Breakfast with Santa”; community dances; school picnics)</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings regarding the new primary program</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom visitations (unit culminations, sharing, etc.)</td>
<td>PI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports day; athletic events; games</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten orientation</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallowe’en fireworks displays; Easter Egg Hunts; community picnics (sponsored by community school councils)</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P as reported by the principal
I as reported by a parent
It is interesting to note the lack of popularity of the September “Meet the Teacher” night and the curriculum night that also often occurs at the beginning of the year. Perhaps what this information is demonstrating is that parents have a much greater concern and interest with the specific activities of their own individual children, rather than with the generalities that are usually a major part of such meetings.

Finally, it is also notable that community social functions are identified as part of the school’s activities. In three of the five schools, there is an annual dinner for parents and students, four of the schools hold a “Breakfast with Santa”, and one school had an annual community Spring Dance as well as a school picnic. While it may be argued that such functions have little to do with education, they have everything to do with establishing and maintaining a comfortable and durable rapport between the school and its parents—and that has a great deal to do with education.

3.7 IN WHAT WAYS ARE PARENTS INVOLVED IN FUND RAISING FOR THE SCHOOL?

Findings

Table 10 (page 157) contains a list of the fund raising activities organized at each of the five schools, as reported by both principals and parents.

In all five schools included in the study, parents are very active in raising money for the school. In the majority of cases, these activities are organized under the aegis of the parents’ committee and parents participate on any of a number of levels: from organizing the affair; to making goods (crafts, baking, etc.); to simply being a purchaser. In some cases, the activities are organized to include the students in raising money as for example, “Spell-a-thons” and “Math-a-thons”. In the majority of cases however, it is the parents’ groups that assumes total responsibility for the activities and retains control of the monies raised. Each school also reported that it tended to undertake a major fund raising activity every two years, and in three cases this appeared to be some form of “Fun
Fair”. Such ventures require the efforts of a great many people and it is therefore unrealistic to expect a group of parent volunteers to take on such an endeavour annually, or for the community to be able to support such an effort too frequently.

In each school, mention was made of major projects undertaken by the parents’ group. In each of the five schools, money has been, or is being raised to create an enhance

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**TABLE 10**

**FUND RAISING ACTIVITIES PURSUED IN EACH SCHOOL: AS REPORTED BY PRINCIPALS AND PARENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sales of commercial products (chocolates, gift wrap, pizza, mugs, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot lunches (hot dogs, hamburgers, soup)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math-a-thons or Spell-a-thons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi-annual “Fun Fairs”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Fairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community social events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports day refreshment sales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft Fairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bake sales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raffles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales of gym strip (T-shirts, sweatshirts, shorts)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X Identified by the principal and/or one or more parents; as functioning in the school.
the playground facilities of the school, and one school spoke of having raised $30,000 over the past several years for the playground, a project that was seen to be a benefit for the whole community. Other objectives have included the purchase of computer equipment and software, sports equipment, sound systems, and the provision of funds for field trips, as well as the expenditure of monies for guest performers and speakers for the students.

Two schools referred to applications that had been made for provincial government lottery funds for money to augment what was raised by the school for playground up-grading and equipment. It would appear however, that such funding is available only for ventures that are of benefit to the greater community, rather than for general school-specific requirements.

As schools search for even more sources of funds, some alternative organizations for fund raising have begun to appear. In two of the schools in the study, separate community associations have been or are being formed, not connected directly with the school (at least not on paper), but whose object it is to solicit and generate funds which can then be contributed to the school. This gives these new non-profit societies the opportunity to tap sources of funds, such as commercial casino operations, access to which appears to be in contravention to district board policy.

Not surprisingly, it is the parents' group in each school that generally retains controls the funds it raises, and makes the final decision regarding the disposition of those moneys. These decisions are made however, with considerable input from the principal and staff, and are determined in September when goals are set for the year. In one school it is definitely a collaborative decision-making process with suggestions arising from the staff, the principal, and the parents' group; and consensus reached among the constituents as to what the fund raising objectives will be for the year. In three other schools, the
principal presents a "Wish List" on behalf of the school, and the parents' group then
decides what it will set as its goals. The fourth school is much more thorough in seeking
recommendations. In School E, parents are surveyed through a questionnaire as to what
they would be willing to support in the way of fund raising objectives, and these
suggestions, together with ideas that arise from the staff and principal are considered.

During the present school year, however, students had a significant role to play in
setting the goals. A group of senior students were concerned with the state of their
school's playground and play equipment. They approached the principal requesting
advice as to how they could have their ideas put forward for consideration. On the advice
of the principal, the students formed a committee, thoroughly researched the project,
drew up a detailed proposal, and presented it to the staff and to the community council.
The students' suggestion has now become the school's fund raising goal for the next
couple of years and the parents' group is now in the process of raising the necessary
funds, with considerable support and assistance from the students. And the students
benefit not only by gaining a new playground, but also from learning a valuable lesson in
the processes of democratic decision-making.

Discussion

Fund raising appears to be a fact of life for schools and it is the parents' groups
that generally undertake this as one of their major objectives. Virtually all types of fund
raisers that are organized require large numbers of people to organize and to support, but
without these efforts, schools could not offer many of the additional services and
resources that they presently enjoy.

When asked if he had any personal perspectives on the issue of fund raising in
schools, the principal of School B responded:

I would prefer that parents would not have to raise money for schools...but
there's absolutely no way in this particular school or [another] school, you
could run what I consider is sort of a complete program on the money
that’s available from the school board. You can’t have the extras.

For parents who participate on one or more of the levels of involvement, this participation
yields a level of satisfaction that they are contributing directly to the benefit of their own
child’s education.

In deciding what fund raising activities to pursue parents’ groups have to consider
a number of factors. They need to be alert to the degree of tolerance of the community for
contributing money; they need to be aware of the volunteer resources they have to draw
upon; and they need to be alert to the specific needs of the school. It appears that these
schools have learned that one key ingredient of successful fund raising is to set a specific
objective before undertaking money-making ventures. Similarly, they all recognize that
they require guidance from the staff and principal in setting those objectives.
Nevertheless, most groups appear to retain the final say in the decision-making process,
and one parent alluded to the fact that this is apparently school district policy.

3.8 WHAT ROLE DO THESE PRINCIPALS PLAY IN ENCOURAGING AND
SUPPORTING THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS AS VOLUNTEERS?

Findings

All five principals professed adherence to a philosophy that included the
involvement of parents in education. Each has set as one of his major objectives the
inclusion of parents in the daily life of the school, and has gathered around him, teachers
who also subscribe to a belief that parents have an important role to play in schooling.
The principal of School A stated it as follows:

...I came into the school, with that as one of my objectives—to build a
strong, involved base. Because I firmly believe that children benefit by
having that liaison and communication. And...if one comes into a school
with that objective, with that philosophy, then there are certain things you
start to do to break down barriers and to open doors.
If principals profess parent involvement as one of their objectives, in School E they have moved one step further. The community school council itself has set as one of its own major goals, to increase parent and community involvement. Thus both the school and the parents’ group are working in concert to draw as many parents as possible into the life of the school and the education of the students.

One of the things that each of these principals has done, is to establish an atmosphere in his school that is open, warm, and welcoming. Virtually all the parents interviewed spoke very highly of the friendly environment that existed in their schools; an environment in which they felt welcome and appreciated and in which they felt they had a important and valuable contribution to make. Each of these school expounds an “open door policy”, but in these schools that is not just a cliche, it is a reality. It is readily apparent that they really are open and that parents feel a strong sense of freedom to come and be a part of the organization.

These principals have also attracted teachers who share their philosophy and each openly admits that those teachers who do not “fit in” eventually move on to other schools. The principal of School B:

I think first of all, that type of teacher, because of the nature of the program and because of the reputation of [this school]...but what happens here is that teachers tend to gravitate to certain kinds of schools and the kind of teacher that tends to come here is the teacher that is very open in terms of program and very open in terms of parents in the classroom and so on and so forth. I think it would be difficult for a teacher on this staff not to be open. There’s so much cooperation taking place with staff alone and so much sharing back and forth, you know.

He went on to discuss his interviewing of prospective staff members:

The first thing I talked about is being a team player in all of my interviews. And I tell them, if you’re not a team player this is not a good school to come to.

All principals also spoke of encouraging and supporting teachers in their involvement of parents.
For the principal of School C, it is often a matter of relating his own experiences with parents involved in the classroom, and encouraging staff members to follow his example.

Well, I guess I've used parents myself in the classroom with doing things and spoken about what a good experience that has been, and when a teacher's feeling that, "This is too much, I can't handle this," or "I've got this kid who needs this special attention but is not qualified for paid help,"... So I've suggested, "Why don't we take a look at how this might work,"... I guess over the years you develop a sense of which parents will be good at this type of job, so we try to match the parent up with the teacher and the child, like how will they work together. And we've made those suggestions. And it's started off of course very slowly because there is that hesitation of having a stranger in your classroom with you.... I guess success builds on success is what happens. If it works for one teacher....

The principal of School D suggested as well that modelling by other teachers was also a powerful means of bringing a teacher to the point of acceptance of parent volunteers.

...it's like in planning any kind of new program. Somebody sees it working in someone else's room, "Gee maybe I'll just try it on this one thing." And then it works and then it'll grow.

Several other principals discussed their handling of the teacher who was reluctant to get very involved with parents. All agreed that it was not a practice that could be forced upon a teacher and that all the encouragement and coaching had to be subtle, patient, and understanding. All agreed as well that there had to be a realization that not all teachers could accept parents working in certain roles in the school, especially in the role of classroom assistants. And it was conceded that this would be still be acceptable.

Finally, the principal of School C encourages parents to volunteer by making sure that any parent who does offer to provide assistance is in fact used in some capacity in the school. Similarly, if a parent offers to share a talent, skill, or knowledge, he will make sure their contribution is worked into the school program at some time and in some manner. The message is very clear: parents are welcomed and appreciated. And other parents are thus stimulated to volunteer.
Principal B reaches out more directly:

We sent personal invitations to the first parent meeting to all new parents in the school and all the new kindergarten parents asking them to come to that first parent meeting. And again we want to get them into the school; we want them to feel the climate and see what's going on in the school.

Thus, he opens the door for these new parents to become part of the school.

Discussion

That these principals all firmly believe in the role of parents in their schools in a variety of capacities, is very obvious. All are enthusiastic about the parents who contribute their volunteer efforts to the school, and all work explicitly at encouraging both parents and teachers to build a partnership for the benefit of the students. All the parents who were interviewed, remarked on the fact that these principals have also established an atmosphere in the school which is conducive to making parents feel welcome and appreciated.

Beyond their efforts to make their schools friendly places to be, principals are limited in their abilities to compel teachers to involve parents in their programs, particularly in the classroom. Leading by example, spotlighting role-models among the teaching force, encouraging and supporting the efforts of those who do involve parents, are among the means at the principal's disposal to create a strong parent volunteer program in the school. This is not to suggest that these measure suffer from limited effectiveness. It is instead to point out that there are limits to what a principal is able to do single-handedly.

These principals however, tend to attract to their schools, teachers who share their philosophy and their vision of parents as important participants in education. As parents do start to be involved, the circle widens to embrace more parents, and more teachers. And no one benefits more than the child in the classroom.
TYPE 4: PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING ACTIVITIES AT HOME

Much of the more recent research into parent involvement has highlighted the impact that parent involvement has upon student achievement and attitudes. Researchers, the likes of Epstein (1986), Truby (1987), and Davies (1987), all identified a variety of existing programs for involving parents in the instructional program at home. These programs can take a variety of forms. In some cases, it is simply a matter of parents reading to their children on a regular basis. In others, the parent may be requested to sign a piece of work, a test, or a homework book. In yet other cases, parents have been requested to participate in assignments that are specifically designed to be completed with the parent and child working in cooperation with each other—a joint project. In all instances however, the parents received direction from the school regarding what their role was to be and how they were to proceed.

It is clear nevertheless, that parents do in fact work with their children regardless of whether or not they have received direction from the school. Several sources also point to the fact that the majority of parents not only already involve themselves with their children’s school work, but that they would be willing to do more work with their children if the school would offer direction and guidance (Epstein, 1987) and that they would be willing to spend time at the school receiving instruction in how best to provide assistance to their children (Moles, 1987).

Joyce Epstein identified twelve techniques that are most frequently employed by teachers to involve parents with their children’s learning.

1. reading aloud or listening to the child read
2. signing the child’s homework
3. giving spelling or math drills
4. giving help on worksheets or workbooks
5. talking with the child about the events of the school day.
6. using things at home to teach the child
7. playing learning games
8. visiting the classroom to observe teaching techniques
9. taking the child to the library
10. borrowing books from the teacher to give extra help
11. entering contracts to supervise homework or projects
12. watching and discussing TV shows for learning

( Epstein, 1986, pp. 282-283)

She also points out however, that the majority of activities involving parents are in the area of reading, and recommends that teachers broaden their views to include tasks from other subject areas as well. In addition, she suggests that schools should consider implementing projects that require the parent to work in conjunction with the student on a task, and that they consider assigning these projects on the weekend when parents generally have more time available to work with their children (Brandt, 1989).

Schools can also help facilitate parent involvement with their children’s school work by providing regular information about the topics being studied in the classroom, instituting regularly scheduled homework tasks for which the student is required to discuss school work with the parent, as well as giving general advice in regards to helping the student with school work.

4.1 TO WHAT EXTENT DO PARENTS WORK WITH THEIR CHILDREN ON SCHOOL WORK AT HOME?

Findings

All parents were asked if they worked with their children at home on school work, and the responses varied considerably. One parent reported that she and her husband spent as much as an hour a day working with their children when she included all types of educational activities that the family pursued. Most parents indicated however, that they spent between one-quarter and one-half hour a day working with their children on school work. In total, twelve parents stated that they did in fact spend time with their children on school work. Two parents asserted that they worked with their children only if their children asked for help. “I’m there to help them if they need help, but I encourage them to
do it on their own,” was the way one parent expressed it, while another suggested, “It’s not my homework.”

Parents reported a variety of things they did with their children. These are listed in Table 11 (page 167).

This list confirms research findings which indicate that the majority of parental help with school work at home is in the fields of reading and learning assistance, and that much of what parents do is conducted on an ad hoc, self-initiated basis.

Two exceptions to this generalization however, are particularly interesting to note. The last named example, “taking their children on educational excursions” was considered by one parent as a very important part of her role as a parent, and her family made it a point to take the children on frequent excursions of an educational nature. Trips to the public aquarium, to Science World, and explorations along the seashore to examine sea life were seen by this parent as important contributions to the general education of this family’s children. The second last item is also interesting because it contains an indication of a teacher making a specific effort to involve the parents in what the child is doing at school. In this case, the parent described how her daughter would often arrive home with a booklet she had completed or some other piece of work that she had finished, and attached would be a note from the teacher suggesting how the parent might discuss the work with the child. Another approach of interest, was a situation where the parent had hired a tutor for the student. This parent felt that an appropriate level of support was not necessarily the provision of direct parental assistance, but rather it was the parent supplying the required assistance in whatever form was available and suitable considering all circumstances. This could be considered as a delegation of parenting responsibility.
TABLE 11

TYPES OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY PARENTS WITH SCHOOL WORK AT HOME

(listed in the order of frequency of identification)

- helping when the child encounters difficulties with assigned homework
- reading to their children
- unspecified help with reading in general
- listening to their children read
- flash card drills
- general supervision of homework
- helping with project work
- helping procure resources (for example, visiting the public library)
- unspecified help with mathematics
- providing assistance directed by specialists such as a learning assistance teachers or speech pathologists
- helping the child study for a test
- helping the child to learn multiplication facts
- proofreading written work
- reviewing spelling lists
- providing assistance in organizing time and resources
- discussing topics being studied or completed work that has been brought home
- taking their children on educational excursions (for example, the Aquarium, Science World)

Among the five schools, a number of formal efforts have been mounted to include individual parents with their children's work at home. Some of these efforts have been directed to individual parents with specific needs. One parent mentioned guidance that had been provided to her by the speech pathologist to assist her in working with her child's speech development. Similarly, a parent with a learning disabled child lauded the efforts of both the learning assistance and classroom teachers not only for the efforts they put forth in school to help her son, but also for the direction she has been given as a
parent to help her child to learn. Such efforts however, are extended on an individual basis however, rather than being directed to all parents.

Of a more general nature, two schools were reported to have school-wide reading programs which involved parents in the reading program. In one school, parents are asked to either read to their children in the younger grades, or in the case of older children, listen to them read. Incentives such as bookmarks and pins were offered to encourage this daily reading at home. A variation in parent involvement programs in reading was reported in another school. In this case, the parents are expected to read their own books alongside the child for a specified period of time each evening, and to verify that they had in fact both read by signing a sheet. Similar incentives are in place in this program as in the previously identified program. It appears that both these programs are directed by the librarian rather than the classroom teachers however.

One other technique for involving parents, was reported in one school. All intermediate students have been issued with school diaries for recording homework assignments. In this particular school, all parents are required to sign the student’s daily planner each day to indicate that the work has been completed. Implicit in providing this signature however, is an understanding that the parent will in fact have looked at the student’s work and ensured that it is complete. In this way, the situation in created for parents to remain knowledgeable regarding the child’s studies at school, the kind of progress he or she is making, as well as to show an active interest in the child’s school work.

A number of factors appear to mitigate against parents being involved with their children and their school work however. One parent reported that her ability to provide assistance to her child was largely dependent upon the age of the child. She found it much easier to work with her primary-aged child partly because of the level of work they were
doing, but more especially because the older child was seeking greater independence and did not wish his mother to help him. In a related type of situation, the parent had decided that the child had to do his work on his own in order for him to learn independence and self-responsibility. Another parent reported that the teacher had made it quite clear that she did not want parents helping their children with homework. None of the parents interviewed however, offered the excuse that they did not personally have the time to work with their children.

Discussion

The data collected would appear to support the research that parents not only wish to be involved with their children’s school work, but that they will find a role to play in that work, whether or not they are directed by the teacher. It appears however, that few of the teachers, even in these schools which are noted for their high level of involvement, actively solicit the assistance of parents in school work that is done at home. Instead, the only true examples of such involvement that were identified involved the teacher-librarian rather than classroom teachers, but in each of these cases it did not appear that the idea had been presented to parents as a means of increasing their children’s levels of achievement. That is not to suggest that the “Reading Club” activities described are not valid. Quite the contrary. Reading is an important facet of education. But the concept that parents can improve their children’s reading achievement through working with them, is a point that appears to have been missed even in these programs.

Parents signing the homework book or daily planner was another way in which parents were asked to participate, but it is questionable whether the aim of this was to ensure that students did in fact complete their work, or to provide a means for parents to be involved to a significant degree in the work their youngsters were doing.
The list of tasks that these parents undertake would appear to replicate the multitude of task lists that researchers have developed when examining parents working with their children on school work. As Joyce Epstein's research in this area has already indicated, parents generally are involved in reading activities (Epstein, 1987), or the drill and practice elements of the mathematics program, and this fact is replicated in the present list.

Also in line with the research is the indication from this study that direction and guidance regarding specific tasks that parents can do to assist their children are found mainly in learning assistance programs, or programs for children with special needs such as speech development or English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. As will be noted in the following section, regular classroom teachers in these schools do not appear to be working actively to enlist parents in working with their children, and do not regularly provide advice and direction that will enable parents to give their children the assistance that their comments reveal that they want to be able to do.

4.2 WHAT INFORMATION IS PROVIDED TO PARENTS CONCERNING WAYS IN WHICH THEY CAN HELP THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME?

Findings

The information gathered from the interviews, indicates that very few efforts are made in these schools to enlist parents as active partners in the processes of learning. Nine parents referred specifically to the idea that such suggestions would be given only in the case of individual students who were experiencing difficulties in school, and in several instances it was pointed out that this would normally occur when the parent approached the teacher, perhaps following the issuance of a report card or during a parent-teacher interview rather than at the instigation of the teacher. The point was made however, that these parents felt that the majority of teachers in these schools would be more than willing to offer suggestions and provide materials in individual cases such as
these if the parent were to ask for such assistance. A number of parents also referred to children in the learning assistance, ESL, and learning disabilities programs as often needing the additional assistance that parents might be able to provide through working with them at home. These too, are children in greater need of assistance than the norm, and their need for more individual attention probably forces the issue of including the parent as an assistant in the teaching process.

The only forms reported by parents through which teachers provided information to parents in general regarding how they might work with their children, were curriculum outlines that are distributed in September in some classrooms and regular classroom newsletters distributed by some teachers. In these documents, parents receive information regarding the class' curriculum, the expectations of the program and the teacher, as well as occasional suggestions of a general nature regarding ways in which a parent might help. It appears however, that these suggestions have more to do with ensuring the successful completion of homework and drilling arithmetic facts, than with parents being invited to play a truly vital role as participants in their children's education. Classroom newsletters have the advantage of being somewhat more current than annual curriculum outlines but even these, while they provide important information about classroom curriculum and activities, offered suggestions that also appeared to be of only a very general nature, and embraced such things as drilling math facts, reviewing spelling words, and generally ensuring that assignments were complete.

And exception to this situation however appears to be School E. In this school, both the principal and the parents made specific reference to classroom newsletters. These newsletters contained information about the curriculum to be studied over subsequent weeks, and activities that were planned for the class. But these bulletins went a step farther than is frequently the case. Teachers in this school appeared to make it a regular practice to explain strategies that were being used in the classroom, and relayed
suggestions to parents as to how they might extend these strategies at home to enhance the children’s learning in the classroom. School E is also the school in which one teacher was reported as sending students’ work home accompanied with suggestions for parents to use when discussing the work with their child.

In only three of the five schools does it appear that the principal assumes a role in providing parents with advice to help them help their children. One principal mentioned the fact that he frequently sends research articles home as part of his school newsletter about such things as how to improve your child’s work at school, the value of reading to your child, whole language, and the new primary program. Another principal referred to a couple of his newsletters that contained something about the values of reading and things a parent can do to enhanced a child’s language development. And a third principal mentioned including suggestions for homework in the first newsletter of the school year. Two principals mentioned that they really stressed reading in their schools and encouraged parents to read with their children, though it was not specified how this information was conveyed to parents or how detailed the information was in regards to precisely what the parent could or should be doing.

Discussion

In spite of the fact that parents clearly indicate their keen desire to help their children do well in school, none of these five schools appears to really make any kind of a concerted effort to provide parents with specific suggestions regarding how they might work with their children to enhance their learning. Those efforts that are made appear to be sporadic, limited to a few teachers who seem to be working independently of the rest of the school, or are occasional brief articles included in a school newsletter. There does not appear to be any coordinated and consistent effort to enlist the help of parents and provide them with the guidance to become vital partners in the education of their children.
Epstein (1985) identified three major factors that influence teachers to develop parent involvement programs. One of these is the grade level they are teaching: the higher the grade, the less likelihood that teachers will include parents in the education process. The second factor is the level of parent participation already present in the school. The third influence is the preparedness of the teacher to expend the effort to develop programs for parent participation. That all five of these schools satisfy the second factor (the present level of parent participation) is evident from their inclusion in this study. The first factor, the grade level of the teacher has already been acknowledged as a problem that needs to be addressed. The final factor however, the readiness of teachers to develop programs to involve parents, is one that principals need to address. Unquestionably, teachers are very busy people, but as Vernon Storey asserts (1989), we can ill afford to ignore the role of parents in schools if we know that their participation can have a significant impact on student achievement; what he refers to as the “educational imperative.” Teachers and principals must find the time to plan and organize for parent involvement.

4.3 ARE SPECIFIC HOMEWORK TASKS ASSIGNED FOR COMPLETION BY BOTH THE PARENT AND THE CHILD WORKING TOGETHER?

Findings

The idea of setting assignments that require parent participation appeared to come as something of a surprise to all five principals. One principal remarked that it was “...an interesting question. I hadn’t thought of that before.” Nevertheless, upon reflection, a number of examples did surface, which embraced the inclusion of parents on a variety of different levels.

Two principals referred to the reading programs, especially the example cited earlier where the parents are required to read alongside their children, rather than just monitor their reading. Two other principals also alluded to instances of parents being
asked to assist their children if they had difficulties, though such examples would not include the parent learning along with the student.

