

**THE LINK BETWEEN SCHOOL COUNCILS AND RATES OF  
PARTICIPATION IN VARIOUS TYPES OF PARENTAL  
INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION**

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## Abstract

This study examines school councils with a focus on stimulating parental involvement in education and their ability to impact rates of parental participation. Evidence indicates that there is a link between a school council with an established focus on stimulating parental involvement and higher rates of volunteerism. Evidence also indicates that there is a link between volunteerism and higher rates of parental involvement across a wide range of activities that support students, including helpful types of involvement at home. Recommendations include adopting a modified version of Epstein's (1995) 6 types of involvement organizer to guide the work of school councils and principals on "how" to approach the task of stimulating parental involvement. Recommendations also include a focus on good volunteer management practices and developing communications that respect parents who choose to focus primarily on helping their children at home.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Purpose

The primary purpose of this research project is to determine if school councils have the ability to influence the rate of parental participation in education, with a particular emphasis on the types of involvement that may lead to improved student learning (building on Epstein's [1995] six types of involvement framework). The secondary purpose of this research project is to identify the ways in which Ontario's parents prefer to be involved in their child's education.

### Rationale

School councils were mandated into existence in Ontario in 1995. Since that time, school councils have struggled to play a consistent and meaningful role within Ontario's education system (Fullan & Quinn, 1996; Kerr, 2000; McKenna & Willms, 1998). In the 1998 report on school councils by the Education Improvement Commission (EIC), a key recommendation was to declare "improving student learning" as the overall goal for councils across the province (EIC, 1998). One of the key methods that the EIC identified for achieving this goal was "fostering parental involvement," although neither the EIC report nor the subsequent *Ontario Regulations 612 and 613* (2000), intended to define the structure and roles of school councils, contained clear direction for school council volunteers on the types of parental involvement that should be fostered to improve student learning. Without this clear direction, it is unrealistic to expect school councils to intuitively and effectively address the goal of improving student learning in a meaningful way (Fullan & Quinn; Kerr; McKenna & Willms). If volunteers are unable to make a meaningful difference, it seems reasonable to anticipate erosion in the

participation rate of parents willing to serve on a school council. The 14<sup>th</sup> annual study on *Public Attitudes Towards Public Education in Ontario* (Livingstone, Hart, & Davie, 2002) confirms a declining trend among parents willing to serve on their school council between 1994 and 2002. Ultimately, declining participation may threaten the viability and sustainability of the school council system in Ontario.

As there is a large body of research (Brough & Irvin, 2001; K. Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Epstein, 1995, 2001b; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Ross, 1994; Umphrey, 1998) that indicates a link between parental involvement and student learning, fostering increased levels of involvement may lead to improved student learning. Presented with evidence that school councils can stimulate rates of helpful parental involvement, I believe that school council volunteers may better understand that they have a real ability to make a meaningful difference within their schools, and as a result, the declining rate of parents willing to serve on school councils may be halted or reversed.

### Study Design

This study examines parental participation rates for various forms of parental involvement in a school where the school council has established a focus on stimulating parental involvement and compares those rates to schools where the school councils have a less established focus on stimulating parental involvement. Qualitative data are used to understand the activities of the school councils involved in the study and the conditions present within the schools that may have impacted parental involvement. Quantitative data are used to determine and compare the rates of parental involvement between the schools with an established focus on stimulating parental involvement versus the schools with a less established or developing focus on stimulating parental involvement.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### The Emergence of Parental Involvement as a Distinct Field of Research

The field of study on parental involvement has emerged in the last 3 decades as a distinct domain of research and expertise (K. Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Epstein, 2001a). Numerous researchers have conducted studies or offered their opinions on the benefits, drawbacks, and approaches to stimulate the types of parental involvement most likely to lead to improved student learning. Although the field of research is now recognized as a distinct area of study, Epstein reminds us that it remains relatively young: “Family-school partnership is really a very immature field of study compared to other aspects of education. People talk about thirty years of research and that's very young in terms of a research enterprise” (Epstein, 2001a).