One principal referred to the achievement-orientation of the parents in the school where parents felt *obliged* to work with their children so as to ensure their success with assigned projects. While this is not a particularly good example of parents learning with their children, it is probably a good demonstration of the earlier-stated idea that parents want to—and will—work with their children, whether or not the teacher directs them to. In this particular instance however, parent involvement is considered to be a “problem” rather than a resource to be tapped and utilized to the benefit of both the child; certainly not a positive approach to the parents’ role in education.

One step beyond this level was to be found in one school in which, as a result of preparing for a science fair, parents were asked to grade their children on their projects with regard to their diligence, their effort, and their degree of independence. While this may be more a way of highlighting for parents the need for students to work on their own, it does require the parent to be cognizant of what the child is doing, and show some interest in his or her achievements.

Nevertheless, two striking examples of parents specifically being asked to participate in a project were presented, one of which involved computers and the other, individually-selected research topics.

In the first example, School A sponsored a week of “Computer Days”. During that period, the principal reported that 275 parents had come to the school to work on the computer alongside their children, and that these parents were learning the use of the computer together with their children as well as using the available computer software. It is of interest to note however, that this principal did not recognize this activity as an example of parents and children learning together. His description of this program arose
within a discussion of the space problems the school was experiencing. Nevertheless, it is an excellent example of the school including parents in the processes of learning with their children.

The second example involved parents working with their youngsters on self-directed projects. In School E, the principal described the humanities projects undertaken by the two senior classes. Students were required to select a project topic that was first of all of interest to them, but that also required them to locate information from sources other than library-based text materials. Accordingly, students selected topics of current interest such as the Meech Lake Accord, environmental protection issues, and physical handicaps. The selection of a topic was governed by their access to information and the original source was most often a relative, friend, neighbour, or business acquaintance of the parent, who was involved in the field and could not only offer first-hand information, but could also help access other resources as well. The structure of the assignment was such that parents were to be part of the topic selection, the planning, and the identification of resources, and as the projects developed it is obvious that parents not only played a vital role in the execution of the work, but also participated actively in the learning that was acquired.

When the question was posed to parents, they too had some difficulty in identifying instances where parents had specifically been asked to participate actively in the students work. Several mentioned that children were welcome to seek advice from their parents but that basically they were expected to complete work on their own. Four parents said they did not know of any instances of this type of assignment. One parent mentioned a science experiment she was required to help her child with, though it would appear that this was a case of requiring an adult to manage the materials, rather than to learn together; and another related how she and her primary-aged daughter had been asked to develop procedures to ensure the child’s safety when travelling around the
community on her own. Another parent referred to supervising the completion of a mathematics booklet over a period of a month.

In School E, one parent was able to talk about the self-directed projects first described by the principal, and expressed the opinion that "...the topics were so interesting a parent would be crazy not to want to be involved!"

One new example arose among the parents, also in School E, though this was a much less formal involvement. While the entire school was deeply involved in its salmonid enhancement project and all students were learning about salmon, related information items of interest were included in the school’s newsletter. Doing so, facilitated discussions between the parent and the child regarding what they were learning at school. This project ultimately became a community-wide activity.

Discussion

In the same way that parents appear seldom to be asked to assist their children with school work at home, there were very few examples of specific efforts made in these schools to involve parents as active learners with their children. Of the two examples cited, work with computers has been identified in the research as one avenue for involving parents in learning alongside their children. Epstein (1985) and Ostlund et al., 1985 cited the computer as providing a vehicle for students and parents to be what Epstein referred to as "co-learners". They also suggested that as more and more students acquired personal computers at home, the computer could be used for more individualized homework assignments and parents would be able to work more closely with their youngsters on computer-guided instructional programs, and problem-solving software. It appears however that our schools have not reached this level of acceptance of computer technology in planning programs. Many teachers are themselves still at the stage of learning how to use the computer themselves, and have not yet reached the stage
of exploring the possibilities for utilizing the computer beyond the drill and practice modes in the classroom.

It is clear that schools need to re-examine their homework practices, particularly the practice of actively *discouraging* parent participation with their children’s schoolwork that was revealed so frequently among the interviewee’s responses. Parents are a resource for learning that is not presently being tapped to any significant extent, and this resource must be considered if schools are to put into practice, what research says about parent involvement and student achievement.

4.4 WHAT IMPEDIMENTS ARE THERE TO PARENTS WORKING WITH THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME?

Findings

Among the principals, five different reasons were advanced as to why parents may not work with their children at home. One principal suggested that parents who are working, just do not have the time or energy at the end of a long working day to spend time with their children. Principal B explained:

...I think it’s really hard for them to find the time, the quality time. It’s so much easier to park your kid in front of the television set and just do something else.

He continued, with a recommendation and a suggestion:

I think we really have to convince parents, a lot of them, that this is essential; it’s really very important. It’s good for them too. It’s good for parents as well in terms of stress reduction and everything else, to sit down with their child and read or something.

Another principal suggested that there are parents for whom their own schooling had not been a positive experience, and as a result they do not ascribe much value to education for their children and accordingly display little desire to get involved in working with their children on school work.
Low economic status was a third reason advanced by one of the principals. He suggested that, when a parent is struggling financially to provide three meals a day, as well as some semblance of adequate shelter and clothing, working with school work is an item that is far down the list of priorities as they deal with the stresses of trying to live within minimal resources.

The possibility that parents would take a different approach from that of the teacher in teaching a concept of idea was presented by a fourth principal as a difficulty encountered when parents worked with their children at home, and this principal suggested that it was best that parents alert the teacher to the difficulties the children are experiencing, rather than trying to teach them themselves.

Finally, one principal suggested that the age of the children had a lot to do with the ability of parents to work with their children. This principal suggested:

As the children get older, I think parents start feeling a bit intimidated because they don’t always understand what it is they can do to help. And I think that we have a responsibility to help them understand what that is.

Parents too proposed five further reasons why parents might not work at home with their children. Four parents suggested that in some families, parents working with their children could lead to strife and conflict between the child and the parent. This would be particularly true if the child was one who was experiencing difficulties in school, or was learning disabled in some respect. Similarly, if the parent’s expectations were too high for the child to meet, there would also be frustration that could lead to conflict, and a possible rupturing of the parent-child relationship.

Three parents suggested that there might be too much of a temptation for the parent to do the work for the child; to provide the answers rather than the guidance that would enable the child to find the answers independently. Three parents also agreed with one of the principals when they suggested that parents might take a different approach
from that of the classroom teacher, and this was seen as posing even greater difficulties for the child as he struggled to understand two differing explanations simultaneously.

Two parents offered that working outside the home is an inhibiting factor for many parents, though one of those parents went on to propose that perhaps it was even more critical for these parents to work with their children at home as they were precluded from participating during the day with their children at school.

Finally one parent offered that many parents did not feel confident or competent in working with today’s subject matter.

...it’s like the metric system in math. All of a sudden the parents cannot be a help to their children in that regard because they lack the knowledge. If you want to see parents feel pretty rotten about themselves that’s the way to do it.... And that’s how a lot of parents feel about computers now. “Oh the kids know more than I do.”

Discussion

The ideas advanced by both principals and parents as reasons for parents not being involved with their children and their school work at home are not uncommon. The suggestion that parents who work outside the home, or parents whose economic status is precarious, are unable and/or unwilling to help, may not be the excuses that educators think them to be. As one parent suggested, for parents who work during the day, it may be even more critical that they be involved with their children’s school work in the evening if they are to remain knowledgeable about what and how the child is doing at school, and are to demonstrate the concern and interest that children need if they are to continue striving for success in their endeavours. Similarly, for parents who are struggling financially, the rewards that can accrue from spending time with their children, reading with them or working on their school assignments, might provide an valuable outlet for the stress, frustration, and potential depression that their status might generate, and yield a more secure family relationship with which to weather the crises.
Epstein (1985), has even gone so far as to suggest that none of these reasons are valid when considering whether or not parents are able or willing to work with their children. Indeed, she cites as the most critical factor, the attitude of the teacher. She found that teachers who involved parents in the classroom also tended to make more demands upon parents at home; and these demands were met by parents, regardless of their socio-economic status, their marital status, or whether or not they worked outside the home. Thus the comment of one parent "...I think that having the encouragement from the teacher might motivate them to try and, you know, fit that in somewhere," may offer the clearest direction for teachers and administrators. Schools must take the initiative to involve parents with their children at home, and provide clear directions as to what it is that the parent can and should do. It is already unmistakably clear that parents are willing to help; schools must provide the direction and guidance to facilitate involvement at this level.

Reference should also be made to question 7.3, beginning on page 221, for a further discussion of barriers to parent involvement in general.

4.5 HOW DO PRINCIPALS ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT TEACHERS IN THEIR EFFORTS TO INVOLVE PARENTS IN WORKING WITH THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME?

Discussion

In view of the fact that very few efforts are being made by any of these five schools in regards either to providing information to parents about helping their children at home with school work, or to developing and implementing programs that include the participation of parents in such a role as a regular part of the school program, no specific information came to the fore during the interviews in regards to the role a principal might play in such endeavors.
The research however, makes it abundantly clear that the involvement of parents with their children in working on school work at home has a profound effect upon the achievement of students, as well as upon their attitudes towards learning and towards their own abilities. If such approaches are not taken even in schools that are noted for their high levels of parent involvement, then this is one area in serious need of investigation by principals.

Initially principals will themselves need to take a pro-active role in providing information to parents on a consistent basis both through their newsletters and in discussions with parents’ groups. It has already been demonstrated that parents are anxious and willing to work with their children. They need to know exactly what it is they should do in order to help their children and thus enhance their learning.

As well, principals will themselves need to become thoroughly versed in the research into this aspect of parent involvement so that the concepts can be presented to, and discussed with, their teachers. Once this knowledge-base has been established, the principal will then need to work closely with teachers in designing strategies and developing programs to actively involve parents at home in the education of their children. Ultimately, the involvement of parents should become a basic element in the planning of curriculum and classroom programs. Teachers, as has previously been noted, have many demands already made of them. They will therefore require considerable encouragement and support as they work to implement this new concept into their regular planning and organization.

**TYPE 5: PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE AND ADVOCACY (Representing other parents)**

In 1989, the British Columbia government enacted a new *School Act* and this legislation contained specific reference to the establishment of parents’ consultative
committees in the schools of the province (School Act, section 8) with authority to "...advise the board and the principal and staff of the school...respecting any matter relating to the school...." The impetus behind the inclusion of this clause in the new act was the widely-held opinion that parents needed to have a greater direct say in the functioning of their local schools, and that advisory councils would appear to be a viable vehicle for such involvement.

The mandating of parents' committees of this nature is not a new phenomenon in North America. Don Davies (1976) reported that by the mid-seventies, there were in excess of three thousand school councils in operation and he pointed to Florida, South Carolina, and Massachusetts as states that had included the establishment of parents' advisory committees in their education legislation. In Canada, the province of Quebec had legislated the establishment of parents' advisory committees in 1972.

Such parents' committees might be expected to deal with a wide range of issues related to the school. Davies (1976, p. 149) suggested the following list of responsibilities that parents' groups might assume or in which they might be participants in the decision-making processes:

- selecting and evaluating the principal
- selecting and evaluating teachers
- identifying goals, priorities, and needs
- setting budget priorities
- evaluating the curriculum and extra-curricular activities
- approving new school programs
- improving community support
- investigating student or parent problems and complaints.

Such a list would appear to derogate significantly from the authority of the school administration in regards to some major facets of the operation of a school, and is most certainly far removed from the traditional view of the role of parents' groups as fund raisers, coffee-servers, and meeting organizers.
In spite of the apparent logic of this approach to school governance, school consultative committees do not appear to have enjoyed a very high level of success. Lucas et al. (1978/79) in their study of Quebec’s parents’ advisory committees found that they played only a minimal role in formulating recommendations or in making decisions, and that they functioned primarily under the direction and control of principals. This study also showed that Quebec’s parents’ committees spent very little time dealing with substantive educational issues and instead were primarily the recipients of information rather than decision-makers; theirs was but a token role.

Other researchers uncovered further problems with parents’ advisory committees. It was discovered that typically, only a very small number of parents actually participated in such groups (Brandt, 1989) and the composition of these advisory councils frequently did not reflect the full diversity of the school community. Additionally, Fullan (1982) has pointed out that such parent committees have little or no impact upon student learning.

Nevertheless, parents’ advisory councils, whatever their composition and function, are an important thread in the fabric of the school. They serve as a vehicle for disseminating information to parents. They provide an avenue for some parents to participate in the school, particularly those who are unavailable during the day or who are not especially comfortable in working with children. They can serve as an important link between the school and the larger community beyond the parent body. And it is possible that they may serve as a restraining influence against ill-advised or poorly-conceived changes occurring in the school since they promote accountability.

Parents’ associations are also important in generating support for the school. If parents can participate in a parents’ group and feel that they are therefore making a contribution to their children’s school, they are likely to develop stronger loyalties to the institution than if they remained on the periphery. It is also fair to presume, that positive
parental attitudes will be transmitted to their children and will result in improved attitudes on the part of students.

5.1 WHAT PROPORTION OF THE PARENT BODIES OF THESE SCHOOLS PARTICIPATES IN THE PARENTS’ ASSOCIATIONS?

Findings

Table 3, reproduced from page 70 below, indicates the proportion of parents who participate actively as members of the parents’ associations in each of the five schools included in the study, as reported by both principals and parents.

| TABLE 3 |
|---|---|---|
| | Principals’ Responses | Parents’ Responses * |
| School A | 25:215 | 12% | 20:215 | 9% |
| School B | 55:600 | 9% | 35:600 | 6% |
| School C | 23:260 | 9% | 25:260 | 10% |
| School D | 23:500 | 5% | 20:500 | 4% |
| School E | 23:250 | 9% | 18:250 | 7% |

Levels of participation are expressed as a ratio of the number of parents involved compared to the student population of the school.

* Reported as a general averaging of the three responses for each school.

All five principals reported that their parents’ councils had an open membership, and that any parent who wished to attend was welcomed and was entitled to vote on
issues. One principal took considerable pride in the number of parents attending his parents’ group meetings and suggested that conversations with colleagues in other schools indicated far lower participation levels elsewhere in the district. Another principal mentioned in particular, the attendance of teachers on a rotational basis and suggested that their presence was appreciated by the parents in that school. A third principal alluded to a slow decline in attendance numbers as each school year progressed and new seasonal activities drew the attention of parents away from the functions of the council in the latter part of the year. The principal of one of the community schools talked about the efforts he and his community school coordinator had expended in working with the council to increase its level of activity and its profile both within the school as well as in the community at large. Finally one principal described a dramatic shift that had occurred in the parents’ group since his arrival in the school. Whereas in the past there had been only a very small group of four or five parents who had worked closely with the previous principal and this group had effectively denied access by other parents to the functioning of the council; the advent of the new administration had served to bring a considerably broader representation of parents into the group and changed the level of activity of the parents’ council into a more participatory mode.

The fact that all meetings of parents’ committees were open to any and all parents who wished to attend was supported by the parents who were interviewed. In addition, the two community schools include residents of the community who are not parents in the school, as members of the council. All councils maintained similar executive and committee structures with “Ways and Means,” “Education,” “Program,” and “Hot Lunch” committees being identified in all five schools.

Several parents recognized a continuing problem of parents’ committees as being the recruitment of new members, particularly parents new to the school. One parent suggested that having small children at home precluded many of the younger parents
from participating, and also suggested that many parents felt that assuming an executive position would involve too much time and work. (This chairperson did not however agree with such an assessment.) In another school, the current chairperson described an attitude that she felt was developing among the parent body, that the council was too much in league with the teachers; a problem that she recognized her council would need to address very shortly.

The parents of School C supported their principal in his description of the situation that had existed prior to his appointment. They related how, after observing the new principal for a time, they reached the conclusion that they did not care for the situation that had existed in the past, and with a “We can do it” approach, set out to change the relationship between the council and the school. Each expressed regret however, that the former “power” group now itself felt isolated, and efforts are apparently continuing to maintain their involvement with the group.

Discussion

Even in these high-involvement schools, it would appear that participation rates in the parents’ consultative committees is limited to a very small proportion of parents. This reflects what such researchers as Fullan (1982), Lucas et al. (1978/79), and Epstein (Brandt, 1989) identified as one of the major deficiencies of school advisory committees: that they do not include the vast majority of a school’s parents.

An examination of Table 3 reveals that, with the exception of School B, each parents’ council includes approximately the same absolute number of individuals, regardless of the number of students in the school. As suggested earlier (see page 72), this may indicate that the size of the committee is governed more by the tasks to be performed, than by the number of parents being served. This would also appear to support Jennings’ contention (1989) that there is an optimum size for a parents’ advisory
council. In his opinion, a committee of nine to eighteen members is most effective, though he would expand the membership to include teachers, community residents, and students, as well as parents and administrators. Only the two designated community schools however, include non-parents among their council memberships.

Virtually all the participants in the study agreed that the level of participation was the major problem they faced, in spite of the fact that the meetings at all five schools are widely advertised as open to anyone who wishes to attend. Nevertheless, few of the interviewees were able to offer any suggestions as to how this situation might be rectified. In School D, an attempt is made to overcome some of the difficulty by scheduling some meetings during the day and others in the evening, and this procedure seemed to open up participation opportunities to two quite distinct groups, and to expand the proportion of the parent body that could be involved. In School C, all three parents made it a point of describing their meetings as “informal” and “easy-going” with the suggestion being that this creates a less threatening atmosphere for parents and people are more willing therefore to express their opinions and contribute their ideas. From other comments made, it is clear that the principal has been a major force in establishing this atmosphere in the meetings in this school.

The principal of School B suggested another hindering factor, as well as a solution, to the issue of attendance at parents’ council meetings:

Another thing we do is we make sure that for evening meetings we provide babysitting. And that is a major key in the school because I honestly believe a lot of parents only come to those meetings to get away from their kids for a few hours. Just to come here and dump their kids because there are a lot of welfare moms who can’t afford babysitters....
That parents’ groups do have an important role to fill in the school and can exert a powerful influence over the functioning of the school is indicated in the comments of the principal of School B:

The parents’ group in this school is very powerful. Extremely powerful. And if they didn’t want something to happen, it would not happen. They have that influence in this community. They are all the movers and shakers. So if they didn’t want it, it’s just not going to happen. So...it’s like baring your soul, you have to be open and honest with these people.

Administrators therefore, need to develop strategies to harness this element of the parent/school relationship for the betterment of the school and its students.

5.2 HOW REPRESENTATIVE ARE THE PARENTS’ ASSOCIATIONS OF THEIR ENTIRE PARENT BODIES?

Findings

It is difficult to gather hard data by way of interviews to a question of this nature, but each participant was asked to express his or her opinion regarding the nature of representation of the school’s parents’ group.

All but one of the principals identified groups within their communities that were not represented on their councils. In one school, the principal recognized that there was no member representing what he described as the “ultra-conservative, traditional” philosophy of education, and pointed out that this group was the source of the majority of complaints he heard about the school.

At another school, it was the really disadvantaged parents that had no representation along with the ethnic groups within the community. This principal suggested that it was members of the traditional two-parent, professional families that involved themselves in such groups as parents’ councils. “It’s a difficult problem. ...It’s not an easy one to solve,” he suggested.
Another principal suggested that it was important to draw the parents of new students, particularly kindergarten parents, into the school and he described his approach as follows:

We sent personal invitations to the first parent meeting to all new parents in the school and all the new kindergarten parents asking them to come to that first parent meeting. And again we want to get them into the school; we want them to feel the climate and see what's going on in the school.

At a third school, the principal came to recognize very early in his tenure, that the parents' group was not necessarily the voice of the whole community, and in making some of the decisions about what was to transpire in the school, he would need to seek guidance from a larger representation of the parent body. Accordingly, this principal frequently addresses contentious issues in the school newsletter, and asks for responses from parents in regards to their opinions. In this way, he is able to temper what he perceives to be the somewhat narrow viewpoint represented by the parents' council.

The principal of one of the designated community schools expressed the feeling that his council included a fairly good geographical representation along with some ethnic representatives: "Probably as good as you can get when you've got twenty people." Nevertheless, while he felt fairly comfortable with the mix on the committee, he singled out people from the relatively wealthy segment of the community as the leaders in the group.

In general, the parents who were interviewed were much more positive in their view that their parents' groups were in fact representative of the full spectrum of opinion and philosophy in the community. Thirteen of them expressed opinions ranging from "pretty representative" to "really good" when asked about the level of representation on the parents' councils. When confronted with the question and the implications it seemed to suggest, two parents stated that they had never really thought of the possibility before, but upon reflection felt that if in fact there were parents whose views were not
represented on the council, there were other avenues through which they could express their feelings (for example, through the teachers or the principal), or as suggested by one parent, these people would probably attend a meeting if they had a problem and their views would thus be heard. One parent also singled out working parents and single parents as groups that possibly lacked a voice on the councils.

One parent in School B pointed out that in many respects, if there were groups of parents whose voices were not being heard it was due, at least in part, to their own lack of initiative; though she went on to suggest that perhaps her council did need to make some attempts to seek them out and draw them into the decision-making processes. As this parent expressed the idea:

I think the danger comes when parents won’t take an active part and so it’s left to the executive to make the decisions.... But to actually take part in the decision-making, is where we need to get more parents involved.

She was supported by a parent in School E who stated:

...there are some parents who choose not to be involved in any way. Now they may have opinions that differ but they won’t come to us with that. They’ll sort of mumble on the street....

And finally one parent suggested that the issue of representation was something of a nagging fear of hers.

...I often wonder if there are parents out there who feel that we who are the association, are maybe our own cliquey little group.... But I think parents are scared to make that step; to become part of the group. You know, they’re apprehensive and they really don’t know what the association is all about. ...I don’t hear really of any, um, negative opinions about us but I just wonder sometimes if they’re out there.

Discussion

It appears that at least four out of the five principals have given some thought and consideration to the possibility that their parents’ groups do not represent all of the social and cultural elements in the school’s community. This awareness has resulted in one of the principals actively seeking the views of those parents who are not members of the
council or who do not attend the meetings, by soliciting their input through other avenues, most notably the school newsletter. Interesting too, is the fact that it is this particular principal who makes it a regular habit to phone a number of parents each week to plumb their attitudes and opinions. Thus, at least part of the strength of this administrator must be attributable to the depth of understanding he has of the entire community served by the school. As suggested earlier, the provision of babysitting for attendees is one approach to opening up the opportunities for more parents to attend meetings of the parents’ group.

Another barrier that works to shield one group from the school, is the school’s philosophy and approach to education. When parents do not agree with, or at least are not particularly comfortable with, the philosophy espoused by the principal and practised in the school, they will tend to withdraw from active participation in the school. It is imperative that opportunities be created for these parents to voice their concerns and opinions, and that their views be taken into account when changes occur and activities take place within the school.

Two principals identified the core group among the parents’ group as originating from that segment of the population that is upper middle class, and primarily of European-descent. This would seem to suggest that the approach of including parents in the education process through a consultative council structure, is primarily a feature of North American educational organizations. Therefore, schools with large minority groups may need to investigate other approaches to involving parents in education beyond the structure of formalized consultative committees.

Schools need also to be aware of those people who are particularly disadvantaged, for whom mere survival is a challenge. Their opinions are equally vital, and their
children's education equally important, and schools need to find ways to bring them into the educational process on terms with which they can deal.

Parents seemed to hold a somewhat more simplistic view of the issue of representation. For several, the fact that parents from all grade levels were included seemed to indicate a good level of representation of the parent body. For others, the fact that the members almost always agreed on things suggested that the group was representative. As well, there appeared to be a fairly general propensity to dismiss any parent whose opinions were not expressed at the table, as someone lacking in the initiative to become involved. It is perhaps understandable that parents would have a much narrower view of the community. To residents, the community they know best is the immediate neighbourhood in which they live. They are accordingly much less aware of the other neighbourhoods and other groups served by the school. The fact that only two of the fifteen parents exhibited any measure of concern about groups that might be, or might feel, disenfranchised, indicates a clear need for principals to work with their parents' groups to help them see issues in terms of the broader community of which the school is a part, and not just in reference to the small groups with whom they work and socialize.

5.3 WITH WHAT TYPES OF ISSUES DO THESE PARENTS' ASSOCIATIONS DEAL?

Findings

Table 12 on page 193, contains the responses of both principals and parents regarding the kinds of issues dealt with by the schools' parents' consultative committee.

Discussion

Even in these schools which are recognized for their high level of parent involvement, much of the work of the parents' associations appears to be in the traditional areas of fund raising and out-of-school concerns. Indeed, all but three of the
## TABLE 12

ISSUES DEALT WITH BY PARENTS’ ASSOCIATIONS:
AS REPORTED BY PRINCIPALS AND PARENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUES CONSIDERED</th>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranging speakers and meetings</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting the school photographer</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing parent volunteers</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning out-of-school programs for students</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising funds</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deciding upon the purchases of materials and resources</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering information regarding educational issues</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing school events and happenings</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing and voicing concerns regarding school issues (for example discipline, programs)</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting on plans for an addition to the building</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering potential class organizations</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting on school staffing needs</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing and approving auxiliary school programs (for example outdoor school)</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in the evaluation of the school and its programs</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in interviews for a new community school coordinator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with the school staff in the development of the school’s philosophy or mission statement</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering community concerns and issues</td>
<td>PII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining liaison with outside groups and agencies as well as with other schools</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P*—as reported by the principal  
*I*—as reported by a parent
respondents identified fund raising as an important issue for their parents' group and several of these individuals mentioned such activities as the first thing that came to mind when the question was posed. (See also question 3.7 on page 156, for a further discussion regarding fund raising activities.) Other matters such as arranging speakers, organizing parents' meetings, and planning after school programs also appear to occupy much of their time and attention.

Involvement with what Don Davies (1976) would consider substantive issues such as those concerned with the actual administration of the school, the selection of staff, and the development and supervision of its program are much less apparent. The most notable examples of such involvement occurred in two schools in which parents were invited to play a role in the development of the schools' philosophy and goal statements. This was particularly evident in School D where twelve parents were invited to participate as equal partners with the staff and administration, in the development of the school's mission statement. This process occurred over a period of several months and included parents selected by the principal in consultation with the staff, to represent a geographical, cultural, and grade-level cross-section of the community. All three parents interviewed in the school spoke enthusiastically of their participation in this endeavour and felt that they had not only had a significant contribution to make, but also that their ideas and opinions were welcomed and seriously considered in the formulation of the statement.

In School C however, the involvement of parents in the development of the school's philosophy appears to have been somewhat less of a factor. Thus, while the principal would identify this as one area in which the parents' group had worked with the school, only one parent thought it significant enough to offer as an example of the involvement of the parents' group. In this case, the parents seem to have been involved
more as a mirror in which the staff could view their own efforts at goal-setting from a somewhat different perspective, rather than as active participants in the process. Nevertheless, this principal of this school expressed the opinion that parental involvement was critically important to the school. He stated:

...if you don’t have that kind of parent input into that kind of decision-making, then you’re not going to have them on your side and working to do the best for their kids. And it’s only if they have not just the feeling, but if they’ve really had input into that decision-making that they feel fully committed to what you’re doing, and you need that sharing.

None of the participants suggested that parents had any direct say in the selection of the teaching staff or the principal though the principal of School B did explain that at the time the school was first being built, parents had been asked to outline the qualities they would like the new principal to possess.

Parents appear to have a much narrower view of the role they play as members of the parents’ council than do principals. Principals were much more ready to enumerate a multitude of examples of parent involvement through the parents’ group in substantive educational issues, while parents appeared to focus more on the fund raising and discussion aspects of their involvement.

What does appear clear from the data however, is that by far the most important role for these parents’ group meetings is as a valuable forum for the exchange of ideas and the discussion of topics of interest—and of concern—to parents. In regards to educational issues, parents identified the discussion and voicing of concerns regarding general school issues as one of the most frequently occurring aspects of their meetings as a parents’ group, second only to fund raising questions in the hierarchy of their involvement. These meetings also provide openings for the school to give parents information about programs and activities in the school; and all schools appeared to
welcome the opportunity for the principal to report events and activities, as well as to allow parents to ask questions about what was occurring in their children’s education.

5.4 WHAT ROLE DO THESE PRINCIPALS PLAY IN THE PARENTS’ ASSOCIATIONS?

Findings

The majority of these principals reported that they tended to maintain something of an arms-length relationship between themselves and their parents’ groups as far as the operations of the councils is concerned. Four of the five principals related that they did play a part in the formulation of the agenda for parents’ committee meetings, though this role appears to be more in an advisory capacity than in a leadership mode. The one exception was a principal who did not meet with the executive of the parents’ group when the agenda was planned prior to a general meeting. This principal was however, able to have items placed on the agenda through his community school coordinator.

These principals also tend to maintain a clearly defined separation between themselves and the identification or selection of people to serve on the parents’ committee. One principal went so far as to state that he had in fact been asked to recommend people but that he had pointedly refused to do so. He had made a conscious decision to avoid any appearance that he was in any way controlling the group. In one case however, a principal did suggest that he played a part in identifying people to serve, but in this situation he would only offer suggestions of people whom the council might approach when they were unable to locate anyone on their own. Even he however, did not play any kind of an active role in soliciting members of the executive or council. In yet another case, the principal would take it upon himself to encourage people to become involved with the council; but again, this was clearly not an overt attempt to place “friendly” individuals in positions of responsibility in the parents’ group.
All five principals stated that they provided a Principal’s Report as one of the items on the agenda, and responded to questions or spoke to issues if asked by the chairperson of the group. None of the principals stated that he moved motions or voted. “I’m just there as a resource person.... It’s their meeting, basically,” is the way one principal expressed it. Nevertheless, another principal suggested, “...I [do] have a fair amount of influence on council.”

Parents too characterized the involvement of their principals as that of consultant, advisor, and liaison between the parents’ group and the school. They defined the principal’s role as supportive rather than active, though all expressed appreciation for the accessibility of these principals and the rapport that existed between the parents’ group and the administration. “He can ask us anything; he can tell us anything,” is the way a School B parent described the relationship.

Discussion

In line with the primary function of these parents’ groups as providing forums for discussion and the exchange of information, these principals play a primarily consultative role on their parents’ councils. They hold no voting authority and in fact, tend to work consciously to establish and maintain a clear separation between their role as principal and their involvement with the parents’ group. In this way they are able to grant the parents some sense of authority and a degree of self-responsibility, while at the same time avoiding any suggestion or appearance that they as principals, are in control of the groups. Nevertheless, as stated earlier, at least one of these parents’ groups has had to encounter criticism that it was little more than a “rubber-stamp” for the wishes of the teachers, though from an examination of their activities, this would appear to be an unfair accusation.
THE IMPACT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Among the most enlightening findings of the research into parent involvement, has to do with the profound effect that the involvement of parents in the education of their children has upon the attitudes of those parents and the attitudes and levels of achievement of students in these schools.

A number of studies, particularly those by Henderson (1988) and Epstein (1985) among many others, clearly demonstrated that including parents in the education process produces measurable gains in students' academic achievement and several United States federal government programs including Head Start and Follow Through predicated their success upon the inclusion of parents as an integral part of the program. Research reported by Storey (1989) has also indicated that it is parents involved specifically with instructional activities that has the most profound impact upon academic success.

Similarly, parental involvement has a direct effect on the attitudes of students, not only towards their own schooling, but also upon their relationship with their parents (Ostlund, et al., 1985) and upon their level of self-esteem and positive self-concept (Eicholtz, 1984).

Parents too demonstrated more positive attitudes towards the school when they were actively involved in the education of their children. Again, it is Joyce Epstein (1984, 1985, 1986, 1987) who has been a leader in this research. Her studies clearly reveal that when parents are included as active participants in the education enterprise, their confidence in education as a whole and in teachers specifically, is considerably higher than when they are kept on the periphery.

Finally, it is now beginning to appear that teacher attitudes too benefit from the involvement of parents. While this is an area that continues to need further research, it
appears that in schools where parents play an active role, teachers have a generally more positive view of parents, have a clearer vision of their own role as teachers, and work towards a more student-oriented curriculum (Henderson, 1988).

While data which has been collected by way of personal interviews is difficult to quantify and evaluate, it is nevertheless of considerable interest to examine the perceptions of both parents and principals regarding their estimation of the effects of parent involvement upon the attitudes of parents and the attitudes and achievement of students. Such data, while purely subjective and based upon opinion rather than fact as it is, does lend a measure of validity to the potential positive effects of parents’ involvement in the schools included in this study.

6.1 WHAT EFFECT DOES PARENT INVOLVEMENT HAVE UPON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

Findings

Without exception, all five principals signified that they felt certain that yes, parent involvement does have a significant and positive impact upon the achievement of students. The principal of School A, while recognizing that his opinion was not based upon any statistical data, indicated that this concept was the basis of his philosophy of education and that it governed his approach as a school administrator. He stated:

...I believe that leaning is enhanced. I don’t have any data to support that.... But I believe, and as long as I believe it I’ll continue to promote it; that it enhances learning. Because I think we know enough about learning, that if the learner feels—certainly can feel challenged, but not intimidated—feels relaxed and comfortable in the environment, he or she is going to learn more and is going to learn better. And one way of providing that climate is by having parents mutually, cooperatively involved in the enterprise. And that’s what it’s all about.

The principal of School D, while new in this particular position, was able to reflect upon his experience in his previous posting. His thoughts:

...I think it really impacts on their performance in their day-to-day studies. I really do. And I think as the more parents that we get [involved], you can
see scores rise on the standardized assessment tests. I can’t say that here; I haven’t been here long enough. But I can say it based on the other school.

The principal of School E approached the issue from a somewhat different perspective. He described how his school placed special emphasis on, and made special efforts to enhance, student self-concept and self-esteem. Much of the energy of the staff of this school was directed toward students learning and assuming responsibility for themselves both as individuals as well as members of a democratic society, and students were involved to a great extent in group problem-solving and decision-making. From this emphasis, he expressed the opinion that academic achievement was a natural follow-through from this approach. “I think they feel pretty good about themselves, and I think that enhances their achievement,” he averred.

The parents too expressed confidence that their involvement would have a direct and positive bearing upon the achievement of their children. One parent suggested that if parents were involved in the school, it transmitted a message to the child that he or she was expected to be involved as well.

I think if the parents are involved that that child is more willing to give of himself, and it becomes an attitude that it’s something they should do. . So I think if parents are involved then their kids tend to reflect it.

A second parent suggested that the involvement of the parent demonstrated graphically to the child that school is important and that education is a shared responsibility.

I think it shows the kids that we care what they’re doing and what’s happening at their school; that it’s not just their school, it’s everybody’s school. That we all want to make it a better place to be and...yes, I would think it would help. ... Yes, I think [they try harder and do better quality work] because they see we’re trying to make it a better place and help them out so they in turn work harder. I would hope that is happening.

This idea was expanded upon by two other parents who suggested that students would perform better when they see that their parents really do care about what they are doing at
school as demonstrated by their involvement at school, and especially when they knew that their efforts would be presented for their parents at the culmination of a particular unit of study.

Three other parents acknowledged the relationship between positive attitudes and academic success.

If the overall attitude is a good attitude, that I think can only help achievement.

and:

...in the younger grades, if they have their parents involved and in their classroom, if it gives them a more positive attitude (and from the ones I've seen it seems to do so), theoretically they probably are achieving best too, so attitudes certainly help. For kids that are scholastically good, it probably doesn't make any difference—except everybody likes being told they're doing well and getting that kind of feedback, and I guess a parent that's involved in the school would be more likely to actually know about the good feedback that they can be giving rather than when they have no idea what's going on in school. So hypothetically I think that it would help achievement; but I couldn't prove it.

These two respondents were supported by a third parent who suggested that if the school were a happy place, then the child would be happy as well and therefore, more successful.

Lastly, one of the parents in School E was able to respond on the basis of research she had done during the preparation of a article for the community school's newsletters. “Yes. Oh, I know it does,” she asserted, and went on to relate information she had gleaned from her readings. It was clear also, that her own personal experience had supported what she had learned, and she was a positive advocate for parent involvement in education.

Only two parents expressed any reservations about the idea that parent involvement could result in improved student achievement. One parent related that while she could envisage her personal involvement impacting upon the success of her own child, she wondered how that involvement would or could affect other children in the school. In the same vein, another suggested that the involvement of a particular parent
might result in the teacher looking more kindly upon that parents’ child in the class, and was evidently uncomfortable with the idea that parent participation might result in teacher favouritism.

6.2 WHAT EFFECT DOES PARENT INVOLVEMENT HAVE UPON STUDENT ATTITUDES?

Findings

In three cases, principals identified a direct connection between student achievement and student attitudes. The principal of School A who was quoted earlier (see question 6.1 above) pointed to the notion that his efforts to create a warm, accepting climate for the students resulted in the development of positive student attitudes. From this, he extrapolated that such attitudes were reflected in higher levels of achievement. The principal of School E, who was also quoted earlier (see question 6.1) also described his emphasis on the development of positive self-esteem and self-concept and how this impacted upon the achievement of his students. These sentiments were also supported by the principal of School D.

The principal of school C envisaged student and parent attitudes as operating in a interdependent manner. When students felt good about their school, their parents would in turn feel positive about their children’s experiences, and this in turn would result in further improvement in their children’s attitudes. He detailed this relationship as follows:

I think because the kids feel good about the school, the parents do, and they come because they want to see what’s making that kid feel so good about what’s going on in that building. And that really helps because once you get a parent coming in because they feel good about the building, then you’ve got them because it’s kind of, “Gee, this is so neat for my kid. How can I help?” “We’ve got a spot for you.” I think, and the same thing, if the kid feels good about the school, he’s going to be successful. But a kid won’t feel good about his school if the parent doesn’t feel good about the school. So you’ve got to get them both.
The principal of School B was very confident that parent involvement has a positive impact upon student attitudes.

I don't think there's any question about it. In this school, I think the children feel it's a very special place because their parents are here an awful lot. I think it makes a difference to a child to see his parent working in some capacity in the school. And I think they do think it's a special place because of that.

Thirteen of the fifteen parents interviewed agreed with the notion that the involvement of parents resulted in positive effects upon student attitudes. The two parents who declined to agree, did so on the basis that they did not have any experience with other schools with which to compare their opinions about their own schools.

Of the majority, four parents highlighted the support and caring that parents display to their children when they participate in the school. The following quotations demonstrate these sentiments.

...the parents are showing an interest and it helps the children realize that they're interested in what's happening and that they're concerned with their education.

...I think they see their parents care about what they're doing at school....

...I think it shows support to the students; and so I feel it does have a positive effect.

I think when the kids see that the parents are really interested in how the school is run, and when they see that you're interested in your school, then I think they can feel that....

A number of parents suggested that their participation allowed their children to feel that education is a shared experience, and a shared responsibility.

It's not just something they go out the door [and do on their own]. ...you know we talk about it a lot, you know at the dinner table.... But I think they want to share things with you, I think. I feel they do.

Oh I think they love their parents to be here. They love to show what they're learning, how they're learning it, and you're often invited into the classroom and the teachers are teaching a lesson. No, I think they feel more comfortable too. ...the kids love to be able to show what they're doing.
...I really do think children feel good when they see parents participating in the school. I think they love it.

I think it helps the kids. I think that they see that everyone's helping and that everyone wants to make it a better place for them.... I think it shows the kids that we care what they're doing and what's happening at their school; that it's not just their school, it's everybody's school. That we all want to make it a better place to be....

I would think it would be a positive thing...the kids like it when their parents are involved. ...everybody's trying for the same thing; nobody's at logger heads with each other. I find that as a whole, the attitudes of the students of the school is very good.”

Yet another parent suggested that the fact that parents were in the school relating on a friendly rather than formal level with teachers, put a new perspective on teachers for the children.

Yes, I do. I think they, the students view the staff as a little more human because parents are there and dealing with them on a personal level.

A parent in one of the community schools, expressed the view that the involvement of the whole community and not just parents, resulted in a higher level of citizenship and community loyalty.

If you can involve your community in your school, and when I say your community I mean parents are in the community too, and if you can involve the parents and the kids in concerns that are happening in your community, events that you want to do, then those people will take ownership of the community and they produce good citizens. ...I don’t think you’re going to get as much vandalism and problems in the community if your kids have bought into helping to preserve that community.

And another parent in the same school supported this contention when she said:

...I think there is modelling that goes on there. Yes, I think that's really influential on the children.

Finally, a parent in School B suggested that the children who were most prone to be involved in trouble at school, were often children of parents who had little or nothing to do with the school.
This parent asserted:

[I know of] some people, who were almost proud of the fact that they haven’t even stepped in the school the whole year, that they managed to stay away. There are those people out there. ...you also see it reflected in the children too...the ones that tend to...have more problems.... That’s why I think that parent involvement is so important.... You need that. These kids need that.

One parent however pointed to a possible negative outcome of parent participation. From her experiences in coming to the school to listen to the orchestra play and watch other day-time performances, she realized just how important it was to her child to have her there in the audience. However, she also observed other students whose parents were not present (for a variety of very valid reasons), and worried that these students must feel much less positive about their school accomplishments because their parents appeared to show less interest in them and their activities. Seeing the mothers of other children in the school, would tend to highlight for these children the differences between themselves and the other children whose parents were involved, and this could be very discouraging and disheartening for such children.

6.3 WHAT EFFECT DOES PARENT INVOLVEMENT HAVE UPON THE ATTITUDES OF PARENTS?

Findings

All principals reported their perception that there was a strong sense of support and of loyalty among their parents, and this they felt could be attributed to the inclusion of parents in a broad variety of activities and roles in the school. The principal of School A suggested that the involvement of parents broke down many of the barriers that often exist between schools and their parents. In his words:

…it gives them the opportunity to take more ownership for what’s going on because we know that learning doesn’t stop or start in the four walls of the school between nine and three o’clock on school days, one hundred and ninety days a year; that most of the learning that takes place is beyond the school and right from the cradle to the grave.
Principal B expressed the opinion that bringing parents into the school in a wide variety of roles as occurred in his school, enabled the school to expand its level of support among the parents as they increased their knowledge about the school, what it was trying to achieve, and how it was going about reaching those objectives.

...the ones that are the real victories [are] the ones who really don’t have a strong feeling one way or another and suddenly become real advocates for public education [after being involved].

The principal of School D views a school as a “family” with parents, students, and teachers working together towards a common goal. Once this sense of family is in place, he sees a multitude of rewards accruing that would otherwise not be possible.

I think my goal is to develop that family feeling for everybody here. That the staff and the parents and the kids, it’s all one big family and we can be honest and open with one another. And when you have that it’s an incredible feeling. It’s really a lot of warmth and it generates a critical mass that makes a whole bunch of things start happening that would never even...you could never even consider unless you have that feeling.

Levels of support such as those reported by these principals could result only from the existence of a deep well of positive parent attitudes, and it is a fair conclusion to suggest that these positive feelings are, at least in part, a result of the schools’ efforts to include parents as part of the normal functioning of the school.

As one concrete measure of the support these schools enjoy from their parents, and an indication of the positive attitudes these parents hold towards their schools, all five school mentioned various “teacher appreciation” activities that were sponsored by the parents that provided a means of saying “Thank you” to the teachers for the job that parents saw them doing on behalf of their children.

Parents themselves spoke enthusiastically and voluminously about their involvement and their feelings about their schools. Without exception, all of these parents
articulated a strong sense of confidence in, and loyalty to, their schools as indicated in their responses when asked to rate their schools.

During the course of the interview, each parent was asked to respond to the following question:

*In general terms, how would you rate your school overall on a scale of one to five; with 1 being the poorest rating and 5 the best?*

Of the fifteen parents interviewed, fourteen gave their school a rating of five, with the lone exception rating her school as four. Thus, for these heavily involved parents, it can be extrapolated that their involvement in the school has resulted in a very positive attitude towards their school. It is interesting to note as well, that the majority of these parents were most emphatic in stating their ratings leaving little doubt that they had firmly-held convictions that in their opinions, their schools were nothing short of excellent.

When their supporting comments are analyzed, a common thread runs through all of their responses: when parents are involved in schools, they are much more knowledgeable about the school and its program, and in turn they develop a greater sense of comfort and confidence in what the school is trying to do for their children. Thus, many parents were ready and able to cite specific examples to illustrate what it was that made their school such a good place for their children, and why they held such a positive view of it. In some way or another, each parent expressed the idea that because of her involvement, she was much more knowledgeable about the school, its staff, and its programs, than were parents who had less contact with the school. These parents felt that they had a good understanding of how the school functioned and felt that they were treated as an integral part of the school and not excluded as one or two of them suggested was the case in other schools they knew about.

I’m sure part of my feelings about the school are because I understand the inner working of the school you know, and over the course of the years you learn more and more about what’s going on. Probably I wouldn’t feel the same way about it because I wouldn’t understand it quite so well.
This latter sentiment was echoed by several other parents as well and these people volunteered that their assessment of the school would not be as high had they not been as knowledgeable as a result of their involvement.

One parent remarked, "I think the people who are informed about what's going on have more of a positive attitude," and another suggested that her involvement yielded a much greater appreciation and understanding of the role of the teachers and just how hard they worked. Involvement offered an opportunity to "see the other side."

A School E parent suggested that there was a spin-off benefit for the students which resulted from the parent's attitudes.

I think parents who are involved tend to be much more positive in what's happening with their children in the school. ... So I think that the parents who are involved tend to be really enthusiastic and I think that's often passed on to their children as well.

A second element common in their responses, is the idea that through their involvement, these parents have come to know the teachers and the principals well, and accordingly feel comfortable in their ability to ask questions, discuss issues, and express opinions. Several parents mentioned the good relationship they had with the principal as well as their own child's teacher, and offered that this was a common feeling among the parents with whom they were acquainted. One parent went so far as to suggest that because of her involvement, the school was a less threatening place for her and therefore it was easier for her to maintain contact and communication with the principal and the staff. She went on to express sorrow for those parents who had not established that same kind of liaison through their own involvement, but suggested that it was up to them: that the opportunities were there for the taking. Involvement also provides a common knowledge base for parents when speaking with teachers. For this reason, a parent in School C suggested that she was able to get more accurate information regarding how her children were doing and how she might help them at home.
It appears too that the fact that their involvement places them in a position to affect what occurs in their school also engenders more positive attitudes on the part of these parents. They are confident that they are able to fulfill a monitoring role and just knowing that they are in a position to help steer the organization gives rise to a level of confidence that would not be there were they shut out of the running of the school. A parent in School E expressed her sentiment:

We elected our government, and our government provides an education system and if we’re not monitoring it, we could be sorry. I feel that we need to monitor what’s happening in our schools, what’s happening in education in the province, and in our individual districts. I believe that that’s a responsibility we have as a citizen, and as a parent.

The fact that they may not in fact actually effect any major changes and may be asked only to express opinions, does not seem to be the issue. What does seem to be important is the fact that they feel they are in a position to bring about changes if they consider it necessary and can exercise some kind of control over what their children are learning and doing at school. Being in a position to see the needs of the school and to be able to help in fulfilling those needs was suggested by one interviewee as an important facet of her involvement. A parent in School B expressed the sentiment as follows:

I think as they realize that they can have some kind of impact into exactly what’s going on, I think their attitude changes for the better.

These parents all feel that they are a part of what’s happening in their children’s education and several parents commented on the fact that their children enjoyed having them be part of their school lives as well. “I like to go into the classroom. I like to see where my daughter is spending ten months of her life,” said one parent who suggested that her daughter enjoyed her presence in the school. Another parent remarked that all parents should be involved in school when she said, “I think parents need to know what goes on in schools, what’s happening, to see the halls, to see the different things that each grade is doing.”
Two parents indicated the high level of confidence they had in their neighbourhood schools when they suggested that they would not consider moving to a new home because they felt so strongly about their present school. In one case, the family clearly needed a larger home, but they were willing to remain where they were so that their children could continue attending the school. In the second instance, the family was ready to move from rental accommodation and buy their own home. To do so however, would mean moving out of the community because of the high cost of houses in this part of the municipality. They were not prepared to move away from their school however, so have continued renting in the neighbourhood rather than transfer their children to a school in which they would feel less confidence. In both these cases, the positive attitudes, high respect, and extreme loyalty of these parents to their school, was allowed to take precedence over other family considerations.

Finally two parents summed up their feelings towards their school as follows:

If I didn’t feel it was such a good school, I certainly wouldn’t be spending as much time here as I do.

and,

If it wasn’t a place where my children were happy and comfortable, and...a place where I felt comfortable...I wouldn’t be here I guess.