Given the relatively recent emergence of this field of study, it seems reasonable to expect continued developments in understanding, policy, and practice. Further, it provides some understanding as to why so much debate continues over the definition and approaches for stimulating helpful forms of parental involvement.

### Forms of Parental Involvement That Help Students Learn

In 1989, K. Cotton and Wikelund reviewed 41 research studies, journal articles, and research-based guidelines for setting up programs of parental involvement to draw a set of definitive conclusions about the types of parental involvement most likely to positively impact student learning. Their findings were both conclusive and compelling. “The research overwhelmingly demonstrates that parent involvement in children’s learning is positively related to achievement” (K. Cotton & Wikelund, p. 3).

As early as 1989, trends were beginning to emerge from the field of study to indicate different levels of impact on student learning from different types of parental involvement.

Looking more closely at the research, there are strong indications that the most effective forms of parent involvement are those which engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities in the home. Programs which involve parents in reading with their children, supporting their work on homework assignments, or tutoring them using materials and instructions provided by teachers, show particularly impressive results.

However, considerably greater achievement benefits are noted when parent involvement is active – when parents work with their children at home, certainly, but also when they attend and actively support school activities and when they help out in classrooms or on field trips, and so on. (K. Cotton & Wikelund, 1989, p. 3)

In early 1995, the Royal Commission on Learning (RCL) completed their research and released their final report (RCL, 1995). The RCL's report was one of the early Ontario-based reports to identify some of the specific types of parental involvement that research indicated would best support student learning.

Just as the research is clear about the positive impact of involving teachers in school management, so it's equally strong about the positive role parents can play in their kids' education. Nothing motivates a child more than a home where learning is valued. If parents show a close interest in

their children's school progress, help with homework and home projects, and attend their kids' various school performances and sports events, their kids are more likely to have higher student achievement, higher aspirations, better attendance, and a more positive relationship with their teachers. That's why, for us, this form of parental involvement in schooling takes precedence over all others, and we've described it as a priority for every principal and teacher to take active steps to help parents do exactly those things.

In our view, this is a far more productive use of the often limited time and energy of most parents than being involved in sharing management responsibilities with the principal; as far as we can see, only a small minority of parents are actually interested in playing that kind of role, and there's no evidence we know of to demonstrate that it improved kids' learning. (RCL, 1995, p. 49)

Members of the Royal Commission recognized a range of types of involvement and began to express a preference for active involvement with between parent and child as a way of reinforcing the value of the school and of education to the child (RCL, 1995). Further, Commission members felt that this was a more direct path to positive outcomes for a student than through activities such as shared management or governance types of involvement.

In 1995, Epstein summarized a decade of research and the development of best practices in parental involvement in her article *School/Family/Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share*. In this 1995 report, Epstein demonstrated six

groupings of different types of involvement and mapped the expected outcomes for students, teachers, and parents that occur from each of the different “types” of involvement. These include:

1. parenting
2. communicating
3. volunteering
4. learning at home
5. decision making
6. collaborating with community

The framework that Epstein presented provided a common language and conceptual organizer to describe, in general terms, the different types of involvement identified in various studies, including those presented by K. Cotton and Wikelund (1989) and by the Royal Commission on Learning (1995). This framework was a significant development in thinking around parental involvement, not because of the discovery of new linkages between parental involvement and student achievement, but because of the plain language used to describe the parental involvement concepts that researchers and practitioners were having difficulty describing. With an organized framework, a common descriptive language, and predictable outcomes for each of the types of involvement, the opportunity presented itself for many schools, school districts, states, provinces, and parent-based organizations to begin to develop more systematic approaches for stimulating the different types of involvement.