6.4 WHAT IS THE GENERAL ATTITUDE OF TEACHERS TOWARDS PARENT INVOLVEMENT?

Findings

No specific polling of teaching staff was conducted as part of this study. Nevertheless, it was considered important to ascertain to at least some degree, whether or not the teachers in these schools played any particular role in facilitating and enhancing the involvement of parents in the school. Accordingly, each interviewee was asked to express his or her opinion regarding the attitude of teachers towards the involvement of parents in education.
Four of the five principals expressed the belief that there was wide-spread and enthusiastic support for parent involvement among their teachers. They suggested that the vast majority of their teachers were very favourably disposed towards the inclusion of parents in their schools and in one school the principal went so far as to suggest that in his school, the involvement of parents is virtually automatic when teachers planned and organized for instruction. He said:

I don’t think they think about it one way or another...it’s all an automatic thing now. It’s kind of, “Gee, we need extra help. Which parents would we really like to help us with this?” It’s not a matter of, “Shall we have parents,” or anything like that. It’s kind of, “Which ones do you think will want to help us?”.... I mean you can’t do it without parents, the staff, all working together and that’s what I’ve got here. They do it. They do a great job.

Several of the principals alluded to the idea that teachers who did not subscribe to an educational philosophy that included parents as an integral part of the school’s program soon left these schools for others, and that such a philosophical basis was a paramount consideration when selecting staff members for the school.

One principal suggested that there was one caution of which to be aware when bringing parents into the classroom program, and that was dealing with the parent who tries to “take over”, to fill the role of teacher rather than of assistant, especially when dealing with such matters as student discipline. This principal recognized however, that the management of this type of situation was within the realm of his administrative responsibility, and he cited one instance where it had been necessary for him to confront a parent with the fact that her presence in the classroom was having a deleterious effect upon the students and hence it was necessary that she be placed in a different type of volunteer role in the school. The fact that he was able to deal successfully with this situation is evidenced by the fact that this mother continues to be an active volunteer in the school though in a different capacity from that of a classroom aide.
The one principal who did not feel that his staff was totally in favour of parent involvement cited a wide variety of attitudes among his teachers ranging from apprehension through reluctance to high enthusiasm: “Some staff are clearly threatened by it.” He identified a number of factors as impacting upon teacher attitudes citing first of all the variety of ages and experiences of his staff. He suggested also, however, the possibility that he personally was trying to move his staff too quickly in too many different directions at one time, and that he would probably have to retrench somewhat until his teachers were able to internalize the changes that they had already embarked upon, most notably the curricular changes that are also occurring in the province at this time.

When asked if they perceived any differences in teacher attitudes between primary and intermediate teachers, three of the principals expressed the opinion that the difference that did exist were not of attitude, but rather of the manner in which teachers at various grade levels included parents in their programs. The differences were due to such factors as the age and attitudes of older students as compared to primary children, rather than the attitudes of the teachers towards parent involvement. This evaluation is in line with the opinions expressed in connection with question 3.5 (page 150).

All fifteen parents agreed with the sentiment that the teachers in their schools welcomed the involvement of parents. All felt that the teachers appreciated what parents did in the school, and at least one expressed her pleasure that the teachers in her school openly demonstrated their appreciation to the parents, something that she said was lacking in a previous school with which she had been involved. Several parents also pointed to the fact that it was recognized by both the teachers and the parents that much of what was occurring in these schools could not happen were it not for the assistance provided by a large number of parents. “The more parents that are available to assist, the
more things they can do at the school," said one parent, and she described a variety of activities that required the assistance of parents if they were to take place.

Several parents also directed attention to the importance they ascribed to the attitudes of the teachers. They characterized their teachers as highly personable, and the relationship that existed between the teachers and the parents was a comfortable and friendly one rather than a formal and stilted professional-client association. This rapport appeared to be a very important facet of the involvement of parents in all five of these schools, and is supportive of the literature.

Two parents suggested that it was their understanding that the teachers hired for their schools clearly understood that they were expected to involve parents and to work closely with them. This appears to be a cornerstone to effectively implementing parent participation in schools, and certainly appears to be the case in the five schools included in the study. One parent also described the teachers in her school as extremely hard-working professionals who spent many hours in the school and were often there on weekends either working in their classrooms or participating in school or community activities.

The only negative note that was sounded by a parent was from one who had overheard a teacher explaining that while he would like to be able to involve parents in his program, he just did not have the time to plan and organize for their inclusion in the program. Her relating of this incident however, was not based upon criticism of this teacher, but rather upon an understanding and appreciation of the multitude of demands made upon teachers and a recognition that including parents in the classroom program does indeed make further heavy demands upon the teachers’ time and energy.

Few of the parents felt that the grade level of the teacher was a major factor in determining the degree of parent involvement of parents. The majority of them felt that
their assistance was welcomed at all grade levels though, in line with the principals, they recognized that children at different ages had differing needs, and that therefore the role that parents would play necessarily differed at the various levels. They did not however, feel that it was the grade level of the teachers that caused the difference; rather it was the nature of the children and the nature of the programs. At the primary level, parents saw a role for themselves working in centres such as are found more frequently in primary classrooms; whereas at the intermediate level, the prevalence of whole-group direct instruction and the increased level of difficulty of the subject matter led to parents playing less of a role within the classroom and participating more in out-of-class activities and on more of an intermittent basis. Differences also existed among individual teachers, but parents did not feel that this was particularly a function of grade level as it was a reflection of teacher personality and inclination.

Discussion

Parent attitudes, student attitudes, and teacher attitudes are all interwoven and interdependent as is clear not only from the research, but also from the results of this study. In these five high-involvement schools, principals and parents all reported their opinion that the involvement of parents had a positive impact upon the students in a number of ways. The involvement of parents signalled to students that education was important, and that their parents were interested in what they were doing at school. Similarly, parents demonstrated a very positive attitude towards their schools which could be directly attributable to their level of involvement. Because they spent considerable time in and around the school, they were knowledgeable about the school and its programs and hence felt comfortable with what was occurring in their children's schooling.

In addition, several of these parents openly demonstrated their high respect for the teachers in their schools. They recognized not only that these were teachers who worked
hard at their jobs, but also that teaching itself was a demanding profession. Accordingly, they saw their own involvement as contributing to the effectiveness of their teachers, and they felt that they had an important role to play in enhancing education.

It is evident too, that the teachers in these schools possess a positive attitude towards their work and their students. The ease with which they relate to parents, and the facility with which they include them in their programs, demonstrate their understanding, intuitive as it might be, that parents can play an important role in the education of young children. It is also evident that the teachers in these schools were selected with the specific requirement that they be prepared to include parents as an integral part of their program, and the only negative comments heard in the interviews arose in reference to those teachers who did not appear particularly comfortable with parent involvement. Both principals and parents clearly indicated that those teachers who did not share the vision of parent participation in education would soon move on to other positions in other schools where parents play a lesser role.

GENERAL ISSUES IN PARENT INVOLVEMENT

There are a number of other issues that need to be dealt with when reflecting upon the involvement of parents in education. Several of these questions are considered through discussion of the succeeding questions.

7.1 HOW IS THE ROLE OF PARENTS DEFINED OR DELINEATED IN THE STATEMENTS OF PHILOSOPHY AND/OR MISSION STATEMENTS OF THESE SCHOOLS?

Findings

All five schools make some reference to the involvement of parents in their published philosophy or mission statements.
At School A, reference is made in the parents' handbook that is distributed in September, to the part that parents might play in the school. That statement reads:

The staff and students at ____ need and welcome your support and involvement. Our "open door" policy provides you with the opportunity to communicate with us at any time. Drop in or call....

The reference continues by inviting parents to volunteer in a variety of areas in the school and concludes with the remark:

By working together cooperatively, we can look forward to maximizing the quality of service that we provide for your children.

In School B, reference is made to parent involvement in the first paragraph of the school's mission statement in which it refers to the school as "open" and speaks of the "partnership" that exists between the school and the home. The importance of parent involvement in the school was supported by the principal when he asserted during the interview, "It's the life-blood of the school."

At both School C and School D, parents participated in the development of the school's mission statement, a process that is continuing at School D. The principal of School C described how both his staff and the parents' group felt very strongly that there was a partnership of family and home in helping the child develop his fullest potential.

School D is continuing to work with its parents on the development of its philosophy statement, but at the present time it refers more to community involvement rather than the participation of parents in particular.

At School E, one of the parents referred to the preamble to the community school council goal statements where it refers to the staff and council working to a shared vision for the school. Amongst the three major goals drafted by the council, the second reads as follows:

To develop a wide range of opportunities for involvement by all persons living or working in the _____ area in all activities, programs, social
Discussion

In spite of the importance that the principals of these five schools attribute to the involvement of parents—and their actions certainly support their words—there is really only limited mention of the role of parents in their schools' statements of philosophy or mission statements. What reference there is, appears in only the broadest sweep of a brush, and does not fully recognize the importance that parents play in the education of children. Many of these statements make quite specific references to subject matter to be presented, skills to be mastered, and abilities to be developed, as well as to the role various programs in the school play in the education of all children. Yet, these are schools in which parents are right now playing very large and vital roles, and one would expect to find that role more clearly delineated in the educational philosophy of the schools. In these five schools, the philosophy of parent involvement is effectively practised, but is not clearly enunciated.

7.2 HOW DOES THE AGE OR GRADE LEVEL OF THEIR OWN CHILDREN EFFECT THE INVOLVEMENT OF THESE PARENTS?

Findings

In Chapter Three, each of the fifteen parents who participated in this study is profiled. That information is contained in Table 1 which is reproduced on page 218, following.

Amongst these parents, just two of them have only intermediate students while only two others have solely primary children. The balance of the parents have a mixture of both primary and intermediate aged children together with some secondary students. None of these parents however, has kindergarten-aged children. Included among their children are eleven primary students, sixteen intermediate students, and eight secondary students.
### TABLE 1

**PARENT PROFILES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL/PARENT</th>
<th>YEARS OF ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT</th>
<th>CHILDREN PRESENTLY IN SCHOOL</th>
<th>WORKING OUTSIDE OF THE HOME</th>
<th>POSITION IN PARENTS' GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 SEC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Co-Chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Co-Chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Volunteer Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Past Chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Co-Chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Yes *</td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>X XX</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Vice-Chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Chairperson-designate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Attending school part time

Parents were asked during the interviews if their involvement had changed at all as their children had advanced through the grades. Nine parents reported that their
involvement had increased while three told of a decline in their participation in recent years, and three reported no change.

For the parents whose involvement has increased with the passage of time, a number of reasons were cited. For three parents, the passage of time had seen them expand into different roles in the school, one of whom is now not only the chairperson of her elementary school's parents' advisory council, but is also the chairperson on the secondary school's council. For another parent, having a learning-disabled child had caused her to increase her involvement in the school as she sought to ensure the best programming for her son. The most frequently cited reason for an increase in involvement however, was the entry into the school of the parent's youngest child. No longer having a child at home frees the mother from home-based responsibilities and enables her to assume a greater role and devote more time to the school. This reason was mentioned in four cases. Finally, all three parents in School C referred to the change of principals four years earlier as largely responsible for them becoming more involved in the school. Clearly, according to these parents, the previous administration had acted as a major impediment to the involvement of parents in this school in the past.

A number of reasons were advanced to explain why the parent's role in the school had changed in character rather than increasing or decreasing. One parent reported that as her daughter had entered the intermediate division, she wasn't needed as much at the classroom level, and so she is now able to direct her energies more to council and community work. For two parents, the maturation of their children has enabled them to return to the work force. This has meant of course, that they have had to curtail their involvement in the school.

One parent who reported that her involvement had decreased attributed it to having become "burned out" as a result of heavy involvement over a number of years.
For this parent, while she was still ready and willing to assist with activities, she no longer wanted to shoulder the responsibilities of chairing committees, preferring to let others assume those leadership roles.

Discussion

It would appear from this group of heavily-involved parents that the ages of their children has little real bearing upon their present involvement in the school. Their children span the grades from grade one through to the secondary school, and no particular pattern appears from the data. The fact that none of them has a kindergarten child may suggest that it takes parents at least that first year before they are ready to become more completely involved beyond their own child's classroom; and the fact that there are more intermediate students included in the group may be a reflection of the fact that these particular parents are all members of the schools' parents' groups which is a position that parents may not feel comfortable assuming until they and their children have been involved with the school for a period time.

A number of factors seem to bear on the level of involvement of parents. Clearly, having young children at home limits the involvement a mother might have in the school and the entry of the last child often opens opportunities that did not exist previously. Similarly, as their children continue to grow, other opportunities arise, and parents of older children often seek a return to work outside of the home, and thus reduce the time they have available for the school. Particularly interesting however, was the impact of the change in administration at School C. The new principal, with a different vision of the role of parents in education, allowed parents to become involved to the degree that they really desired, and their enthusiasm for both their own activities and for the principal, speaks volumes for the role of the principal in facilitating parent involvement.
7.3 WHY DO SOME PARENTS PLAY ONLY A MINIMAL ROLE IN THE SCHOOLS?

It was not the purpose of this paper to establish a definitive list of reasons why there are parents who have only minimal contact with the school. Nevertheless, it is interesting to examine the reasons advanced by the participants. What do these parents, who themselves are very heavily involved with their schools, perceive to be the reasons for some other parents maintaining only a limited participation in their children's school? What impediments do these five principals perceive exist as barriers to parent involvement?

A related question was posed under question 4.4 (see page 177) when respondents were asked to provide suggested reasons why some parents are not able to work with their children on school work at home.

Findings

Among the five principals, a number of reasons were advanced for parents maintaining only a minimal involvement in the school.

A. Working Parents:

All five principals referred to parents working outside of the home as a major factor for their limited involvement. This included single-parent families where the parent was absent from the home during the day, as well as two-parent families where both mother and father hold jobs during the day.

B. Family Stress or Tensions:

For families suffering through economic difficulties, there is probably little energy left for involvement in the school after having met the daily demands of keeping the family together, putting food on the table, and providing clothing for the children. For these families, school necessarily ranks low on the list of priorities. Similarly, families
experiencing the considerable tensions resulting from marital breakdowns, custody battles, and physical abuse have few emotional resources left with which to contribute to the school. This reason was provided by two principals, both of whom work in schools with a fairly high preponderance of families with low socio-economic status.

C. Cultural or Ethnic Factors:

Two principals suggested that in schools with a high preponderance of students from other cultures, many parents hold a somewhat different view of their role vis-à-vis that of the school from the usual North American perception. Members of some cultures are socialized to accept the paramount authority of the school. For such people, school is considered as entirely separate from, and independent of, the family, and these parents would consider it inappropriate for them to interfere in the education system.

D. Intimidation or Fear of the School:

Three principals identified a feeling of being threatened by the school as a reason for some parents absenting themselves from the school. For many, this attitude may be the result of poor experiences in their own schooling that results in a generally negative outlook as adults. For others, it may be that their experiences regarding their own children, especially children in difficulty, has meant that they are involved with the school only in negative situations and these experiences have not been pleasant for them. In turn, they are not inclined to contribute positively to an institution that they may feel has repeatedly attacked them. Similarly, there may also be an element of embarrassment for parents whose children are frequently in trouble at school.

E. Apathy or Disinterest:

Three principals suggested that there was a body of parents who just had no particular interest in the school or in the education of their children. Many reasons were advanced to explain this disinterest, but as with most causes, it is more that likely an
interweaving of a number of elements that ultimately results in parents having little to do with the school.

F. Other Interests/Too Busy:

Finally two principals suggested that there are parents who are just too busy with other interests to devote much time to the school. These are often people who have broader community interests than just the school, or are so involved with their own lives and activities that their children's school takes a rather low place in their priorities.

In concert with the principals, parents also identified most of the above-noted factors as barriers to parent involvement. Thirteen parents recognized working parents, both single-parent and two-parent families as one group whose involvement tended to be minimal. No parents however, suggested family stress as a hindrance to the participation of parents in the school, most likely due to a lack of personal knowledge on the part of this particular set of parents. Only one parent acknowledged cultural differences as an impediment, while three suggested that intimidation or fear of the school based upon past personal experiences would tend to keep parents away from participation. One of those three parents however, also suggested that the presence in and around the school of a large number of ex-teachers whom she considered as "the experts", might also be an inhibiting factor for some parents. Five parents pointed to a lack of interest in, and sometimes apathy towards, their children's education on the part of some parents and suggested that this might arise from cultural factors, but also from a basic philosophy of maintaining a separation of the family from the school. Finally, three parents suggested that there are parents who are just too busy with other activities in their lives to be involved with their children's school, and parent participation was a low priority for such parents. Allied with this group, were parents who in the past had been actively involved but whose interests had changed and whose attention was now directed to other activities outside of the school.
Beyond these six factors mentioned above, the parents were able to suggest several additional barriers to the involvement of parents in education.

G. Having Young Children At Home:

Six parents pointed to the fact that when there are pre-school aged children in the home, a mother’s ability to be involved and volunteer time to the school is substantially curtailed. All six pointed out that it was only when their own youngest child entered the school system, that they were able to devote the time to parent involvement that they were presently giving.

H. Personality Factors:

Three parents suggested that for parents who were insecure, shy, or otherwise uncertain as to how they would be received, entering the school and becoming involved with many different people could be overwhelming, and these types of individuals would tend to maintain a distance between themselves and the school. All three parents suggested however, that there were ways that other parents as well as school personnel could help these people make the transition into the school and identify ways in which they could be involved and feel that they were making a valuable contribution.

I. English As A Second Language:

For parents who are new to the country, and especially for mothers who are frequently the last member of a family to assimilate a new language, the lack of facility with English is a powerful hindrance to parent involvement. Three parents mentioned this language barrier as one factor that kept a number of parents from being able to participate in the school.

J. The Evolutionary Nature of Volunteer Participation:

Two parents pointed to the changing levels of involvement that some parents exhibited over time. As their children entered the school and progressed through the
grades, many parents increased their involvement and broadened the range of areas in
which they participated. Thus, there will be parents who are presently in their initial years
in the school and their participation might now be minimal as they take time to
established themselves as members of the school community and as they evaluate the role
they might play in the school. Over time, their involvement will likely increase.

K. Parent "Burn-out":

After years of volunteer service in a variety of capacities, some parents reach the
point where they simply have had enough and feel it is time to allow other parents to
assume responsibilities. Two parents saw this as an important factor in reducing the
involvement of certain parents in the school, as they became tired and withdrew from
high-profile involvement.

L. Child-care Needs for Attendance at Evening Functions:

Even when their children are all attending school, there are parents who are
precluded from attending evening functions (for meetings, concerts, etc.) because of their
need for child-minding. In School B, this issue is already being addressed as the parents' group is employing older students to provide baby-sitting service so that parents can attend council and general parent meetings. Parents in other schools appear less fortunate however.

M. Union Relations:

In School E particularly, the issue of labour relations continues to interfere with
the involvement of parents particularly in volunteer capacities in classrooms. As
described in Chapter Three (see page 61), ten years ago this school experienced considerable union strife with tensions developing between paid teacher aides and volunteer parents. The residue of this discord remains as a factor mitigating against parent involvement.
N. Lack of Involvement of Fathers:

Finally, two parents commented on the fact that few fathers were able to participate in the school, with heavy work commitments usually cited as the reason.

Discussion

The list of reasons proposed by both principals and parents contains no surprises. Indeed the majority of reasons given for parents not participating in education are all contained in some form or other in the literature. What is notable however, is the absence of some of the factors working against parents being involved that are mentioned by several researchers. James (1989), in her review of current literature, includes among barriers to parent involvement, four reasons that were not mentioned by the participants in this study: the organizational structure of the school; teachers' attitudes; lack of appropriate teacher training; and territorialism. The fact that these four items are not even hinted at in the list generated by these principals and parents is probably as clear an indication as anything, that in these five high-involvement schools, these particular barriers have already been breached. The organization of these schools has been made flexible enough to accommodate the various needs of parents who wish to be involved. Teacher attitudes are extremely positive towards the inclusion of parents in the education enterprise. Teachers have overcome any lack of training they may have received through evaluating and implementing their own philosophical beliefs. And these are teachers who work easily with each other as well as with parents: they are secure in their role in the school and feel no need to guard their "territory".

Fruchter (1984) also suggested that when parents are offered opportunities to participate, the avenues presented are often formal and only symbolic. Again, this does not appear to be the case in these five schools. All are described by parents as "open," "friendly," and "welcoming," qualities that are the antithesis of "formal," and the roles
that these parents described themselves as filling are considerably more that simply “symbolic.”

Nevertheless, there are some negative factors operating even in these schools. At first glance, it would appear to be self-evident that working parents would not be able to, or want to, be involved to any great degree. Moles (1987) however found quite the opposite to be true. His research revealed that single and married parents as well as working parents all share the same levels of interest and willingness to help children learn; and Epstein (1987) uncovered the fact that single parents spend more time helping their children than do married parents. As well, she suggests that only two to five percent of parents have problems that are so severe as to interfere with their desire or ability to work with their children and be active participants in education. What this research suggests therefore, is that educators must avoid falling into the trap of imputing reasons for parent actions, without first establishing the true facts.

The principal of School E sums it up as follows:

You know, as open as I think we try to make them, we have to be really aware that parents don’t easily come in and blend into a school setting unless they’ve been lucky enough to be...in a school that’s had a fairly good parent involvement.... And so by getting them involved in a lot of different ways, and in a lot of community-oriented ways, family-oriented ways, they get to know the teachers, they get to know other community members, they get to know me, and then they’re much more comfortable in...considering the school as a centre....


Findings

Detailed descriptions of each of the five schools included in the study may be found in Chapter 3. From those profiles, information that bears upon this question has been summarized in Table 13 following.
TABLE 13

SCHOOL AND PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS BEARING ON LEVELS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE FIVE STUDIED SCHOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>SCHOOL A</th>
<th>SCHOOL B</th>
<th>SCHOOL C</th>
<th>SCHOOL D</th>
<th>SCHOOL E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic Level of the Community</td>
<td>Low middle &amp; working class</td>
<td>low middle &amp; working class (including many welfare families)</td>
<td>Professional &amp; upper middle class</td>
<td>upper middle &amp; middle class</td>
<td>middle &amp; low middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Population</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designation as a Community School</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of Principal</td>
<td>mid-60's</td>
<td>early 50's</td>
<td>mid-40's</td>
<td>early 40's</td>
<td>early 40's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of Principal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Experience of Principal</td>
<td>20+ years</td>
<td>10+ years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>10+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure of Principal in this School</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Some facts have been extrapolated from other information provided during the interview process.

Discussion

If in fact, these schools rightly deserve their reputations for high levels of parent involvement, (and all the information studied to this point certainly supports this designation), then perusal of the information contained in Table 13 would seem to suggest that none of the listed characteristics has a particularly profound impact upon that reputation. While none of the schools included significant numbers of children from extremely wealthy neighbourhoods nor from extremely deprived areas, but rather served
various components of middle class society, the fact that a school serves one or other of the segments of that particular part of the social spectrum appears to have little or no effect upon the preparedness of that school to involve parents. Indeed, the literature points out that whether or not parents are well-off or struggling financially, and whether or not they work outside the home, they all share common concerns for their children: that their children receive the best education possible and that the parents are kept informed about how they are succeeding (Storey, 1989). Epstein's research (1987) also directs attention to the fact that the successful schools she identified, involved all parents whether or not they were well-educated and whether or not they were members of the work-force, and this research is supported by the likes of Moles (1987) and others. Her reading of the situation is that the most critical factor is the teaching staff, not the parents or the community.

In a similar vein, neither the size of the school nor its designation as a community school appear not to be significant influences on the involvement of parents. As has been noted several times throughout this paper, a key factor affecting the inclusion of parents appears to be the "friendly atmosphere" or "family-feeling" that these schools seem to exude and it would appear logical that a smaller school might be able to establish this kind of atmosphere more easily than a larger institution. However, two of the schools included in this study have a student population in the neighbourhood of six hundred students, and they both clearly involve parents to at least the same extent as the smallest school that was examined. As well, one of these larger schools is a designated community school, while the other is what might be considered a "standard" school, so this appears not to be an important feature governing the level of parent involvement. Again, the critical factor would appear to be the human element of the school.

Amongst the five principals, there is also no readily discernible characteristic that would set them apart from other principals. Their ages span almost twenty-five years;
their experience ranges from four years to twenty years; and their tenures in their present schools extend from one year to six years. As well, both male and female principals are included in the group. It can be inferred therefore, that principals who will be successful in involving parents, arrive in their positions with characteristics already in place that enable them to very quickly establish their philosophy and to sustain it over a period of time and in a variety of schools.