In their 1996 article *School Councils: Non-Event or Capacity for Reform*, Fullan and Quinn refer to the work of Epstein:

Summarizing over a decade of research and development of best practice, Epstein (1995) makes the case unequivocally. At least six types of involvement working in concert are needed to make a difference [for student learning]. These include:

1. parenting skills (improve home environments)
2. communication (two-way -- school-to-home, home-to-school)
3. volunteering or parent aides (recruit and organize parent help)
4. learning at home (specific home tutoring assistance)
5. decision-making (involve parents and develop parent leaders)
6. coordinating with community agencies (identify and interpret community services). (Fullan & Quinn, 1996, p. 3)

Variety is a theme that emerges regularly from the research on parental involvement. It reinforces the point that there is no single type of involvement that can be identified as the only type required to impact student learning. Based on their review of studies completed prior to 1989, K. Cotton and Wikelund (1989) indicated that variety is one of the keys to success.

Researchers have also found that the schools with the most successful parent involvement programs are those which offer a variety of ways parents can participate. Recognizing that parents differ greatly in their willingness, ability and available time for involvement in school activities,

these schools provide a continuum of options for parent participation.

(K. Cotton & Wikelund, 1989, p. 8 )

### Parental Involvement in the Governance of Schools

Recent studies by Corter and Pelletier (2004) and by Leithwood and Parker (2000) have found that parental involvement in the governance of schools has little or no direct impact on classroom practices and little or no direct impact on student learning. There is evidence that research related to parental involvement in the governance of schools has been arriving at conclusions of this nature since the late 1970s (E. Cotton & Mann, 1995; David, 1994; Davies, 1977; Kannapel, 1994; RCL, 1995; Van Meter, 1994).

With many jurisdictions introducing school councils or similar structures and the continued emergence of what seems to be unfavourable research results such as those reported by Leithwood and Parker and Corter and Pelletier, we might wonder what potential opportunity exists for school councils. With that said, we might also question the linkages being examined in some of the research studies themselves. While it may be accurate to conclude that school councils are not having a direct impact on student learning because they are not having an impact on classroom practices, the study may be attempting to evaluate a linkage that is beyond the purpose and capabilities of school councils. As a result, the conclusions drawn may be somewhat misleading. Regulation 612 does not indicate that impacting classroom practices is an explicit goal of school councils. As such, it is unlikely that many school councils would focus their energies on trying to impact classroom practices. While it is interesting to know if school councils are having an impact on classroom practices, it is not core to their purpose, nor to the direction and training that they have been given. As a result, “having an impact on

classroom practices” is a variable of questionable value in determining if school councils are succeeding or failing to have an impact on student learning.

In 1989, K. Cotton and Wikelund concluded that there were benefits for parental involvement in the governance of schools, despite the absence of research evidence directly linking this form of involvement with student achievement.

The lack of evidence linking parental involvement in governance and student achievement should not be taken to mean that parents should not be included in some aspects of school decision making, however.

Researchers and others have identified benefits other than student achievement which have been found to emerge from involving parents in governance. These include:

- The elimination of mistaken assumptions parents and school people may hold about one another's [sic] motives, attitudes, intentions and abilities
- The growth of parents' ability to serve as resources for the academic, social and psychological development of their children – with the potential for much longerterm [sic] influence (because of continued interaction with their children over time)
- The increase of parents' own skills and confidence, sometimes furthering their own educations and upgrading their jobs, thus providing improved role models for their children
- The increase in parents serving as advocates for the schools throughout the community. (K. Cotton & Wikelund, 1989, p. 7)

Participating in governance activities is one of the six types of involvement identified by Epstein (1995), the one identified as “decision-making.” Fullan and Quinn support Epstein’s perspective, and suggest that there is a level of skill involved: “Note that involvement in decision-making is only one of the six forms [of parental involvement] (and a skilled one at that)” (Fullan & Quinn, 1996, p. 3).

In Ontario, school councils have advisory responsibilities, not decision-making responsibilities (Ontario Regulations 612 and 613, 2000). It may be more accurate to indicate that Ontario’s school councils are more of a tool for dialogue than for governance. Elected school trustees continue to retain the responsibilities that would be more accurately described as governance.

The writing of Sarason (1995) may contain some clues as to the opportunity inherent in introducing new voices into either governance roles or dialogue with members of the education system. Sarason considers the education system to be essentially a contained social structure which has its own set of norms, expectations, traditions, attitudes, and standards for participants to adhere to. New participants are inculcated into what is a powerful culture as the traditions are explained, skills are learned, and the attitudes are passed along. Sarason views the educational system as suspicious of outsiders, and does not seem to hold their opinions in high regard (Sarason).

People within the culture react to both the manner in which change decisions are introduced into the system and the contents of any change initiative. The relationships between the participants influence the perceptions of any new initiative. If an initiative is perceived as a threat, then the “system” will mount a defense to retain the status quo and avoid any disruption in the established relationships. The system is too complicated and

organized to delineate new learning and new thinking along the clean lines of the organizational charts. The informal relationships and unwritten rules must be taken into account, and change agents need to take this essential step (Fullan, 2001; Sarason, 1995).

Sarason (1995) further argues that the time perspective for viewing real change is longer than most people recognize or are willing to acknowledge. Changing a social institution as complicated as the education system takes significant time, as many of the “givens” are so deeply entrenched in the culture of the system, and within society in general, that real change may take a generation or more. Too many change initiatives are not given the chance to succeed simply because the change agents take an unrealistic view of the time horizon during which they will implement the change and begin to see the results (Sarason). This argument suggests that a change initiative such as school councils may take longer to have a real impact than anyone realizes and that measures of success or failure taken too early may not reflect the true impact that they may have over time.

Engaging parents and the community in the school system through the dialogue created by school councils offers the potential to expand the social structure of the system (Kerr, 1999). Over time, perhaps they have the potential to influence the culture of the educational system such that new arguments may be introduced and debated by educators and noneducators alike. With a foundation of effective communication between educators and noneducators, there exists a basis for building trust and the mutual respect necessary to arrive at conclusions and resolutions to introduce healthy positive change into the school system gradually and in a manner acceptable to both educators and noneducators (Kerr).

## Training and Development for School Council Participants

Early training for school councils focused on the operational basics necessary to establish such a body. Sessions focused on basic orientation, holding elections, team building, conflict resolution, and some of the essentials of establishing and running a successful team (Kerr, 2000).

There is little indication of a proactive and sustained effort to provide school councils with the skills and knowledge necessary to accept the responsibility for advancing parental involvement within their schools. In an unpublished study undertaken by the York Region District School Board (2001), school council participants indicated their levels of interest in a series of different training session topics. Preferences (Table 1) indicate an interest in training that would enable them to operate more effectively as a team and to understand how to advance parental involvement within their schools. Notice in Table 1 that seminars related to the basics and structural components of school councils are ranked numbers 12 and 13. This ranking suggests that participants were adequately comfortable with these issues in the year 2001 and were ready and preferred to move on to more advanced topics that might assist in creating more effective school councils.

Without training or at least a connection to resources to provide some guidance on how to foster parental involvement within their schools, it seems unreasonable to expect councils to become effective in addressing this particular responsibility. Without guidance and leadership, involved parents will slip back into their “comfort zones” and school councils will continue to struggle to move beyond the more traditional roles of parent groups (Kerr, 2000).

Table 1  
*Indicated Preferences for New Seminar Development*

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Individuals indicating that they would attend the following training seminars:

1. Fundraising
  2. Volunteers
  3. Communications
  4. Help from the Community
  5. The Kinds of Involvement That Matter
  6. Council Leadership
  7. Parenting Resource Centres
  8. School Improvement Planning Process
  9. Money Matters
  10. Learning at Home
  11. Conflict Resolution
  12. Structures, Constitutions and Policies
  13. Introduction to School Councils
- 

*Note.* Based on small sample size,  $n = 28$ . Results provide directional information.