If quantitative characteristics such as these do not have a significant impact upon the ability of a school to achieve a high level of parent participation, what must emerge then is the thesis that the personnel in these schools bring with them certain innate personal qualities that enable them to establish the necessary rapport between the institution and the parents it serves, and to establish those practices that draw those parents into a significant role in the education of their youngsters. Key among those personnel is of course the principal. Some of those qualities and practices have already been alluded to and will be enumerated in greater detail in the following section.

THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL IN PARENT INVOLVEMENT

8.1 HOW DO THESE PRINCIPALS VIEW THEIR ROLE IN ENHANCING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR SCHOOLS?

Findings

As each of the principal interviews drew to a close, the principal was asked to summarize his view of the part he played in facilitating the participation of parents in his school. While much specific information had already been gleaned throughout the interviews and has already been related in this paper, it is interesting to consider their somewhat more global perceptions of their roles as principals in reference to parent involvement.
Without exception each of these principals viewed his role as one of facilitator and supporter. They fulfilled this role in a variety of ways.

First of all, they worked consistently to establish an atmosphere in the school that was welcoming to parents, and that allowed parents to enter the school and participate in the school’s activities as a partner that was welcomed and appreciated. In each of these schools, one clear indication of the welcome extended to parents, is the fact that parents are openly welcomed in the staff room, to help themselves to a cup of coffee, engage in casual conversation with teachers and with other parents, and are treated as welcome visitors by all members of the staff. School E has gone so far as to re-name the staff room, the “Community Room”. One parent expressed her reaction to the welcoming atmosphere in her school as follows:

...the atmosphere here is very friendly—it’s a nice place to be—so you don’t mind helping out. And when you’re appreciated for what you do, you always tend to want to give more.

Once such an environment is established in the school, parents will readily avail themselves of the opportunities to come into the school, to make contacts with teachers, and to become involved in the activities of the school and classrooms. This atmosphere also facilitates teachers making positive contacts with parents, and opens up opportunities for those teachers to include parents in their programs and activities.

In supporting the establishment of this friendly atmosphere, these principals have implemented strategies and routines that bring parents into the school. In one instance, this was the encouragement of community functions such as receptions, dinners, and dances. During such events as these the principal is able to continue the work of breaching the barriers that so frequently separate schools from their parents. One principal makes it very clear what his real agenda is in encouraging and participating in such occasions.
He stated:

...we’re breaking down all those barriers. Staff members attend. They get to know parents; parents get to know staff members as people not just as their son or daughter’s teacher. And all those barriers start falling. And I make it very clear to parents and to teachers that, while I might be enjoying myself at the dance or at the wine and cheese or at the Christmas concert, that my ulterior motive is [that] I want to break down those barriers. It creates some problems in that first.... I admit it doesn’t make my life easier. You know if I close the door and keep everybody away, that’s easier....

These principals also see their role as setting an example and being a role-model for the rest of the staff. Principal B suggested:

I think that it’s like raising children. Example. Example. Example. That’s the only way to raise kids. It’s the only way to get the staff.... It’s the attitude that I show towards parents I think. That’s the most important thing.

By involving parents in the areas of school operations for which they are responsible, principals send clear signals to their teachers that parents are to be considered as critical facets of the school culture. Principal B again:

I think, I have to set a tone. I have to be open. Parents have to be able to come and see me. I have to be accessible to parents at any time. I have to be willing to do the same things I am asking my staff to do. I couldn’t possibly do all the contacts and do...I mean, there’s just no way I could do that. So all I can do is sort of hope that this permeates down.

Thus principals make it a point to meet and greet parents when they enter the school or enter the premises. They attend all functions involving parents in order to establish and maintain important contacts. And they enlist the support of their parents’ councils in establishing and highlighting the importance of the parents’ role in the school. Such an effort is particularly evident at School E where, as remarked on earlier, the school’s parents’ council has established as one of its three goals for the year, to increase the involvement of parents.

These principals also make it a point to encourage their teachers to involve parents through encouraging efforts that are already being made by other teachers on the
staff. By publicly supporting these teachers and openly praising their efforts, they again are transmitting a vitally significant message to their teachers and that is their belief in the importance of a participatory role for parents. They offer guidance; they provide advice; they lend assistance; and they involve themselves in activities designed to include parents. In these ways they are able to help ensure the successful implementation of parent involvement plans.

In addition, when selecting new staff members, these principals direct paramount consideration to identifying teachers who are prepared for, and enthusiastic about, the involvement of parents in the schools’ work with children.

Finally, these principals all appear to have a clearly articulated philosophy of education that not only includes, but emphasizes, the role of parents as important participants in the education enterprise. As well, they all welcome the variety of opportunities that arise to present and clarify this philosophy to both teachers and parents. Beyond the statement of a philosophy however, is very clear evidence that these principals actively put their beliefs into practice, and that it governs their daily activities around the school, among the parents, and in the community. The principal of School B stated it as follows:

I think the most important thing here is that we not only preach the philosophy of being an open school but we are an open school. Parents can come into this building—any room at any time—and walk in and sit down and I don’t mean interrupt a lesson, but they can go to any class they want.

Discussion

While there are many activities specific to each type of parent involvement, that are undertaken by principals to enhance and facilitate parent involvement, there are a number of more general approaches that bear on the entire issue of whether or not parents will be participants in their children’s school. These principals first of all have a clearly
enunciated philosophy of involving parents in education. They work to establish a warm, friendly, and welcoming atmosphere in their schools. They themselves include parents in a variety of roles in the areas of the school for which they hold responsibility. They lead by example. They initiate parent involvement activities on the whole school level. They support and praise their teachers’ efforts to include parents in their programs. And they work tirelessly in all aspects of their work to promote a culture that includes parent involvement in education.

8.2 WHAT PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES DO THESE PRINCIPALS HAVE IN COMMON?

Findings

Permeating all of the responses given by the principals, but more particularly, specifically identified by the fifteen interviewed parents, are a number of personal attributes that appear to be shared by these principals of high involvement schools. Such adjectives as “enthusiastic”, “open”, “friendly”, and “approachable” were frequently presented as descriptors of these principals. They were acknowledged by the parents as holding prime responsibility for the establishment of the open and friendly atmosphere that the parents identified as one of the most critical factors in drawing parents into the school to become active participants in the organization. They all spoke of principals who were accessible; who were easy to talk to; and who were active and responsive listeners. They were acknowledged as administrators who acted quickly and sincerely upon concerns as well as commendations expressed by parents. They are described as enthusiastic, personable, and out-going; making people comfortable in their presence; having “a warm way” about them; being encouraging and diplomatic. One parent in particular, described one quality that she especially valued in her principal when she explained, “...he’s up-front, and he lets you know what he thinks...right off the bat....” It is notable too, that each of these principals is referred to by parents by his first name and each principal stated that he made it a point to introduce himself to parents by his first
They also maintained a first name basis with parents, a clear indication of the efforts these principals are making to sever the barriers of formality that can hinder the relationship between the school and its parents.

They were all noted as well, for being present at all functions of the school from productions, through classroom curriculum meetings, to evening work bees. But more than that, they were distinguished for being actively involved in all the activities in the school and for being visible and available during out-of-school hours when parents were either bringing their children to school or picking them up at the end of the day. They also made themselves accessible whenever parents needed to speak with them, and several parents spoke highly of the “open door policy” of the principal, an approach that appears in these school to be a reality and not merely a meaningless phrase. One principal described his standard procedure when phone calls were received in the school office. He has instructed his secretary to put all calls directly through to him, that no calls are to be screened prior to his answering the telephone, and that no person is to be kept on “hold” on the telephone for more than just a few moments. If he is unavailable, then a message is taken and he returns the call as soon as he is able. This procedure was also confirmed by the parents in his school.

Similarly, a second principal described his practice of responding within the day, to any parent who had contacted him with a problem or concern. That telephone call to the parent might be simply to indicate that he did not yet have an answer to their concern, but the real message was that the issue was being acted upon and was not being forgotten. He did not leave the building at the end of the day until all these calls had been placed.

Another principal made it a point of being at the entrance of the school when children were arriving or departing for the day, and was therefore available to any parent who wished to speak with him. Probably more important, however, is the fact that the
principal was there to extend to parents as well as to the children, a simple friendly greeting. But the significant positive effects of this kind of openness and friendliness were attested to by the parents in that school who were interviewed. Without exception, they acknowledged this principal as an especially friendly, out-going individual, one who was easy to talk with, but as well, one to whom parents willingly extended a warm, friendly hand in return.

The same warmth and friendliness was also extended to the students of the school by each of these principals, and walking with them through the halls and classrooms of the school it was notable how easily the students related to the principal, and how the principal knew each child and displayed an obvious sincere interest in what each was doing. This relationship with the children, would be transmitted home to parents and the rapport established between the principal and the students would be translated into an increased level of confidence on the part of the parents. While this was not the overriding consideration in their actions, these principals quite clearly recognized that children carry important messages home with them.

These principals also make it a point to meet and greet parents and students new to the school, take the time to show them through the building, and thereby begin establishing the rapport that will be the cornerstone of that family's positive involvement with the school.

Finally, none of these principals appears to maintain a rigid appointment book. When a parent expresses a need to meet with them, whether it be by way of the telephone, or by arriving unannounced at the office counter, these principals make it a practice to clear their schedules and make time for the parent. Parents and their concerns or questions are clearly recognized as of paramount important by these principals, and they go out of their way to make time for parents. When parents are made to feel that they
are being received as valued members of the school community in this way, they view the school as an open, welcoming institution; and it becomes one in which they feel they are valued as having an important role to play in the school, and one in which they in turn wish to be involved.

Discussion

Personality appears to be a significant characteristic of these successful principals; indeed the principal's personality seemed to be an essential characteristic in the eyes of the parents. The success of a principal in involving parents in the school seems to be predicated to a significant degree upon the basic personal qualities of that individual: friendliness; openness; sincerity; approachability. Principals who are open to meeting with and actively listening to parents, who make it obvious that they value parents as important members of the school community, and administrators who ensure that they keep themselves visible in the school, are looked upon as opening the school to the involvement of parents in significant roles in the education of their children. In these schools, the formalized client-professional relationship that parents have so often complained about (James, 1989 and Lindle, 1989) does not exist, and these principals have gone to considerable lengths to break down many of the barriers that can separate schools from their communities.

Their overall attitude towards parents is also an important, though probably obvious, factor in involving parents in education. What is significant however, is that these principals make it abundantly clear to parents that they value them as important members of the school community. When parents are received in this way, they come to view the school as an open, welcoming institution, and it becomes a place where they feel they are valued as having an significant role to play in the school, and is one in which they in turn want to play a part (Eicholtz, 1984; Storey, 1989; Wiles, et al., 1981).
Principals’ personalities and attitudes towards parent involvement are vitally important. The true benefactors of course, are the children.

8.3 WHAT DO THESE PRINCIPALS DO TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF PARENTS INVOLVED WITH THE SCHOOL?

Findings

There is a wide variety of practices that principals use to increase and enhance the involvement of parents in schools, and the specific practices employed by the principals included in this study will be enumerated in more detail on the following pages. There are however, several fundamental and significant characteristics that appear to govern all the efforts of these principals to involve parents in their schools, and that appear to have a substantial overriding impact upon the participation of parents in these schools.

The first of these characteristics is the personal qualities that these principals possess as delineated in the discussion of the preceding question. They are all very outgoing, friendly, and welcoming individuals whose presence throughout the school and in all aspects of the school’s functioning, produces the positive atmosphere that appears to be so critical in drawing parents into the education venture.

A second overriding characteristic, is that each of these principals possesses a clearly articulated philosophy of education; a philosophy that identifies parents as an important and integral thread in the fabric of the school. Each of these principals also has a clear vision of what he wants his school to become, and that vision contains a clearly defined and enunciated role for parents on a variety of levels. Each of these principals recognized that if schools are to work with children as whole beings and not just as receivers of information and raw material for skill development, then schools need to work closely with parents in all aspects of education. Accordingly, communication with parents receives important attention. Similarly, these principals recognize and encourage
a variety of volunteer roles for parents to fulfill in their schools, and encourage their teachers to include parent involvement as a regular feature in their curriculum planning. As well, the work of these principals with parents serving on the parents' advisory committees, provides them with valuable opportunities to establish liaison and rapport with parents and to not only transmit important messages about the school, but also to receive impressions and opinions from the parent community.

Finally, these principals view their schools as an integral part of the broader community and in at least four of the cases, considerable effort is expended by the school to involve the entire community of which the school is a part, in the workings of the school. These efforts range from providing current information about the school to all members of the community to including community-wide activities in the school's calendar of events. It is notable as well, that the designation of a school as a community school is not a necessary prerequisite for this attitude to prevail.

Beyond the global factors such as those just described, certain specific practices are employed by principals that expand their effectiveness in increasing and enhancing parent involvement. A compendium of these practices follows, organized under the heading of each of Joyce Epstein's five classifications of parent involvement.

ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES THAT FACILITATE AND ENHANCE PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Type 1: The Basic Obligations of Parents (Parenting)

1.1 Effective principals ensure that they are fully aware of the complete range of opportunities that are available in the community for parents to enhance their parenting skills.

1.2 Effective principals include in their regular school newsletters, articles about child development and child-rearing, including articles taken from educational periodicals as well as items written by themselves.
1.3 Effective principals include in the Parent Handbooks given to every parent at the beginning of the year, advice regarding school expectations, as well as suggestions of ways in which parents might help their children with homework. These handbooks also outline the resources available to parents seeking assistance.

1.4 Effective principals keep themselves fully knowledgeable of the parents and students in their schools and their home/family situations, and are able to recognize parents in need and direct the appropriate resources to them.

1.5 Effective principals, at September orientations for parents include advice regarding the parent’s role in the education of children.

Type 2: The Basic Obligations of Schools (Communicating)

2.1 Effective principals are fully aware of the full variety of communication links that exist between the school and the home, and work to ensure that all of these avenues convey the desired messages about the school.

The School Newsletter

2.2 Effective principals take the measure of their communities when developing the form and style of their school newsletters so that the messages are conveyed clearly and that the school’s image is enhanced.

Soliciting Parent Opinion

2.3 Effective principals work to create an open, welcoming and accepting atmosphere within the school that allows parents to feel comfortable in expressing their opinions.

2.4 Effective principals make themselves available to parents at every possible opportunity so parents are able to speak openly to them about their concerns and ideas.

2.5 Effective principals make regular use of such formal opinion gathering devices as tear-offs on newsletters, surveys, and questionnaires in order to solicit parents’ opinions.

Teacher-to-Parent Communication

2.6 Effective principals lead by way of example in encouraging frequent and open contact with parents.

2.7 Effective principals encourage individual teachers to produce classroom newsletters and to be available to parents when they bring their children to school and when they pick them up after school.

2.8 Effective principals encourage their teachers to make frequent telephone calls to parents in order to deliver positive messages about their students, as well as to discuss problems.
Report Cards

2.9 Effective principals devote time and energy in working with their teachers on the skills of writing effective anecdotal report card comments that are clear, concise, and free of educational jargon.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

2.10 Effective principals work to create an open, welcoming atmosphere that allows parents to feel that they are welcome at any time to meet with teachers to discuss their children's progress, or to air any concerns they may have; that they do not have to wait for a formal parent-teacher interview.

2.11 Effective principals support their teachers in the conduct of parent-teacher interviews through such approaches as providing a modest reduction in the instructional time during conferencing periods; and by such other approaches as for example, taking responsibility for all students for an hour in the afternoon thus freeing up additional time for interviews, and by preparing supper for staff members on those days when interviews are scheduled into the evening.

2.12 Effective principals recognize the need to provide time for working parents to attend conferences by scheduling them at times that are convenient for parents, through giving parents the opportunity to indicate when they would prefer to attend, and through scheduling conferences into the evenings.

2.13 Effective principals recognize the need to make provision for non-English-speaking parents through a variety of approaches including the use of district translators and the assistance of community members with facility in other languages.

Other Means of Communicating Pupil Progress

2.14 Effective principals establish and maintain an open, welcoming atmosphere in the school that enables parents to easily make informal contacts with teachers and to remain knowledgeable about their children's progress in school.

2.15 Effective principals model their belief in maintaining communication with parents and encourage their teachers to maintain open dialogue with individual parents through supporting the use of such measures as casual conversations with parents, frequent telephone calls, the sending of work and test papers home for parent perusal, classroom newsletters, and open houses.

2.16 Effective principals develop school-wide programs and encourage teachers in their classrooms, to recognize and highlight the positive things that students do, in order to provide a balance against the negative messages that frequently need to be delivered to students and parents.
Other Avenues of Communication

2.17 Effective principals, through their own actions, provide role-models for teachers in establishing and maintaining strong, frequent, informal contacts with parents.

Type 3: Parent Involvement at School (Volunteering)

3.1 Effective principals profess, and practise, a clearly articulated educational philosophy which acknowledges the vital role parents can play as volunteers on a variety of levels in the school and which recognizes the positive effects this involvement has upon students and their learning.

3.2 Effective principals support and encourage the participation of parents as volunteers in a wide variety of areas in the school.

3.3 Effective principals work to create an environment that is supportive of teachers involving parents in volunteer capacities in the school and in their classrooms, and an environment in which parents feel comfortable, appreciated, and rewarded in contributing to the education of their children.

3.4 Effective principals actively support their teachers in their quest to involve parents in their classrooms by closely monitoring the roles parents are fulfilling and assuming some of the more difficult aspects of dealing with parents whose presence in a classroom may not be advantageous to the children or to the relationship between the teacher and the parent.

3.5 Effective principals actively seek and promote opportunities to bring parents and other members of the community into the school to share their talents, knowledge, and special expertise. By leading through example, they are able to support and encourage individual classroom teachers to do the same in their own areas.

3.6 Effective principals issue open invitations to parents, and encourage parents, to attend a wide variety of activities in the school including regular assemblies, school-wide and classroom open houses, and regular productions; and create a welcoming atmosphere for all parents entering the school to attend such functions.

3.7 Effective principals encourage teachers to provide opportunities for parents to visit their classrooms and participate with students in such undertakings as unit culmination activities and classroom open houses.

3.8 Effective principals, in conjunction with their parents' groups, organize school and community social functions in order to enhance the rapport between the school, its parents, and the community at large.

3.9 Effective principals select teachers for their schools who share their philosophy and vision of the role of parents as volunteers in a broad variety of capacities in the school, including in classrooms.
3.10 Effective principals provide leadership to their teachers by way of example, through relating personal experiences, and by identifying other role-models among members of the staff.

**Type 4: Parent Involvement in Learning Activities at Home**

4.1 Effective principals provide general advice to parents through their regular newsletters, regarding ways in which parents can help students with homework assignments, and techniques they can employ to help their children improve their academic skills.

4.2 Effective principals are enthusiastic supporters of teacher efforts when classroom teachers undertake projects to include parents learning alongside their children, and identify them as models for others to emulate.

**Type 5: Parent Involvement in Governance and Advocacy**

(Representing other parents)

5.1 Effective principals work with their parents' groups to establish an atmosphere that is open and non-threatening in order to facilitate input from as broad a variety of parents as possible and to allow parents to feel free to express their opinions and contribute their ideas in an environment that is welcoming and comfortable.

5.2 Effective principals employ a wide variety of active approaches to ensure that all members of the school community are included in the decision-making processes; and make an effort to ensure that the broad range of opinions, philosophies, and outlooks are included in the decision-making equation.

5.3 Effective principals work to keep their parents' groups aware of the need to extend their vision beyond the members of the immediate group and seek opinions and ideas from all sectors of the school community.

5.4 Effective principals establish and maintain a clear and unambiguous definition of their role as participants in parents' group meetings, ensuring that parents understand and recognize that these are the parents' meetings, and are not functioning under the control of the principal.

5.5 Effective principals work consciously to establish a comfortable, relaxed rapport between themselves and their parents' groups that enables them to provide information and guidance as required, while at the same time avoiding the appearance or suggestion that they are leading the group.
The Impact of Parent Involvement

6.1 Effective principals are fully knowledgeable of current research regarding the effects of parent involvement upon parent and student attitudes, and upon student achievement; and work to implement a high degree of parent participation in their schools for the benefit of their students.

General Issues in Parent Involvement

7.1 Effective principals ensure that clauses are included in their schools’ statements of philosophy and mission statements, that identify the importance of the role of parents in education, and which clearly define an active role for parents in the school.

7.2 Effective principals publish their schools’ statements of philosophy and mission statements in such vehicles as the Parents’ Handbook and in their newsletters, so that all parents can understand and appreciate the important role they can play, and encourage parents to become active participants in their children’s education.

7.3 Effective principals work to break down the traditional organizational factors that hinder the entrance of parents into the education enterprise by eliminating as much as possible, the formality and inflexibility that frequently work to obstruct parent involvement.

The Role of the Principal

8.1 Effective principals have a clearly articulated philosophy of education that includes recognition of the vital role parents should play in education.

8.2 Effective principals have a clear vision of their role as principal in providing support and encouragement, and to being a role-model for their teachers as the school works to increase and enhance parent involvement.

8.3 Effective principals select new teaching staff for their schools with particular consideration directed to their commitment to the involvement of parents in the education program on a broad variety of levels.

8.4 Effective principals actively seek means to draw parents into the school to experience first-hand the openness and friendliness of the school, and to articulate the school’s desire to have them included as an integral part of the process of education.

8.5 Effective principals work to establish and maintain an open, warm and welcoming atmosphere in the school where the “open door policy” is a reality, not merely a cliche.
8.6 Effective principals work consciously and consistently to create and maintain an open, friendly, and non-threatening atmosphere in their schools in which parents, teachers and administrators are seen as co-educators, and in which parents feel comfortable in approaching the school and entering into a variety of parent involvement activities in the organization.

8.7 Effective principals make a particular effort to greet families new to the school, guide them through the building, and immediately begin the process of establishing the rapport that will encourage these parents’ involvement with the school and in their children’s education.

Discussion

The foregoing is far from an exhaustive list of administrative practices that increase and enhance parent involvement in elementary education. It is, however, an extensive enumeration of those practices identified in the five schools included in this study. Clearly, these five principals employ a wide variety of highly effective strategies as witnessed by the high level of parent involvement in their schools.

Nevertheless, even in these high involvement schools, there remain areas where parent participation could be increased or improved, and recommendations to assist principals in this regard are included in Chapter Five.

SUMMARY

From the evidence collected during the conduct of this study, it is clear that each of these five schools rightfully deserves its recognition for a high level of parent involvement. In each school, there are parents involved in each of Joyce Epstein’s five areas of parent involvement; and both principals and parents recognized the considerable impact that such involvement has upon student achievement, as well as upon student and parent attitudes. Nevertheless, it is also apparent that even in these schools, there are limits to the extent of parental involvement and that parent participation could be expanded both within the areas in which parents are presently playing a role, as well as into areas not yet explored.
This study has also attempted to identify the practices that the principals in these schools employed to increase and enhance the participation of parents. A list of fifty administrative practices has been identified and these are catalogued above.

It is however, also apparent from the examination of these schools, that there are yet further actions and approaches that even these effective principal could and should undertake in order to broaden the involvement or parents in education. Accordingly, a number of recommendations are contained in Chapter Five which follows.

The inventory of effective practices contained herein, together with the set of recommendations contained in the following chapter, form an extensive compendium of effective principal practices which can be used as a framework against which principals can measure their own strategies and effectiveness.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY

The literature is abundantly clear: the involvement of parents in education has a significant impact upon the efficacy of schools in their quest to provide high quality education for children. These outcomes are most clearly exemplified in more positive student and parent attitudes and in improved student achievement when parents are allowed to play a significant role in the education process. Nevertheless, there is also other research that points to the fact that in actual practice, very few parents are invited to be participants in their children’s education; and very few schools recognize this element of the school community as a critical resource to be tapped for the substantial benefit of students. The purpose of this paper therefore, was to identify those administrative practices that enable, enhance and increase the involvement of parents in education.