## Support and Informational Needs of Parents

Parents seek information to know how they can help their children do better in school every year (Epstein, 1995). Parents are their child's "first teacher" (Sullivan, 1998), and they have an interest in seeing their children do as well as possible. However, as children develop, and as the school material changes, parents have a need for up-to-date information about how they can best support their children. A finding from the recent Parent Voice in Education Project (PVEP) in Ontario identified that parents need information about how the education system works, where decisions are made, and how to become involved in helpful ways (PVEP, 2005). This conclusion from a province-wide consultation in 2005 echoes the 1995 declaration of the Royal Commission on Learning: "We believe ... that parents must be welcomed by every school in the province and given thorough advice about how they can support their children's learning" (RCL, 1995, p. 9).

### Training and Development for Principals and Teaching Professionals

In 1997, the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) completed a study entitled *New Skills for New Schools: Preparing Teachers in Family Involvement* (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). In the United States, the conclusion was as follows:

School efforts to promote family involvement in children's education will succeed only if teachers are adequately prepared to support these efforts. The high standard of professional development that policymakers espouse for teachers of core academic subjects applies equally to partnerships for family involvement. Teachers -- from prekindergarten to secondary school -- need skills to create the positive family partnerships that result in student success and improved schools.

Teacher preparation in family involvement lags far behind school efforts to promote family involvement. In 1992, the initial research for this report found that teacher certification requirements in the majority of states did not mention family involvement. States whose certification requirements did allude to family involvement, however, often defined family involvement in vague terms. Likewise, most teacher education programs did not offer substantial training in family involvement. Training that was conducted was often limited in scope of content and teaching methods. Thus, a serious discrepancy existed between preservice preparation and the types of family involvement activities that teachers were increasingly being expected to perform in schools. (Shartrand et al., 1997, p. 1)

This study indicates that encouraging and stimulating effective forms of parental involvement is something that teachers are not often prepared for, either preservice or in-service. Aside from the evidence that indicates the benefits for students arising from parental involvement, some studies indicate that teachers benefit directly through improved teacher and staff morale when working in a school that works well with families (Epstein, 1995; Lasky & Moore, 2003; Olmscheid, 1999). Achieving a school environment able to work well with families would seem to begin with educator preparation.

### The Ontario Context

The following sections examine the development of the school council initiative in Ontario, from their original conception within The Royal Commission on Learning,

their launch in 1995, through their early training and development, and through multiple provincial consultation processes and reports.

### *The Royal Commission on Learning*

In late 1994, the RCL delivered their final report, *For the Love of Learning*. The first of four main engines of reform recommended by the RCL was a new alliance between home, school, and the community.

The RCL suggested that the trend towards assigning the responsibility for addressing all new knowledge and emerging societal issues on the school system be stopped and even reversed. Schools, argued the RCL, cannot be isolated, self-contained institutions, and teachers cannot be expected to be experts in every field, act as psychologists and social workers, and co-ordinate all of the new activities expected of the school. School community councils with significant parent representation were recommended to help organize and mobilize community resources to “allow teachers to concentrate on better academic teaching [not to place more demands on teachers]. Inevitably and reasonably, the council would want to advise the principal on general matters relating to improving the school, and the wise principal would seek and heed its advice” (RCL, 1995, p. 50). The councils recommended by the RCL were not councils of governance but instruments for community capacity building.

### *Policy Program Memorandum 122*

The year 1995 was a pivotal one in Ontario, as it was the year that *Policy Program Memorandum (PPM) 122* (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1995) was in preparation for release. The year also saw the printed release of the RCL report

*For the Love of Learning*, and Epstein's (1995) organizing framework. Unfortunately, PPM 122 did not appear to capture the best of either report, and instead launched the more structural elements of the school council reform initiative. It was a progressive move in establishing a broader dialogue between educators and noneducators, however, it did not leverage the most up-to-date developments in the thinking around how to stimulate effective types of parental involvement. In fact, one might argue that it officially recognized one form of parental involvement (participating in decision making) while inferentially discounting other forms of involvement that both parents and educators knew intuitively to be important. During the 1995 implementation of school councils, the exclusion of forms of involvement such as volunteering and fundraising caused some confusion over the purpose and role of school councils (Denne Public School Transition Team discussion, personal communication, February 1996).

In 1996, Fullan and Quinn demonstrated considerable foresight as they described two eventual outcomes for the school council system: a structurally compliant outcome or something that would lead to capacity building at the local level. Simply achieving structural compliance by "having" a school council would accomplish nothing, Fullan and Quinn claimed. One might argue that PPM 122 and the subsequent *Regulations 612 and 613* (2000) were primarily concerned with the formation and structural compliance of school councils.

Fullan and Quinn expressed their disappointment in the manner in which the work of the RCL was applied in practice:

Look what has happened so far with the Ontario Royal Commission's (Love of Learning) recommendations on school councils (released in

January 1995). The Commission's analysis and report took some pains to stress that their recommendations involved councils as one of the key "engines" of reform, which would be part and parcel of mobilizing schools and community resources to help address the daunting task of teaching all students in today's different environment. Instead, policy initiatives appear stalled at the superficial, structural requirement of installing councils in each school. (Fullan & Quinn, 1996, p. 2)

Fullan and Quinn described school councils moving beyond structural compliance to building capacity. They suggested that a school council focused on stimulating the six different types of involvement identified by Epstein could achieve something of consequence. Fullan and Quinn (1996) write:

What does make a difference is the multiple forms of particular involvement, deliberately fostered, developed, and supported. ... At least six types of involvement working in concert are needed to make a difference:

1. parenting skills (improve home environments)
2. communicating (two-way, school to home, home to school)
3. volunteering or parent aides (recruit and organize parent help)
4. learning at home (specific home-tutoring assistance)
5. decision making (involve parents and develop parent leaders)
6. collaborating with community agencies (identify and interpret community services)

Note that involvement in decision-making is only one of the six forms (and a skilled one at that). Moreover, these forms of involvement do not happen by accident or even by invitation. They happen by explicit strategic intervention. In other words, both parents and educators need education and training in their new roles and new role relationships in order to become effective. (Fullan & Quinn, 1996, p. 3)

### *The Education Improvement Commission*

In 1998, the EIC in Ontario conducted an extensive review of the developing research on parental involvement and conducted a province-wide consultation with parents, educators, and other interested parties, specifically related to how school councils were having an impact. The report entitled *The Road Ahead III: A Report on the Role of School Councils* summarized the status of school councils, how people were responding to their new roles and responsibilities, and how they might move forward to become more effective.

Research indicates that school councils are more effective if they are given a mandate that is clear and meaningful. Many school councils in the province have been hampered by a lack of clarity about their purpose.

... The background statement of PPM 122 indicates that school councils were established to increase the level of parental and community involvement in the education of Ontario's young people. ... we believe that the purpose of school councils is to improve student learning and that parental and community involvement is one of the means to achieving this purpose. (EIC, 1998, p. 7)

The EIC report highlighted three specific areas in which school councils might move forward to focus on improved student learning.

1. Fostering parental and community involvement in education.
2. Participating in the school improvement planning process.
3. Influencing decisions made by Principals, school boards and the Ministry of Education and Training. (EIC, 1998, pp. 11-13)

Similar to the RCL report, the EIC report provided direction to educators, administrators, parent groups, and school councils about the need to focus on involving parents in education, but the report was not clear regarding “how” they might go about the task of organizing and stimulating effective forms of parental involvement. In 2000, however, the EIC released a resource to stimulate the development of site-based school improvement plans, *School Improvement Planning, A Handbook for Principals, Teachers and School Councils* (EIC, 2000). The handbook recognized and endorsed Epstein’s conceptual organizer for use at the site level to stimulate effective forms of parental involvement. When the EIC mandate ended just after this handbook was published, adoption and use of the new school improvement planning process was left up to individual boards and schools. This handbook was the first Ontario publication to provide direction to Ontario’s principals and school councils about how to stimulate effective forms of parental and community involvement. It provided clear direction to local site-based teams, including administrators, teachers, parents, and school councils on how to collaborate in stimulating parental involvement through locally developed action plans. The handbook continues in limited use following the closure of EIC, the group that initially championed the development of the guidebook.