Joyce Epstein is distinguished as one of the premier educators involved in the identification and definition of the roles parents can play, and should be playing, in the education of their children. She has delineated five major areas in which parent should be involved. They are described as follows:

- **Type 1** The Basic Obligations of Parents (Parenting)
- **Type 2** The Basic Obligations of Schools (Communicating)
- **Type 3** Parent Involvement at School (Volunteering)
- **Type 4** Parent Involvement in Learning Activities at Home
- **Type 5** Parent Involvement in Governance and Advocacy (Representing Other Parents)
THE PROBLEMS

Two major issues regarding parent involvement have been examined in this paper. First of all, the study has attempted to evaluate the level of parent involvement in each of the five schools selected for this study. More significantly however, it has sought to define the practices that the principals of these schools employ in order to promote the involvement of parents in their schools. Working from the thesis that effective principals utilize certain identifiable strategies to facilitate the inclusion of parents in the education process, the study has examined the issue of parent involvement within the framework of Joyce Epstein’s five classifications noted above.

The research for this study therefore, has been guided by two fundamental questions:

A. To what extent, and in what ways, are parents presently involved in each of the selected schools?

and

B. What administrative practices are employed by the principals of those schools to facilitate and enhance the involvement of parents in the process of education?

These two broad areas were investigated through a series of forty-eight sub-problems. These questions were posed in order to elicit specific information regarding the various types of parent involvement present, including the areas in which parents were involved in each of the schools, the level of parent participation present in each school, and the behaviours of principals that served to facilitate the involvement. The specific questions that were explored are listed in Chapter One.
In order to undertake the study, it was necessary to first of all identify a set of schools in which parents were already involved to a significant degree. Permission to conduct the study was sought from School District Number 41 (Burnaby), a large urban school district that included a substantial number of elementary schools of varying sizes and in a variety of socio-economic and geographic locations. Once that permission had been received, senior officials in the district office were requested to nominate schools which in their opinions, enjoyed a reputation for a high level of parent involvement. From the schools so identified, the five most frequently named schools became the subjects for this study.

Personal interviews were conducted with the principal of each of the selected schools, as well as with three parents from each school. These interviews, which were from one to one and one half hours in duration, were recorded on audio tape for later transcription and interpretation. The analysis involved classifying and organizing the data that had been gathered according to the topics of the forty-eight questions posed at the outset of the study. Organizing the data in this way allowed for comparisons to be made between principals and parents, among the five principals, among the fifteen parents, as well as among the five separate schools.

ESSENTIAL FINDINGS

The major findings of the study are herein summarized.

LEVELS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE INVESTIGATED SCHOOLS

From the data collected, it would appear that these five schools rightfully enjoy their reputations for involving parents as a established aspect of their operations, and the
presence of parents on the premises and their participation in a variety of activities are regular features of the schools' organizations.

Within this group of five schools, there is a general commonality in that involvement. All schools reported significant levels of parent volunteerism (Type 3), both within classrooms as well as in other areas of the school such as the library and the computer laboratory. Parents were also active as volunteers for such special occasions as hot lunch days, sports days, and after-school performances.

The parents' advisory council (Type 5) is another area of significant involvement in these schools, though the number of parents actually in attendance at the regular meetings appears to be fairly constant amongst the five schools, with each school reporting attendance figures in the range of twenty to twenty-five, in spite of their varying sizes.

Parents are also the recipients of the standard communication instruments commonly in use in schools. These include regular newsletters, report cards, parent-teacher conferences, telephone calls from teachers, and the like (Type 2). However, while each principal reported on various approaches to soliciting parental opinions, communication between the home and the school appears to be largely one-way: from the school to the parent.

Few efforts appear to have been made by these schools however, to assume a leadership role in working with parents to enhance their skills in parenting (Type 1). Similarly, there appeared to be few instances of parents being enlisted to work with their children on school work at home (Type 4).

Each of these five areas of parent involvement will be explored in further detail on the following pages.
PERCEPTIONS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

From the discussions with both principals and parents, it is evident that even in schools such as these which enjoy reputations for high levels of parent involvement, school personnel and parents tend to possess a rather simplistic view of “Parent Involvement.” In their initial responses when asked to enumerate the ways in which parents participated in the education of their children, both principals and parents limited their suggestions to activities that are essentially volunteer in nature, as well as the work of the parents’ advisory committees. The concept that parents were involved with the school’s communication network and that the school had a part to play with parents in enhancing parenting skills, did not appear to be apparent to the majority of the interviewees, nor did the idea that parents could be playing a significant part in working with their children on school work at home.

TYPE 1: THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF PARENTS (Parenting)

None of the five schools produces its own programs for parents that are designed to assist them to improve their parenting skills. Instead, each of the parents’ consultative committees contracts with community agencies such as family life organizations to provide presentations for their parents. In addition however, in one of the schools the parents’ group had developed a parents’ library which includes materials on child development and child rearing topics; and school counsellors appear generally to have materials available for parents who request them. The principals in these schools use, to varying degrees, their school newsletters and parent handbooks to disseminate some general information regarding parenting themes and make it a point to be as fully knowledgeable as possible of the situations of their parents and students in order to be able to accurately assess their needs and direct community assistance to those who require assistance.
TYPE 2: THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF SCHOOLS (Communicating)

Both the principals and the parents surveyed shared a view of communication that was limited to the more obvious methods employed by schools: newsletters, report cards, parent-teacher conferences, and parent meetings. Few of the participants however, recognized some of the more subtle means through which messages about the school are transmitted as for example the information and impressions children take home with them on a daily basis, and casual conversations with teachers and other school personnel. Nevertheless, these latter avenues can be very powerful message delivery systems.

The regular school newsletter appears to be the major vehicle for informing parents about the school and its programs. There was however, no unanimity of opinion regarding the most desirable format for school newsletters nor the optimum frequency for their publication. Instead, it appears that each principal has created the format that most accurately reflects his or her own style as well as the character of the community. Frequency of distribution appears also to be governed more by the school’s individual needs rather than some research-based criteria.

While it was recognized that it is important for the school to maintain a complete understanding of the opinions and concerns of its parent body, few schools make it a regular practice to fathom parent sentiment. All five schools referred to occasions in the past when they had employed parent questionnaires in order to gather parent opinion, though it appears that such formal strategies are reserved for the occasional major question. In only one school is there a systematic effort made to provide parents with a line through which they can express their ideas and concerns, and that is in a school where the newsletter always includes a tear-off on which parents can react to current issues. In this same school, the principal makes it a point to regularly telephone parents at random so as to listen to their impressions and ideas. The most important factor in
facilitating the gathering of parent opinion however, was identified as an "open atmosphere" in which parents could felt free to come into the school and express their opinions, confident that they would be received with an equal measure of concern by the principal or the teachers. The true "Open Door Policy" therefore is critical if the school is to hear accurately what parents are thinking about the school and education issues.

At the classroom level, these principals encourage their teachers to maintain open communication with their parents by being available to parents during out-of-class times, by making extensive use of the telephone to keep parents informed of the successes of their children as well as to report problems, and by issuing regular classroom newsletters outlining expectations and current programs and activities. As it is on the school level, so on the classroom level, openness is a vitally important factor in effective school-to-parent communication.

Not surprisingly, the report card and the parent-teacher conference were identified as the most common formal means for the school to communicate information to parents about their children’s progress. The effectiveness of the report card seems to depend not so much on the form of the report (that is, anecdotal versus achievement ratings) as it does on the quality of the information included by teachers. In this regard, principals assume a role of providing in-service training for their teachers in the development of effective report card comments that are clear, concise, and devoid of educational jargon.

At least once in the school year, usually in the Autumn, formal parent-teacher conferences are planned in these schools and are organized to include opportunities for working parents and parents who speak languages other than English to attend and be informed of their children’s progress in school. While these conferences are generally well-received by parents, the most critical factor appears again to be the open atmosphere that pervades the school. In several instances, the openness of teachers to meeting with
and speaking with parents precluded them from feeling the need for regularly-scheduled conferences since these parents felt that they could speak with the teacher whenever necessary. However, a number of parents commented on the shortness of their interviews and school staffs probably need to re-evaluate the time they make available for meeting parents.

In general, the role filled by principals is that of support: providing a reduction in instructional time, assuming some teaching duties, and catering meals for the staff. Little effort appears to be expended in providing professional development in the conduct of parent-teacher conferences however; in spite of the fact that few practising teachers have received such instruction as part of their basic teacher training programs.

The less formal contacts between parents and the school, through their own children, and in discussions with non-teaching personnel, do not appear to hold the same level of significance in these schools that the literature suggests it should. While all of the parents interviewed spoke of frequent conversations with their children about school, they did not consider this to be a particularly valuable, or necessarily accurate, source of information. Among non-teaching personnel, only the school secretary was identified as an important link in the communication chain, and clearly this member of the staff is a key element in ensuring the open atmosphere of the school that seems to be the overwhelming factor in the success of school-parent contact.

**TYPE 3: PARENT INVOLVEMENT AT SCHOOL (Volunteering)**

In common with a large number of schools, parents play a significant role as volunteers in the schools included in this study. They are active in classrooms, in the library, in the computer laboratory, and in the cafeteria, as well as in fund raising activities sponsored by the parents’ consultative committees. Until their attention was drawn to it, most of the participants in the study did not recognize attendance at
assemblies and evening functions as another important facet of volunteerism. It was also
evident in these schools, too, that the majority of parents who serve as volunteers in
classrooms do so at the primary level, and a number of reasons for this situation were
advanced. As well, the majority of parents who work in classrooms do so in clerical
capacities—putting up displays, cutting out figures, and organizing materials—rather
than in assisting with the instructional program. When parents are enlisted in working
with children in instruction, it is generally in the area of Language Arts, particularly
Reading. Some parents are also involved through sharing their knowledge and expertise,
though this is a resource that is only lightly tapped in any of these schools.

Parents are invited to participate as members of the audience for a variety of
functions at these schools. More noteworthy however, are the occasions when parents are
invited to attend regular school assemblies, to attend performances by visiting artists, and
to attend classroom unit culmination activities. Parents appear to be welcome at all times,
to all functions in these school.

Principals play something of a peripheral, though fundamental, role in this facet
of parent involvement. By being role-models themselves, by relating examples from their
own experiences, by encouraging teachers who do include volunteers in their programs,
and by working to create the welcoming atmosphere that eases the way for parents into
the school, they do play a pivotal role. These principals all enunciate a clear philosophy
of education that recognizes parents as an integral element of the process of education,
and they work with their teachers to implement strategies to include parents in a wide
variety of roles in their schools.

They also seek out teachers who share their belief in the importance of parent
involvement when selecting new staff members for their schools.
TYPE 4: PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING ACTIVITIES AT HOME

Actively seeking to involve parents with their children’s school work at home, is an area that appears to have been little explored even in these high-involvement schools. In each of the schools, general information regarding things that parents might do to assist their children are included in newsletters and parent handbooks. However, in spite of research that identifies the important effects that such efforts can have upon student attitudes and achievement, and in spite of the fact that virtually all the interviewed parents indicated that they were already working with their children regardless of the lack of direction from the teacher, only one or two isolated examples of parental assistance being solicited and direction being given were identified in any of these schools. In general, teachers will enlist the assistance of a parent when a particular child is experiencing difficulty, especially students who attend learning assistance or English as a Second Language (ESL) centres. However, such examples involve individual parents and are not generally applied for an entire class.

TYPE 5: PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE AND ADVOCACY
(Representing other parents)

From the literature, it is evident that parents’ advisory groups generally involve only a limited number of parents, that they frequently do not represent the entire spectrum of opinion in the community, and that they seldom deal with substantive educational issues. Such factors would also appear to be true in the five schools included in this study. In each there appears to be a finite number of parents involved, usually in the neighbourhood of twenty to twenty-five parents. While definitive data is not possible to elicit through interviews such as were used for this study, these parents’ councils display a lack of representation from some identifiable segments of the schools’ populations. In addition, school, district, and/or provincial policies appear to preclude them from making major educational decisions. This is not to suggest that concerns such as these are not
being addressed. All of the principals interviewed indicated that they did have some concerns in regards to representation and decision-making processes, but the situation continues to exist.

In spite of the aforementioned shortcomings, the parents' advisory councils in these schools continue to fill an important role. They do provide forums for disseminating information; for discussing current educational issues; and they afford opportunities for parents to ask questions and seek information. The fact that they are viewed as successful by parents appears to be due largely to the work of the principals in creating an atmosphere that is open and non-threatening, and that therefore allows for the free voicing of opinions and exchange of ideas. At the same time, however, these principals work to ensure that there is no appearance that they are controlling the parents' group and maintain a clearly-defined advisory role for themselves.

**THE IMPACT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

While hard data are not possible to elicit from the type of research conducted for this study, it is nevertheless notable that both principals and parents recognized that there are benefits to be gained by all parties when parents are involved in education. The parents all recognized that parents had a more positive attitude towards their school when they were involved, as exemplified by the pride with which the spoke of their schools and the confidence they expressed in their principals and teachers. Similarly, those interviewed were unanimous in their opinion that students progressed better when parents were involved, though their interpretation of this concept tended to be somewhat simplistic: because there are parents in the room or around the school, there are more adults with whom students could relate and from whom they could receive assistance. They did however, also acknowledge that the presence of parents signaled to students that education was important, and that the students' efforts were valued. Similar reasons
governed their interpretation of the positive effects parent involvement had upon the attitudes of teachers. Because there were parents there to help shoulder the teaching tasks, teachers would therefore welcome their presence. All spoke highly of the teaching staffs however, and the hard work that they performed.

Principals on the other hand tended to view the impact of parent involvement from a more scholarly viewpoint. They agreed that when parents were involved in the school those parents were more knowledgeable about the school, what it was trying to accomplish on behalf of children, and the means with which they were seeking the attainment of those goals. Accordingly, parents felt a much greater degree of confidence in, and loyalty towards, the school. They also agreed that the extra “eyes and hands” available when parents were in the building contributed to the school’s program, but went further to include the idea that without parental assistance, there was much they would be unable to accomplish. The principals also expressed the opinion, that their teachers shared a philosophy of education that recognized parents as an important asset to be enlisted in furthering the education of children.

These administrators were also much more certain that parent participation yielded higher levels of student achievement, though this was most frequently an intuitive rather than experience-based opinion.

Only one of the participants—a parent—was knowledgeable of the research that confirmed the substantial benefits that accrue to children when their parents worked with them on school work at home, under the direction of the teacher. Certainly, all parents did show interest in and concern for what their children were doing in school, but few examples were revealed of parents being asked specifically to directly participate in their children’s work. This is one area of the research that seems to have not yet reached the field.
GENERAL ISSUES IN PARENT INVOLVEMENT

A number of general issues regarding the involvement of parents have been considered.

While recognizing and acknowledging the importance of involving parents in the education of their children, none of the five schools included in the study included specific references to that involvement in their philosophy or mission statements beyond a general statement regarding the partnership of the school with the home. Nevertheless, this matter is being considered in at least one of the schools where parents are playing an active role in the development of the school's mission statement, and another school is approaching the issue from the point of view of selecting increased parent involvement as one of the goals of the parents' council.

Among the parents interviewed, all were active participants in their schools. Nevertheless, when such factors as the ages of their children and whether or not the parent worked outside the home were examined, no particular circumstances appeared to either determine or limit the involvement of the members of this particular group of parents. Both principals and parents however, were able to offer a fairly extensive list of reasons why some parents were not able to be very involved, a list that is replicated frequently in the literature. However, the literature also points out that even such factors as holding a job, having small children, or experiencing family stress, should not deter parents from being involved. Such factors might limit the ways in which they can participate, but should not limit the degree of parental involvement. This is a concept to which school personnel must give careful consideration when declining to make demands upon parents to be part of their children's schooling.

Finally, some general characteristics of the schools and their principals were examined to determine if there were any factors that influenced the level of parent
involvement in a school. School size, socio-economic area, and designation as a community school appear to have little or no effect upon the ability of the school to involve parents. Similarly, none of the factors such as the age of the principal, whether the principal is male or female, his or her tenure in the school, nor his or her experience as an administrator, appears to be either a limiting or contributing factor to these principals' effectiveness in involving parents in the education process.

THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

If none of the quantitative factors of principals can be identified as determinants of a principal's effectiveness in involving parents, what then are the factors that set these five schools apart from all the others in the school district? In Chapter Four, fifty administrative practices have been enumerated as being employed by one or more of these principals to increase and enhance parent participation in their schools, and certainly a common thread is that these are individuals who view their role as facilitators and supporters of efforts to include parents in education.

But administrative practices such as those cited earlier appear to be but the tools that these principals use in the operations of their schools. Overriding everything that these principals do, and guiding all of their activities, are two attributes that clearly stand out above all others. They are all, without exception, highly personable, out-going individuals, who quite clearly, thoroughly enjoy meeting and working with people, adults as well as children. Secondly, they all espouse a clear vision and embrace a well-articulated philosophy of education that defines vitally important roles for parents in the school and in the education of their children. Without these two attributes firmly entrenched, it is questionable whether any of these principals would be as effective as they are, and whether any of these schools would enjoy the levels of parent participation that they presently experience. And their students' education would be the lesser for it.
Chapter Four contains a compendium of fifty practices that these five principals invoke to facilitate and enhance parent involvement. However, even in these schools which are identified as schools with a reputation for a high level of parent involvement, it was evident that there were certain other strategies that the principals could employ that would not only increase the level of participation, but also broaden the range of involvement activities in the school. Accordingly, a number of recommendations are herewith offered, organized according to Joyce Epstein's five classifications of parent involvement.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Perceptions of Parent Involvement**

- That principals seek ways and means to increase the involvement of fathers in the life of the school.

- That principals increase their knowledge of the full spectrum of parent participation so that in setting goals for the involvement of parents, consideration is given to all the areas of involvement; and that parents are made aware of the variety of levels on which they can be and should be involved in the education of their children.

**Type 1: The Basic Obligations of Parents (Parenting)**

- That principals investigate some of the newer technological facilities presently becoming available as means for transmitting important parenting advice to parents: videotaped programs; computerized phone messages; answering machines with recorded information either from the school or from individual classrooms (Brandt, 1989).

- That principals be aware of the considerable importance of the school counsellor when selecting these people for the staff because of the critical role they play in working with parents and children in distress.
Type 2: The Basic Obligations of Schools (Communicating)

- That principals investigate and become familiar with a wider variety of means for delivering information about the school and student progress including such technological facilities as mentioned above.

- That principals become increasingly aware of the less formal, more subtle communication lines along which information about the school is transmitted to the community (for example, parent-to-parent; child-to-parent, etc.).

The School Newsletter

- That principals investigate other means of delivering information about the school beyond the printed word in the school newsletter.

Report Cards

- That principals devote time and energy in the development of workshops for teachers, particularly at the intermediate level, to explain the philosophy of the new report cards that are anecdotal, that measure a child’s growth against a continuum, that highlight what the child has already achieved, and that do not use comparative achievement ratings.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

- That principals, with their staffs, re-evaluate the length of time allocated for parent-teacher conferences, ensuring that there is sufficient time for all parents to feel comfortable in having had the opportunity to fully discuss their child’s progress and any concerns they might have; and that consideration be given to instituting a flexible time schedule whereby varying lengths of time would be available for varying parent or student situations.

- That principals undertake a major effort to train their teachers in the conduct of effective parent-teacher conferences, including preparation for a conference, varying approaches to presenting information, and methods of establishing and maintaining open communication during the discussion, as well as basic interview techniques.

Other Means of Communicating Pupil Progress

- That principals ensure that their teachers are knowledgeable of the fact that parents’ preference is for communication that is frequent, personal, and informal; that there is a wide variety of means available to communicate with parents; that the messages that can be conveyed through these means can be both meaningful and powerful; and that principals encourage their teachers to communicate frequently and openly with individual parents.

Other Avenues of Communication

- That principals discuss with their staffs, the desirability and value of establishing informal contacts with parents, but that they also alert teachers to the dangers that can be inherent in such contacts as for example, being drawn into discussions of other teachers, other programs, and other schools.
• That principals investigate with their staffs, strategies for preparing students with accurate and complete information with which they can correctly apprise their parents of the learning and events that have occurred during the day, employing such techniques as learning logs, journals, and the like.

• That principals when hiring staff for the school, consider the image of the school portrayed by such auxiliary school personnel as the school secretary, the custodian, the school nurse, and the teachers’ aides.

• That principals work with intermediate teachers to consider and devise strategies for increasing and improving the frequency and quality of communication between the school and parents in these upper grades.

Type 3: Parent Involvement at School (Volunteering)

• That principals work with staffs to explore the literature detailing benefits that accrue to both the teacher and the student, when parent volunteers participate in the instructional program.

• That principals work with their staffs to develop strategies for including parent volunteers working with students in the regular classroom programs, thus enhancing their learning opportunities and increasing achievement.

• That principals investigate with their staffs opportunities for including parents and members of the community in the school’s program, thereby enhancing the curriculum offerings of the school.

• That principals develop strategies to identify parent and community resource people whom the school may access to enlarge upon its own capabilities to teach and inform; and encourage their teachers to use these resources in their classrooms.

• That principals investigate with their intermediate grade teachers, strategies for including parents in the classroom program at the higher levels, that satisfy the needs and desires of both students and parents while at the same time enhancing the learning situation for each student through the involvement of parents.

• That principals work with their staffs to establish a broad range of activities for including all parents in the education of their children, through the institution of such approaches as school-wide and classroom open houses, invitations to classrooms and regular school functions such as assemblies, thus permitting parents to attend functions at the school both during the day and during out of school hours.

• That principals work with their parents’ groups to mount such social functions as pot-luck suppers, international dinners, school picnics, and community dances as means of establishing and maintaining a genuine rapport between the school, its parents, and the community at large.
Type 4: Parent Involvement in Learning Activities at Home

- That principals review the research regarding the impact that parents’ working with their children at home on school work has upon student achievement and attitudes.

- That principals apprise their teachers and their parents of the impact parents’ involvement has upon students when parents work with their children on school work at home.

- That principals work with their staffs to develop programs and strategies for actively involving parents in working at home with their children on school tasks.

- That principals assume an active role in providing parents with specific suggestions for helping their children at home; that they provide parents with summaries of research into the relationship between parent involvement in schoolwork at home and student achievement; and that they do this on a continuing, consistent basis.

- That principals encourage and assist their teachers to develop strategies and programs for including parents in the processes of learning, as a regular and on-going part of the planning of the program for each class.

- That principals encourage and support teachers in the development of a regular program of classroom newsletters as one means of keeping parents informed of the curriculum and activities of the class, and the role parents can play in enhancing that classroom learning.

- That principals work with their teachers to develop strategies for including parents as co-learners with their children on a variety of projects; and that they re-examine practices that appear to discourage parents from working with their children.

Type 5: Parent Involvement in Governance and Advocacy (Representing other parents)

- That principals work with the members of their parents’ groups to develop strategies to enlarge the number of parents who participate in at least some aspects of the functioning of parents’ consultative groups.

- That principals work with their parents’ groups to develop strategies to ensure that all groups in the school have representation in the decision-making processes of the parents’ committees.

- That principals work with their parents’ groups to develop other approaches besides formal meetings to allow a broader spectrum of parents to be included in the decision-making processes.
The Impact of Parent Involvement

- That principals ensure that they are fully cognizant of current research into the effects of parent involvement upon parent and student attitudes and student achievement.

- That principals work with their staffs and parents to ensure that each group fully understands and appreciates the importance of parent involvement in affecting positively parent and student attitudes and student achievement.

- That principals monitor closely the involvement of all parents working in the school particularly those who volunteer in classrooms, and assume responsibility for alleviating any potentially difficult situations caused by the presence of some parents in classrooms.

General Issues in Parent Involvement

- That in the development of school philosophy and mission statements, principals, together with their staffs and parents’ groups, work to more clearly and definitively recognize and define the important role that parents play in the school as an essential element in the education of children.

- That principals work with their parents’ groups to ascertain the real reasons why parents in their particular school communities are not presently participating in the school, and seek ways of overcoming those specific barriers that are keeping the school’s parents from being actively involved.

- That principals work with their parents’ groups to develop facilities whereby parents with pre-school children would be able to come to the school and volunteer during the school day.

The Role of the Principal in Parent Involvement

- That principals provide in-service training for their teachers in regards to ways and means of involving parents in their programs.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The schools and principals discussed in this study necessarily represent an elite group. As stated at the outset, the levels of parent involvement described in these schools and the administrative practices identified, cannot automatically be ascribed to other schools in this or other districts in the province. The practices evidenced in these five
schools are the result of a coalescing of a broad variety of elements that has resulted in parents becoming important threads in the fabric of these particular schools.

If however, parents do want a greater role in education—and there is certainly more than enough evidence to indicate that they do—and if schools are sincere in their desire to increase the role that parents play in the education process, then what is needed is more than just enthusiastic, committed, and effective principals who believe in parent involvement. What is required are some major structural changes at all levels of the school system. A new vision of the relationship between schools and parents must be formulated if parents are to successfully be drawn into the education process to the ultimate benefit of our students.

At the present time, the best examples of education systems that are attempting to restructure in order to acknowledge the roles of parents and the community in schools are to be found in other parts of the world where several governments are taking significant steps to implement changes in school governance. The British government recently passed into law the Education Reform Act of 1988 which delineates a strategic role for parents in the operations of local schools. Similarly, New Zealand has instituted measures to invest major responsibility for education in local authorities, and the state of New South Wales in Australia is implementing similar measures. In the United States, school districts in Hawaii, Maryland, Florida, Louisiana and New Mexico are initiating a variety of reforms in school governance to allow parents a greater say and to play more vital roles in the operations of their schools.

Perhaps the most dramatic example on this continent however, is the city of Chicago. In September 1989, the city’s Board of Education transferred virtually complete responsibility for school operations to parent and community councils at each of its more than six hundred schools. While the impetus behind this extraordinary move may not
have been a desire to enhance parent involvement *per se*, it does nevertheless provide the opportunity for parents to play a significantly greater role in the education of their children. In each of these examples however, time will be needed before it is possible to measure the success of the new organizations.

What then, must we in British Columbia do if we genuinely wish to increase the levels of parent participation in our schools? The present *School Act* includes permissive provision for the inclusion of parents in the decision-making processes in schools. While parental roles in school governance are not considered to have major influences upon student learning, this is nevertheless a level at which parent involvement should first of all be strengthened. Once consultative committees are in place and parents are playing a viable role in this facet of the school, such associations can provide an important interface between the school and the family and thus play a major role in facilitating the participation of parents at the classroom level, the site at which their influence will have the greatest positive impact upon student achievement and attitudes. Already one of the schools in this study includes a "Volunteer Coordinator" among its parents’ group officers as a means of easing the entry of parents into the education process.

Beyond the individual school site however, other critical changes are necessary in the system. At the district level, superintendents and school trustees must assume proactive roles in the involvement of parents. While district level activity will not automatically result in the successful implementation of parent involvement programs in schools, through their attitudes and actions educational leaders such as these transmit a clear and unambiguous message to schools that they believe in the importance of including parents in influential roles in their children's education, and that they support school and classroom efforts to increase and enhance that participation.
Teacher training institutions too must re-evaluate their training of prospective teachers. Teachers entering the profession must not only be made thoroughly knowledgeable of both the research base regarding the significance of parent involvement for student learning, but must also be given specific training in techniques for effectively including parents in the educational program.

Similarly, the education of school administrators must also include a major emphasis on the influential role that parents can and must play in education; and must equip future administrators with the skills and techniques necessary for implementing effective parent involvement programs in their schools.

The principals in the five schools investigated in this study certainly provide us with much to emulate in regards to ways in which administrators can increase and enhance parent involvement in their schools. There is more to learn, and more that we must do if we are to fully tap the resource that parents represent as we seek to provide the best educational opportunities for the students in our schools. The levels of parent involvement identified in these five schools included in this study will only be replicated in other schools however, if significant changes occur at all levels of the school system.

CONCLUSION

Few people would disagree with the proposition that the principal is the key figure in the school. And few would argue with the premise that it is the principal who is largely responsible for the effective inclusion of parents in the education processes of the school. This study has identified a number of practices that effective principals employ to facilitate and enhance the involvement of parents in elementary school education.
In describing his role as principal in reference to facilitating parent involvement, one of the five principals interviewed summed up his view of administrative leadership as follows:

A good administrator is in the middle of the pack. You can't be way out in front. You have to push some people ahead of you and pull some people behind you. So, I don't even let them know all the dreams.

The effective principal therefore is neither a leader nor a follower: he is an integral, actively involved, member of the school community, working with his teachers and his parents to provide the best for his students.

And that best must include facilitating the active and effective participation of all parents in the education of their children.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

LETTER TO NOMINATORS
AND
NOMINATION FORM
Dear <name>:

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Michael Deane, and I am currently serving as District Administrator in West Vancouver. I am writing to you however, in my capacity as a Graduate Student at Simon Fraser University.

I have been granted permission to conduct research in Burnaby as part of my Master of Education major project on the topic of parent involvement in education. Specifically, I hope to be able to identify those practices that principals employ to increase and enhance parent involvement in education. My objective is to codify such behaviours and to create a compendium of administrative practices that appear to be effective in encouraging, increasing, and enhancing parent participation in education.

To that end, I would like to enlist your help in identifying exemplary schools in the district where there is already a high level of parent involvement. Therefore, in your capacity as <position>, I would be most appreciative if you would indicate for me on the enclosed sheet, schools which you believe enjoy a strong reputation for involving parents to a significant degree and in a variety of facets of the school. I have enclosed a self-addressed, stamped envelope for your use in returning the nomination form to me.

Once these high involvement schools have been determined, I propose to interview the principals as well as a selection of parents, and their responses will provide the data which will be analyzed to identify the specific administrative behaviours that have a positive impact upon the involvement of parents in the life of the school.

Thank you very much for your assistance in nominating schools for me. I am looking forward to the opportunity to visiting schools in Burnaby and to working with some of your principals. I also hope that the findings of my study will provide useful information for practising and prospective administrators in their work, and will be most pleased to share my findings with you when they are complete.

Yours sincerely,

Michael J. Deane
District Administrator
NOMINATION FORM

FROM YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE SCHOOLS IN BURNABY, WHICH ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN YOUR JURISDICTION DO YOU FEEL ENJOY THE BEST REPUTATION FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT.

PLEASE IDENTIFY FIVE SUCH SCHOOLS, AND LIST THEM BELOW. IT IS NOT NECESSARY THAT THEY BE LISTED IN ANY PARTICULAR ORDER.

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE.

PLEASE RETURN TO:

Michael J. Deane
District Administrator
School District No. 45 (West Vancouver)
1075 Twenty-first Street
West Vancouver, B. C.
V7V 4A9
APPENDIX B

LETTER TO PRINCIPALS OF NOMINATED SCHOOLS
Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Michael Deane, and I am currently serving as District Administrator in West Vancouver. I am writing to you however, in my capacity as a Graduate Student at Simon Fraser University.

I was recently granted permission to conduct research in Burnaby as part of my Master of Education major project on the topic of Parent Involvement in Education. Specifically, I hope to be able to identify those practices that principals employ to increase and enhance parent involvement in education. My objective is to codify such behaviours and to create a compendium of administrative practices that appear to be effective in encouraging, increasing, and enhancing parent participation in education.

As the initial step in the process, I asked six senior officials in the District Office to each identify a set of five elementary schools which they believed enjoyed a strong reputation for involving parents to a significant degree and in a variety of facets of the school.

As a result of these nominations, <name> Elementary School was identified as one of the top five “High-Involvement” schools and I would like now to enlist your assistance in collecting the data with which I can work to identify those administrative practices that have a positive impact upon the involvement of parents in the life of the school.

What I would like to do, is to meet with you in an interview and explore parent involvement in your school: the different ways in which parents are involved, and what it is that you as the principal do to facilitate and increase that participation. I anticipate that we would require about an hour together.

I also plan to meet with three to four parents of the school to elicit their perceptions regarding parent participation in education.

I hasten to assure you however, that full confidentiality will be maintained in the preparation of the project, both in regards to the name of the school, as well as to you personally as the principal.

Towards the end of the week, I would like to phone you and arrange a mutually convenient time for us to meet. While my time is relatively flexible, afternoons are probably the easiest times for me to manage. During that phone call, I will also ask you for the name and address of the chairperson of your parents’ group.
I realize of course, that this is a very busy time of the year for you, but your willingness to participate is of considerable importance to me as well as to the success of the project.

I am looking forward to speaking with you and to visiting <school name>. I hope that the findings of my study will provide useful information for school administrators in their work, and I will be most pleased to share my findings with you when they are complete.

Thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

Michael J. Deane
District Administrator
APPENDIX C

LETTER TO PARENTS IN NOMINATED SCHOOLS
<name>
<name> School Parents’ Group
<street>
Burnaby, B. C.
<postal code>

Dear <name>:

I would like first of all to introduce myself. My name is Michael Deane and I am an elementary school administrator in West Vancouver. I am writing to you however, in my capacity as a Graduate Student at Simon Fraser University.

I recently began conducting research in Burnaby School District as part of my Master of Education project on the topic of Parent Involvement in Education.

As the initial step in the process, six senior officials in the District Office were each asked to identify a set of five elementary schools which they believed enjoyed a strong reputation for involving parents. As a result of these nominations, <name> Elementary School was identified as one of the top five “High-Involvement” schools. I have just completed a lengthy interview with your school’s principal, <name>, during which we discussed the various ways in which parents participate in the school, and how this involvement is facilitated by the school.

What I need to do now, is to explore the issue of parent involvement from the viewpoint of parents.

Therefore, I would like to enlist your assistance in helping me collect further information regarding parent involvement at <school name>. What I would like to do is to meet with you at the school one day soon and interview you as the <position> of the school’s parents’ group. I anticipate that we would require about an hour together.

It is also my intention to meet with two or three other parents at a different time.

I want to assure you that I will maintain full confidentiality during the preparation of the project, both in regards to the name of the school as well as to you personally.

Towards the end of the week, I would like to phone you to arrange a mutually convenient time for us to meet.
I appreciate of course, that your time is very valuable to you, but your willingness to participate is of considerable importance to me as well as to the success of the project.

I am looking forward to meeting with you and to learning more about <school name>.

Thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

Michael J. Deane
District Administrator
APPENDIX D

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS:
SCHEDULE OF QUESTIONS
PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW
SCHEDULE OF QUESTIONS

PART I

PERHAPS WE COULD BEGIN BY HAVING YOU TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL:

THE STUDENTS
THE STAFF
THE COMMUNITY

COULD YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF?

PART II

COULD YOU BRIEFLY HIGHLIGHT FOR ME THE BROAD AREAS IN WHICH PARENTS IN YOUR SCHOOL PARTICIPATE IN THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN?

Response Areas:

TYPE 1 The Basic Obligations of Parents (Parenting)
TYPE 2 The Basic Obligations of Schools (Communicating)
TYPE 3 Parent Involvement at School (Volunteering)
TYPE 4 Parent Involvement in Learning Activities at Home
TYPE 5 Parent Involvement in Governance and Advocacy
PART III

YOU'VE MENTIONED _____ AS ONE OF THE TYPES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOL. COULD WE PURSUE THAT TOPIC FOR A FEW MOMENTS.

IF TYPE 1 Go to Section 1: Question A
IF TYPE 2 Go to Section 2: Question A
IF TYPE 3 Go to Section 3: Question A
IF TYPE 4 Go to Section 4: Question A
IF TYPE 5 Go to Section 5: Question A

FOR AREAS NOT MENTIONED VOLUNTARILY:

PARENTS ARE OBVIOUSLY INVOLVED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS IN YOUR SCHOOL.

ARE ANY OF YOUR PARENTS INVOLVED IN _____?

OR

PARENTS ARE OBVIOUSLY INVOLVED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS IN YOUR SCHOOL.

DO YOU HAVE ANY PROGRAMS FOR PARENTS IN _____?

IF TYPE 1 Go to Section 1: Question B
IF TYPE 2 Go to Section 2: Question B
IF TYPE 3 Go to Section 3: Question B
IF TYPE 4 Go to Section 4: Question B
IF TYPE 5 Go to Section 5: Question B

NOTE: SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS WILL BE USED AS APPROPRIATE TO EXPAND UPON RESPONSES.
PART IV

THE IMPACT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

I'D LIKE NOW, TO TRY AND DETERMINE SOME OF THE EFFECTS THAT PARENT INVOLVEMENT HAS UPON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND STUDENT AND PARENT ATTITUDES.

See Section 6

PART V

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GENERAL

I'D LIKE TO CONCLUDE WITH SOME GENERAL QUESTIONS REGARDING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THIS SCHOOL.

See Section 7
SECTION 1

TYPE I THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF PARENTS (Parenting)

QUESTION A

YOU’VE MENTIONED SOME OF THE SCHOOL’S PROGRAMS IN THE AREA OF ASSISTING PARENTS BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE IN THEIR ROLE. COULD YOU ELABORATE ON THOSE PROGRAMS FOR ME?

QUESTION B

YOU’VE MENTIONED A VARIETY OF WAYS IN WHICH PARENTS ARE INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL.

ARE THERE ANY PROGRAMS OFFERED BY THE SCHOOL THAT ARE DESIGNED TO ASSIST PARENTS BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE IN THEIR ROLE AS PARENTS?

If yes...

COULD YOU ELABORATE ON THOSE PROGRAMS FOR ME, PLEASE?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

1.1 Who has played the major role in developing such activities?

1.2 How can we ensure that the parents most in need of this kind of advice and information, do in fact attend?
DO YOU OFFER ANY PROGRAMS TO HELP PARENTS UNDERSTAND AND FULFILL THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE A HOME ENVIRONMENT THAT IS SUPPORTIVE OF LEARNING, (THAT IS, ENSURING THAT THERE ARE APPROPRIATE SPACES AND TIME FOR HOMESTUDY, AND ENCOURAGING GOOD STUDY HABITS)?

If yes...

WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THEM FOR ME?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

1.3 Who has assumed leadership in this regard?

- In what ways?

- How have you as the principal provided support and encouragement, and worked to expand this type of activity.

SOME PEOPLE HAVE SUGGESTED THAT, WHEN THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF PARENTS TO PROVIDE FOOD, SHELTER, CLOTHING, HEALTH AND SAFETY ARE NOT BEING MET, THE SCHOOL HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO WORK WITH THE APPROPRIATE AGENCIES TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN ARE ADEQUATELY CARED FOR.

HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED ANY SITUATIONS IN THIS SCHOOL WHERE CHILDREN ARE NOT BEING WELL LOOKED AFTER?

If yes...

HOW HAVE SUCH SITUATIONS BEEN HANDLED?
SECTION 2

TYPE II  THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF SCHOOLS  
(Communicating)

QUESTION A

YOU'VE MENTIONED COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS AS ONE OF THE WAYS PARENTS ARE PART OF THE FABRIC OF THE SCHOOL. COULD WE CONSIDER THIS AREA IS SOME MORE DETAIL?

QUESTION B

ONE AREA THAT WE HAVEN'T DISCUSSED AS YET IS COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS.

WOULD YOU DESCRIBE FOR ME THE WAYS IN WHICH YOUR SCHOOL COMMUNICATES WITH THE HOME?

SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

YOU MENTIONED THE SCHOOL NEWSLETTER AS ONE OF THE COMMUNICATION LINKS BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND THE HOME.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SCHOOL NEWSLETTER FOR ME?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

2.1 In what ways is your school newsletter different from that of other schools? What makes it unique?

2.2 What would you consider to be some of the problems associated with school newsletters as a means of communication?

2.3 How have you overcome some of these problems?
TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT HOW THE SCHOOL COMMUNICATES TO THE HOME, BUT WHAT ABOUT PARENTS COMMUNICATING INFORMATION TO THE SCHOOL?

DO YOU USE ANY PARTICULAR TECHNIQUES TO FACILITATE A TWO-WAY DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND THE HOME; WHERE PARENTS ARE ASKED TO COMMUNICATE THEIR IDEAS TO THE SCHOOL?

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND INDIVIDUAL PARENTS

PARENTS ARE, OF COURSE, MOST CONCERNED WITH THEIR OWN CHILD'S SCHOOLING.

COULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE COMMUNICATION LINKS THAT ARE IN PLACE TO KEEP PARENTS INFORMED ABOUT THEIR OWN CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES AND PROGRESS.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

2.4 How do you encourage and support teachers in their efforts to maintain communication with the home?

2.5 What obstacles hinder school to home communication?

• How might some of these be overcome?

REPORT CARDS

LET'S TURN OUR ATTENTION NOW, TO THE REPORTING OF PUPIL PROGRESS TO PARENTS. ONE OF THE MOST COMMONLY USED VEHICLES FOR COMMUNICATING ACHIEVEMENT IS OF COURSE, THE PUPIL REPORT CARD.

COULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL'S REPORT CARDS?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

2.6 We have a new primary report card in British Columbia. What has been the reaction of your parents to this new report format?
2.7 What kind of written responses have you received from parents on these reports?

2.8 How has the school dealt with this information?

2.9 Could you tell me about the report form that's used at the intermediate level?

2.10 Have you provided the teachers with any kind of guidance in the preparation of report cards?

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

I'D LIKE TO TALK NOW A BIT ABOUT PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCING IN YOUR SCHOOL?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

2.11 Have you provided any kind of guidance to your staff in regards to the handling of parent-teacher conferences?

2.12 If teachers do obtain information about the student given by the parent during the conference, how would it normally be dealt with?

2.13 How do you go about scheduling parent-teacher interviews?

2.14 Do you make any particular provisions for special groups of parents?

* Working parents
* Parents whose first language is not English
* The reluctant parent who avoids, for whatever reason, coming to a parent-teacher conference
OTHER MEANS OF COMMUNICATING PUPIL PROGRESS

ARE ANY OTHER AVENUES OTHER THAN THE FORMAL REPORT CARD AND PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE EMPLOYED TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO PARENTS ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN’S SCHOOL WORK?

If yes...

COULD YOU DESCRIBE THEM FOR ME?

INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS WITH PARENTS

WHAT ABOUT INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS THAT OCCUR BETWEEN A TEACHER AND A PARENT, WHICH ARE OFTEN ANOTHER WAY FOR PARENTS TO GET INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN AND THE SCHOOL? (FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE HALLWAY AFTER SCHOOL, ON THE SOCCER FIELD, ETC.)

HAS THERE BEEN ANY KIND OF DISCUSSION REGARDING THIS KIND OF INFORMAL COMMUNICATION?

THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT

WHAT ABOUT THE MESSAGES THAT STUDENTS THEMSELVES TAKE HOME WITH THEM?

ARE ANY EFFORTS MADE TO ENSURE THAT THE MESSAGES CHILDREN TAKE HOME, ARE IN FACT THE MESSAGES YOU WANT PARENTS TO RECEIVE ABOUT THE SCHOOL?

OTHER SCHOOL PERSONNEL

THERE ARE OTHER SCHOOL PERSONNEL WHO CAN BE A SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL (FOR EXAMPLE: SECRETARIES, CUSTODIANS, TEACHER ASSISTANTS, NURSES, VOLUNTEER AIDES, ETC.)?

ARE YOU ABLE TO INFLUENCE THE MESSAGES THAT THESE PEOPLE CONVEY ABOUT THE SCHOOL?
OTHER MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

ARE THERE ANY OTHER VEHICLES FOR COMMUNICATION IN USE OTHER THAN THOSE WE'VE ALREADY MENTIONED?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

2.15 How do you as the principal encourage and support such communication?

ABOUT HOW FREQUENTLY WOULD YOU SAY ANY INDIVIDUAL FAMILY RECEIVES A COMMUNICATION IN SOME FORM OR OTHER FROM THE SCHOOL?
SECTION 3

TYPE III  PARENT INVOLVEMENT AT SCHOOL (Volunteering)

QUESTION A
YOU'VE MENTIONED PARENTS SERVING AS VOLUNTEERS IN THE SCHOOL.

WOULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH PARENTS ARE INVOLVED AS VOLUNTEERS IN YOUR SCHOOL?

QUESTION B
ANOTHER TYPE OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT MIGHT BE PARENTS SERVING AS VOLUNTEERS.

DO YOU HAVE PARENTS VOLUNTEERING THEIR TIME AND SERVICES TO THE SCHOOL?

If yes...

COULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH PARENTS SERVE AS VOLUNTEERS IN YOUR SCHOOL?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

3.1 How many parents, or what portion of the parent body, would you suggest serve as volunteers in such activities as these?

3.2 Have you seen a change of any kind in this type of parent involvement over the last several years?

If yes:

* How has it changed?

* To what would you attribute this change?
YOU'VE MENTIONED PARENTS VOLUNTEERING TO WORK IN CLASSROOMS.

WHAT SortS OF TASKS DO THESE PARENTS PERFORM?

OR

DO ANY OF YOUR TEACHERS HAVE PARENTS WORKING WITH THEM IN THEIR CLASSROOMS?

If yes...

WHAT SortS OF TASKS DO THESE PARENTS PERFORM?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

3.3 About how many parents work as volunteers in classrooms?

3.4 How are these volunteers identified?

3.5 Has there been a change of any kind in the use of parent volunteers in classrooms over the last several years?

If yes:

• How has it changed?

• To what would you attribute this change?
YOU'VE MENTIONED A NUMBER OF WAYS IN WHICH PARENTS WORK WITH TEACHERS. HOWEVER, I'D LIKE TO FOCUS NOW UPON PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM IN THE CLASSROOM, AS OPPOSED TO CLERICAL TYPES OF TASKS.

DO ANY OF YOUR TEACHERS HAVE PARENTS PERFORMING INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE CLASSROOM?

If yes...

WHAT KINDS OF INSTRUCTIONAL TASKS DO THESE PARENTS PERFORM?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

3.6 What role have you played in encouraging and supporting the involvement of parents as volunteers?

3.7 Is the use of parent volunteers more prevalent at certain grade levels than at others?

If yes:

- At which grade levels are they more frequently working?

- Why do you think this is so?

3.8 How do you deal with the teacher who is reluctant to involve parents in the classroom?

3.9 How can we encourage more parents to participate as volunteers?

3.10 How do you deal with the issue of confidentiality when parents are working with individual students and privy to information about those children?
USING PARENT SKILLS AND TALENTS

DO ANY OF YOUR TEACHERS MAKE USE OF THE SKILLS AND TALENTS OF THEIR PARENTS: FOR EXAMPLE TO TEACH A LESSON, TO SHARE SOME EXPERIENCES OR SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE?

If yes...

COULD YOU PROVIDE SOME EXAMPLES?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

3.11 How do you identify parents who have skills, talents, or special knowledge to share?

PARENTS AS AUDIENCE

WHEN WE USE THE TERM "VOLUNTEERING" WE USUALLY THINK OF THE PARENTS WHO COME TO THE SCHOOL TO SERVE IN CAPACITIES SUCH AS WE HAVE JUST DISCUSSED.

HOWEVER, I'D LIKE TO BROADEN THE CONCEPT OF "VOLUNTEERING" SOMEWHA T TO INCLUDE PARENTS VISITING THE SCHOOL TO BE MEMBERS OF AN AUDIENCE, OR TO BE SPECTATORS.

COULD YOU DESCRIBE FOR ME THE KINDS OF ACTIVITIES TO WHICH PARENTS ARE INVITED?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

3.12 Has the degree of parent participation on this level changed over the last several years?

Why or why not?
FINALLY, I'D LIKE TO BRIEFLY BROACH THE SUBJECT OF FUND RAISING AS ANOTHER TYPE OF VOLUNTEER SERVICE.

ARE YOUR PARENTS ACTIVE AT ALL IN RAISING FUNDS FOR THE SCHOOL?

If yes...

COULD YOU DESCRIBE FOR ME THE TYPES OF THINGS THEY HAVE DONE TO RAISE MONEY FOR THE SCHOOL?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

3.13 How many parents would you say involve themselves, to whatever degree, in the raising of money for the school?

3.14 Who decides how money raised by the parents will be spent?
SECTION 4

TYPE IV  PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING ACTIVITIES
AT HOME (Learning at Home)

QUESTION A

YOU'VE MENTIONED PARENTS WORKING WITH THEIR
CHILDREN AT HOME.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT PARENTS DO TO
HELP THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME?

QUESTION B

ARE THERE ANY PROGRAMS IN THE SCHOOL WHICH
ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO WORK WITH THEIR CHILDREN
AT HOME?

If yes...

COULD YOU DESCRIBE THEM FOR ME?

HOW IS INFORMATION ABOUT WAYS PARENTS CAN TO
HELP THEIR CHILDREN TRANSMITTED TO PARENTS?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

4.1 How can you as the principal encourage and support these kinds of efforts
     on the part of teachers?

4.2 What do you think are the greatest impediments to parents working with
     their children at home on school work?

4.3 How can these barriers be overcome?
ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY TEACHERS ON YOUR STAFF WHO HAVE ASSIGNED SPECIFIC HOMEWORK TASKS THAT HAVE TO BE COMPLETED WITH THE CHILD AND THE PARENT WORKING TOGETHER?

If yes...

WOULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT THEM?
SECTION 5

TYPE V PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE AND ADVOCACY (Representing Other Parents)

QUESTION A
YOU IDENTIFIED PARENTS INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION AS ONE AVENUE FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT.

WOULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION?

QUESTION B

DOES YOUR SCHOOL HAVE A FORMAL PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF ANY KIND?

If yes...

COULD YOU DESCRIBE THE PARENTS' ASSOCIATION FOR ME?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

5.1 What percentage of your parent body would you say is actively involved in the parent association?

5.2 How are the members of the group selected?

5.3 Do you play any role in the selection of the officers and members?

5.4 Has the membership of the group changed at all over the past several years?

If yes:

• How has it changed?

• To what might this change be attributed?
5.5 How representative would you say the group was, of the full spectrum of opinion within the parent body?

If not representative:

- What can you do, or have you done, to change that situation?

5.6 With what sorts of issues does this group deal?

5.7 Who determines what items appear on the agenda of parent advisory meetings?

5.8 Does this parents’ group play a role in the making of any major school or educational decisions?

If yes:

- Can you give me some examples?

5.9 Do you see any problems with this type of parent group?
SECTION 6

THE IMPACT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

WOULD YOU SUGGEST THAT THERE HAS BEEN ANY PARTICULAR IMPACT UPON STUDENTS THAT MIGHT BE ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE PARTICIPATION OF PARENTS IN THIS SCHOOL?

6.1 Student Attitudes
6.2 Student Achievement

WHAT ABOUT THE ATTITUDES OF PARENTS?
WHAT EFFECT WOULD YOU SUGGEST THAT PARENT INVOLVEMENT HAS HAD UPON PARENT ATTITUDES?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

6.3 Do you feel there has been any noticeable change in parent attitudes as more parents have become involved in the school?

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE GENERAL ATTITUDE OF YOUR TEACHERS TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

6.4 Has you noticed any change in teacher attitudes as parents have become more involved?

6.5 Is there a difference in the attitudes of teachers at different grade levels?

6.6 How do you bring some of the more reluctant teachers “on board” so to speak, to involving parents?
SECTION 7

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GENERAL

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR PARENT BODY WOULD YOU SAY ARE INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL TO SOME DEGREE? PERHAPS WE COULD CATEGORIZE INVOLVEMENT AS FOLLOWS:

- **SUBSTANTIAL INVOLVEMENT** (Daily or weekly)
- **MODERATE INVOLVEMENT** (Three to five times a year)
- **LIMITED INVOLVEMENT** (Once or twice a year)
- **NO INVOLVEMENT**

CAN YOU SUGGEST REASONS WHY THOSE WHO DO NOT PARTICIPATE TO ANY GREAT EXTENT MIGHT NOT BE PLAYING A LARGER ROLE IN THE SCHOOL?

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BARRIERS?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

7.1 How have you been able to overcome some of these obstacles?

7.2 What have you as the principal been able to do to try to bring those parents who are not participating to any great extent, into the life of the school?

- The parents who don’t seem to have the time?
- The “reluctant” parents?

IN YOUR SCHOOL’S STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY OR IN ITS MISSION STATEMENT, IS THERE ANY SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE ROLE OF PARENTS?

IF SO, WHAT IS THAT STATEMENT?

OVER THE LAST FOUR OR FIVE YEARS, HAS THERE BEEN ANY CHANGE IN THE LEVEL OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOL?
IN SUMMARY, HOW DO YOU SEE YOUR ROLE IN ENHANCING PARENT INVOLVEMENT?

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO NEXT?
APPENDIX E

PARENT INTERVIEWS:
SCHEDULE OF QUESTIONS
PART I

CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT AS A PARENT IN THIS SCHOOL?

IN SELECTING ______ SCHOOL FOR THIS STUDY, SENIOR OFFICIALS IN THE DISTRICT OFFICE WERE REQUESTED TO IDENTIFY SCHOOLS WHICH THEY BELIEVED ENJOYED THE BEST REPUTATION FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT. THIS IS ONE OF THE FIVE SCHOOLS THEY SELECTED.

WOULD YOU AGREE WITH THIS ASSESSMENT OF ______ SCHOOL: THAT PARENTS ARE INVOLVED TO A HIGH DEGREE?

If yes...

WHAT WOULD YOU SUGGEST GIVES THE SCHOOL THIS REPUTATION IN THE DISTRICT?

PART II

YOU'VE TOLD ME SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR OWN INVOLVEMENT IN ______ SCHOOL. ARE THERE OTHER GENERAL AREAS IN WHICH PARENTS ARE INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL?

Response Areas:

  TYPE 1  The Basic Obligations of Parents (Parenting)
  TYPE 2  The Basic Obligations of School (Communicating)
  TYPE 3  Parent Involvement at School (Volunteering)
  TYPE 4  Parent Involvement in Learning Activities at Home
  TYPE 5  Parent Involvement in Governance and Advocacy
PART III

YOU'VE MENTIONED ____ AS ONE OF THE TYPES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOL. COULD WE PURSUE THAT TOPIC FOR A FEW MOMENTS.

IF TYPE 1  Go to Section 1:  Question A
IF TYPE 2  Go to Section 2:  Question A
IF TYPE 3  Go to Section 3:  Question A
IF TYPE 4  Go to Section 4:  Question A
IF TYPE 5  Go to Section 5:  Question A

FOR AREAS NOT MENTIONED VOLUNTARILY:

PARENTS ARE OBVIOUSLY INVOLVED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS IN THE SCHOOL.

IS THERE ANY INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS INVOLVED IN ____?

OR

PARENTS ARE OBVIOUSLY INVOLVED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS IN THE SCHOOL.

ARE THERE ANY PROGRAMS FOR PARENTS IN ____?

IF TYPE 1  Go to Section 1:  Question B
IF TYPE 2  Go to Section 2:  Question B
IF TYPE 3  Go to Section 3:  Question B
IF TYPE 4  Go to Section 4:  Question B
IF TYPE 5  Go to Section 5:  Question B

NOTE: SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS WILL BE USED AS APPROPRIATE TO EXPAND UPON RESPONSES.
PART IV

THE IMPACT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

I'D LIKE NOW TO TRY TO DETERMINE SOME OF THE EFFECTS THAT PARENT INVOLVEMENT HAS UPON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND STUDENT AND PARENT ATTITUDES.

See Section 6

PART V

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GENERAL

I'D LIKE NOW TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GENERAL TERMS.

See Section 7

PART VI

I'D LIKE TO CONCLUDE WITH SOME FINAL GENERAL OPINIONS ABOUT THE SCHOOL.

See Section 8
SECTION 1

TYPE I THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF PARENTS (Parenting)

QUESTION A
YOU MENTIONED SOME OF THE SCHOOL'S PROGRAMS IN THE AREA OF ASSISTING PARENTS BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE IN THEIR ROLE. COULD YOU ELABORATE ON THOSE PROGRAMS FOR ME?

QUESTION B
YOU'VE MENTIONED A VARIETY OF WAYS IN WHICH PARENTS ARE INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL. DOES THE SCHOOL HAVE ANY PROGRAMS THAT ARE DESIGNED TO ASSIST PARENTS BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE IN THEIR ROLE AS PARENTS?

If yes...

COULD YOU ELABORATE ON THOSE PROGRAMS FOR ME?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

1.1 Who has usually initiated such activities as these?

1.2 How can we ensure that the parents most in need of this kind of advice and information, do in fact attend?
ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO ASSIST PARENTS IN FULFILLING THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE A HOME ENVIRONMENT THAT IS SUPPORTIVE OF LEARNING, (THAT IS, ENSURING THAT THERE ARE APPROPRIATE SPACES AND TIME FOR HOMESTUDY, AND ENCOURAGING GOOD STUDY HABITS)?

If yes...

WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THEM FOR ME?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

1.3 Can you suggest any other things the school might do to assist parents in this regard?

SOME PEOPLE HAVE SUGGESTED THAT, WHEN THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF PARENTS TO PROVIDE FOOD, SHELTER, CLOTHING, HEALTH AND SAFETY ARE NOT BEING MET, THE SCHOOL HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO WORK WITH THE APPROPRIATE AGENCIES TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN ARE ADEQUATELY CARED FOR.

ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY SITUATIONS IN THIS SCHOOL WHERE CHILDREN HAVE NOT BEING SATISFACTORIZLY CARED FOR?

If yes...

TO YOUR KNOWLEDGE, HOW HAVE THEY BEEN HANDLED?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

1.4 Would you agree that this is a school responsibility: to monitor the home situation of its students and act when deficiencies are determined?

1.5 At what point would you say that the school is overstepping its bounds in concerning itself with the family situation of its students?
SECTION 2

TYPE II  THE BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF SCHOOLS
(Communicating)

QUESTION A

YOU’VE MENTIONED COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND THE PARENTS AS ONE WAY IN WHICH YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE SCHOOL IS ENHANCED. COULD WE CONSIDER THIS AREA IN SOME MORE DETAIL?

QUESTION B

ONE AREA THAT WE HAVEN’T TOUCHED ON YET IS COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND THE HOME.

COULD YOU DESCRIBE FOR ME THE VARIOUS WAYS IN WHICH YOU FIND OUT WHAT’S HAPPENING IN THE SCHOOL?

SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

YOU’VE MENTIONED THE SCHOOL NEWSLETTER AS ONE OF THE COMMUNICATION LINKS BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND THE HOME.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE SCHOOL’S NEWSLETTER FOR ME?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

2.1 How often do you receive a newsletter from the school?
2.2 What kinds of information does it usually contain?
2.3 What features of your school’s newsletter do you particularly like?
2.4 Are there any ways in which you’d like to see the newsletter changed?
2.5 How effective do you feel the school newsletter is, as a means for you to find out about the school?
TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

WE’VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT HOW THE SCHOOL COMMUNICATES TO THE HOME, BUT WHAT ABOUT PARENTS COMMUNICATING WITH THE SCHOOL?

DOES THE SCHOOL EVER SEEK YOUR OPINIONS OR IDEAS AS A PARENT?

If yes...

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL DO TO SOLICIT YOUR IDEAS?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

2.6 How do you feel that your ideas and opinions are received and acted upon by the school?

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND INDIVIDUAL PARENTS

AS A PARENT, YOUR GREATEST CONCERN IS OF COURSE WITH YOUR OWN CHILD’S SCHOOLING.

CAN YOU TELL ME HOW YOU GET INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT AND HOW YOUR CHILD IS DOING AT SCHOOL?

REPORT CARDS

LET’S TURN OUR ATTENTION NOW, TO THE REPORTING OF PUPIL PROGRESS TO PARENTS. ONE OF THE MOST COMMONLY USED VEHICLES FOR COMMUNICATING ACHIEVEMENT IS THE PUPIL REPORT CARD.

CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE REPORT CARDS YOUR SCHOOL USES?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

2.7 How effective do you feel the formal written report is in giving you information about your child?

2.8 What would you say are the positive qualities of the report card presently in use?
Are there any changes that you would like to see made in the report card to make it more informative for you, the parent?

**PRIMARY PARENT**

The new primary report card provides a place for the parent to respond.

- Have you used this opportunity to communicate with the school?
- Do you feel that the school has responded at all to your comments? If so, how?

**INTERMEDIATE PARENT**

The new primary report card provides a place for the parent to respond.

- Would you like to see such a provision on the Intermediate report card?
- Do you feel that the school would respond to your comments?

**PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES**

**I'D LIKE TO TALK NOW A BIT ABOUT PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES.**

**CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCING IN YOUR SCHOOL?**

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS**

2.11 What do you like about the parent-teacher conference?

2.12 How would you suggest that these conferences might be improved?

2.13 Do you as the parent, ever provide information to the teacher at the conference (as opposed to just hearing from the teacher about your child)?

If yes:

- Have you been specifically asked for your information or opinions?
- How has the teacher dealt with the information that you have provided?

2.14 Does the school make any special provisions that you are aware of, for working parents to attend parent-teacher conferences?
2.15 Does the school make any special provisions that you are aware of, for parents whose native language is not English?

**OTHER MEANS OF COMMUNICATING PUPIL PROGRESS**

**ARE ANY OTHER AVENUES, OTHER THAN THE FORMAL REPORT CARD AND PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE, USED TO PROVIDE YOU WITH INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR CHILD’S SCHOOL PROGRESS?**

If yes...

**COULD YOU DESCRIBE THEM FOR ME?**

**INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS WITH TEACHERS**

**DO YOU EVER ENGAGE IN INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR CHILD’S TEACHER?**

If yes...

**WHAT SORTS OF TOPICS DO YOU DISCUSS?**

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION**

2.16 Is this a particularly important source of information for you?

**THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT**

**WHAT SORTS OF INFORMATION DO YOU LEARN FROM YOUR OWN CHILD/CHILDREN?**

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS**

2.17 Do you regularly ask your child about school? Does your child voluntarily tell you about school?

2.18 How accurate, would you say, is what your child tells you about school?

2.19 Are you aware of any particular efforts on the part of the teachers or the principal, to ensure that the information you receive through your child is in fact complete and accurate?
OTHER SCHOOL PERSONNEL

WHAT ABOUT OTHER SCHOOL PERSONNEL (FOR EXAMPLE: SECRETARIES, CUSTODIANS, TEACHER ASSISTANTS, NURSES, VOLUNTEER AIDES, ETC.)?

ARE THEY A SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL FOR YOU?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

2.20 Are you aware of other parents who regularly consult such non-teaching personnel about school-related issues?

OTHER MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

ARE THERE ANY OTHER AVENUES OF COMMUNICATION IN USE OTHER THAN THOSE WE’VE ALREADY TALKED ABOUT?

HOW FREQUENTLY WOULD YOU SAY YOU RECEIVE INFORMATION IN SOME FORM OR ANOTHER FROM THE SCHOOL?

DO YOU THINK THAT CLASSROOM-TO-HOME COMMUNICATION IS MORE FREQUENT AT CERTAIN GRADE LEVELS THAN AT OTHERS?

If yes...

AT WHICH GRADE LEVELS IS IT MORE FREQUENT?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

2.21 Why do you think this is so?

2.22 Are you able to get all the information you want about the school and your child?
**COMMUNICATION IN GENERAL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IN SPITE OF THE VOLUME OF INFORMATION THAT FLOWS FROM THE SCHOOL, MANY PARENTS EXPRESS THE FEELING THAT THE SCHOOL MAKES CONTACT WITH THE PARENT ONLY IF THERE IS A PROBLEM - THAT LITTLE COMMUNICATION ABOUT THEIR OWN CHILD AT SCHOOL IS POSITIVE.</th>
<th></th>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHY DO YOU THINK SO?</td>
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**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION**

2.23 What does the school/what could the school do, to overcome this perceived communication problem?
SECTION 3

TYPE III  PARENT INVOLVEMENT AT SCHOOL  (Volunteering)

**QUESTION A**

YOU'VE MENTIONED PARENTS SERVING AS VOLUNTEERS IN THE SCHOOL.

COULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH PARENTS ARE INVOLVED AS VOLUNTEERS IN THIS SCHOOL?

**QUESTION B**

ANOTHER TYPE OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT MIGHT BE PARENTS SERVING AS VOLUNTEERS.

ARE YOU AWARE OF PARENTS WHO VOLUNTEER THEIR TIME AND SERVICES TO THE SCHOOL?

If yes...

COULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH PARENTS ARE INVOLVED AS VOLUNTEERS IN THE SCHOOL?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

3.1 About how many parents, would you suggest participate as volunteers in such activities as these?

3.2 Have you seen a change of any kind in this type of parent involvement over the last several years?

If yes:

How has it changed?

To what would you attribute this change?

3.3 Can you think of any things that teachers and/or administrators might do to increase the participation of volunteer parents?
YOU'VE MENTIONED PARENTS VOLUNTEERING TO WORK IN CLASSROOMS.
WHAT SORTS OF TASKS DO THESE PARENTS PERFORM?

OR

DO ANY OF THE TEACHERS IN THE SCHOOL HAVE PARENTS WORKING WITH THEM IN THEIR CLASSROOMS?
If yes...
WHAT SORTS OF TASKS DO THEY PERFORM IN THE CLASSROOM?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

3.4 How are these volunteers identified by the school?

YOU'VE MENTIONED A NUMBER OF WAYS IN WHICH PARENTS WORK WITH TEACHERS. HOWEVER, I'D LIKE TO FOCUS NOW UPON PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM IN THE CLASSROOM, AS OPPOSED TO THE PERFORMANCE OF CLERICAL TYPES OF TASKS.
ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY PARENTS WHO HAVE PERFORMED INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES IN CLASSROOMS?
If yes...
WHAT KINDS OF INSTRUCTIONAL TASKS DO THESE PARENTS PERFORM?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

3.5 What advantages can you see for parents being involved in the classroom in these kinds of tasks?

3.6 What disadvantages might there be?
USING PARENT SKILLS AND TALENTS

YOU'VE MENTIONED PARENTS COMING TO THE SCHOOL TO SHARE SOME SKILL, TALENT, OR KNOWLEDGE THAT THEY HAVE?

OR

ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY PARENTS WHO HAVE COME TO THE SCHOOL TO SHARE SOME SKILL, TALENT, OR KNOWLEDGE THAT THEY HAVE?

If yes...

COULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT SOME EXAMPLES OF THIS TYPE OF VOLUNTEERING?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

3.7 Do you know how these parents were identified?

PARENTS AS AUDIENCE

WHEN WE USE THE TERM "VOLUNTEERING" WE USUALLY THINK OF THE PARENTS WHO COME TO THE SCHOOL TO SERVE IN CAPACITIES SUCH AS WE HAVE JUST DISCUSSED.

HOWEVER, I'D LIKE TO BROADEN THE CONCEPT OF "VOLUNTEERING" SOMEWHAT TO INCLUDE PARENTS VISITING THE SCHOOL TO BE MEMBERS OF AN AUDIENCE, OR TO BE SPECTATORS.

COULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT SOME OF THE KINDS OF ACTIVITIES TO WHICH PARENTS ARE INVITED?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

3.8 Do you feel that there has been any change in the degree of parent participation on this level over the last several years?

Why or why not?
FINALLY, I'D LIKE TO BRIEFLY BROACH THE SUBJECT OF FUND-RAISING, WHICH IS ANOTHER LEVEL OF VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT.

ARE PARENTS ACTIVE AT ALL IN RAISING FUNDS FOR THE SCHOOL?

If yes...

IN WHAT WAYS HAVE PARENTS RAISED MONEY FOR THE SCHOOL?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

3.9  Who decides how money raised by the parents will be spent?
SECTION 4

TYPE IV  PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING ACTIVITIES AT HOME (Learning at Home)

QUESTION A

YOU’VE MENTIONED PARENTS WORKING WITH THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT PARENTS HAVE BEEN TOLD THEY COULD DO TO HELP THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME?

QUESTION B

ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY PROGRAMS IN THE SCHOOL WHEREBY PARENTS ARE ENLISTED IN HELPING THEIR CHILDREN WITH SCHOOLWORK AT HOME?

If yes...

COULD YOU DESCRIBE THEM FOR ME?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

4.1  Do you work with your own children at home with their school work?

• What kind of things have you done with your children?

• About how much time would you say you spend helping your children in a week?

4.2  Are you aware of any teachers in the school who have provided parents with specific advice regarding how they can help their children at home?

If yes:

• How was that advice provided?

4.3  What are some of the things that parents have been advised they could use to help heir children at home?
4.4 Do you know of any teachers who have assigned work that is specifically designed to be completed by the child and the parent working together?

4.5 What disadvantages might there be in parents working with their children on school work at home?
SECTION 5

TYPE V  PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE AND ADVOCACY (Representing Other Parents)

QUESTION A

YOU IDENTIFIED PARENTS INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL’S PARENT ASSOCIATION AS ONE AVENUE FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT.

WOULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR PARENTS’ ASSOCIATION?

QUESTION B

DOES THE SCHOOL HAVE A FORMAL PARENTS’ ASSOCIATION OF ANY KIND?

If yes...

COULD YOU DESCRIBE THE PARENT ASSOCIATION FOR ME?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

5.1 What percentage of your parent body would you say is involved in your parent group?

5.2 How are the members of the group selected?

5.3 What role does the principal play in parent group?

5.4 Has this group changed at all over the past several years?

If yes:

• How has it changed?

• To what might this change be attributed?
5.5 How representative would you say the group is, of the full spectrum of opinion within the parent body?

If not representative:

*What might be done to change that situation?

5.6 With what sorts of items does this group deal?

5.7 Who determines what items appear on the agenda of parent advisory meetings?

5.8 Does this parents' group play a role in the making of any major school or educational decisions?

If yes:

*Can you give me some examples?

5.9 What do you see as the positive aspects of this kind of parent involvement in the school?

5.10 What might be some negative aspects?
SECTION 6

THE IMPACT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

DO YOU FEEL THAT THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS IN THIS SCHOOL HAS HAD ANY PARTICULAR EFFECT UPON STUDENTS?

If yes...

COULD YOU ELABORATE FOR ME, PLEASE?

6.1 Student Attitudes:

6.2 Student Achievement:

WHAT ABOUT THE ATTITUDES OF PARENTS?

HAVE YOU NOTED ANY CHANGE IN PARENT ATTITUDES THAT MIGHT BE CONNECTED TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS IN THE SCHOOL?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

6.3 Do you feel there has been any noticeable change in parent attitudes as parent involvement has increased?

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE GENERAL ATTITUDE OF THE TEACHERS TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

6.4 Have you noticed any change in teacher attitudes as parents have become more involved in the school?

6.5 Do you feel there is any difference in the attitudes of teachers at different grade levels?
HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR PRINCIPAL FEELS ABOUT PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOL?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

6.6 Does your principal do anything in particular to make it easier for parents to be involved in the school?

6.7 Can you suggest anything else you would like to see him/her do to increase parent involvement?
SECTION 7

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GENERAL

ABOUT HOW MANY PARENTS WOULD YOU SAY ARE INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL TO SOME DEGREE? PERHAPS WE COULD CATEGORIZE INVOLVEMENT AS FOLLOWS:

- SUBSTANTIAL INVOLVEMENT (Daily or weekly)
- MODERATE INVOLVEMENT (Three to five times a year)
- LIMITED INVOLVEMENT (Once or twice a year)
- NO INVOLVEMENT

CAN YOU SUGGEST REASONS WHY THOSE WHO DO NOT PARTICIPATE TO ANY GREAT EXTENT MIGHT NOT BE PLAYING A LARGER ROLE IN THE SCHOOL?

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BARRIERS?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

7.1 How have some of these obstacles been overcome in this school?

7.2 What else might be done to break down barriers to parent participation?

- By the school
- By parents

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF PARENTS BEING INVOLVED IN EDUCATION?

ARE THERE SOME POTENTIAL DISADVANTAGES?
SECTION 8

SOME FINAL PERSONAL OPINIONS

YOU'VE TOLD ME A BIT ABOUT YOUR CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOL.

AS HE/SHE/THEY HAVE PROGRESSED UP THROUGH THE GRADES, HAS YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOL CHANGED AT ALL?

If yes...

TO WHAT WOULD YOU ATTRIBUTE THIS CHANGE?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

8.1 Is there anything that teachers might do to change this situation?

8.2 Is there anything the principal might do to change this situation?

IN GENERAL TERMS, HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR SCHOOL OVERALL, ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5 (WITH 1 BEING THE POOREST RATING, AND 5 THE BEST)?

DO YOU FEEL THERE IS ANY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT THE SCHOOL AS YOU'VE JUST INDICATED, AND THE AMOUNT OF INVOLVEMENT THAT YOU HAVE HAD IN THE SCHOOL?

If yes...

WOULD YOU EXPLAIN THIS CONNECTION?
SINCE YOU HAVE BEEN A PARENT IN THE SCHOOL, HAVE YOU SEEN ANY CHANGE IN THE AMOUNT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOL?

If yes...

HOW HAS THAT INVOLVEMENT CHANGED?

WHY DO YOU THINK THERE HAS BEEN A CHANGE?

FINALLY, WHAT WOULD YOU SUGGEST IT IS, THAT YOUR PRINCIPAL DOES TO FACILITATE THE INCLUSION OF PARENT IN THE LIFE OF THE SCHOOL?
REFERENCES
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