### *Regulations 612 and 613*

*Ontario Regulations 612 and 613* were issued in 2000 to further clarify some of the language, roles, and responsibilities surrounding school councils, principals, and district school boards. One of the advances made in this publication was the explicit statement of a purpose for school councils, “The purpose of school councils is, through the active participation of parents, to improve pupil achievement and to enhance the accountability of the education system to parents” (p.1).

Further language in the regulations recognized that many school councils were involved in fundraising activities and provided clarifying language around the handling of money. Beyond these advances, much of the language in the regulations placed further emphasis on achieving structural compliance and advising principals on a number of governance type matters.

The regulations did not provide direction to boards, principals, or school councils about how school councils might most effectively achieve their purpose of “improving pupil achievement” (p.1). The regulation failed to explicitly reference the EIC handbook on school improvement planning, which was available to provide guidance to school council participants on how they might focus on this purpose.

Responsibility for the school council change initiative was rooted with the principals, as evidenced by Regulation 613. The regulations required school boards and principals to seek the views of school councils on a variety of matters and to report back to school councils on advice received.

### *The Limited Definition of Parental Involvement*

While Ontario's school councils were originally intended as a tool to foster parental and community involvement, direction to that effect was referenced only in the background of PPM 122 (1995) and again in the recommendations of *The Road Ahead III* by the EIC (1998). However, formal direction to that effect was not referenced in the provincial regulations to school councils or to other parent groups. As discussed earlier, many schools council and parent groups have not received the training and tools to develop the skills required to take on this kind of responsibility (Kerr, 2000).

Language in PPM 122 and Regulation 612 directed school council participants to focus more on governance issues rather than fostering the types of parental involvement known to lead to improved student learning. Through a focus on structural compliance and an implicit endorsement of one type of involvement (i.e., participating in decision making) over the other more effective forms of involvement, participants may have been led to believe that being part of a school council or attending school council meetings is the most desirable form of parental involvement. There continue to be many school councils that believe that one of their main goals is to involve more parents in a school council or to seek attendance at a school council meeting as a goal in and of itself (Thurston, 2001). Rather than understanding that there are only a small percentage of parents who wish to take part in this type of involvement, lower levels of participation on a school council is sometimes viewed as a sign of apathy by both parents and educators.

To some degree, this official recognition of one type of involvement misdirected the efforts of many well-meaning individuals and unintentionally created conditions for conflict between educators and noneducators. Rather than focus on stimulating parental

involvement within the balance of the school community, conditions were created for school councils to believe that their primary purpose is to play a role in governing the school and to engage more parents from within the community in this activity.

*Recommendations of the Parent Voice in Education Project*

A province-wide consultation of parents was held in early 2005 on behalf of the Minister of Education for Ontario. The project was led by a group of parents with a long history of involvement in the education system in Ontario. A provincial policy on parental involvement was one of the group's key recommendations, along with key supporting mechanisms at the provincial, board, and school levels. Tri-level support for an educational priority is a concept that Fullan (2004, 2005a, 2005b) recognizes as an essential ingredient for success.

Supporting mechanisms include an Office of Parental Involvement within the Ministry of Education in Ontario to both advance parental involvement and support the continued development of school councils, assignment of direct responsibility for advancing parental involvement to Directors of Education or their senior delegates, and board level support for parents, principals, and teachers and school councils such as training and development and opportunities for local information sharing.

At the school level, changing the priorities of school councils was one of the recommendations of the Ontario Parent Voice in Education Project. The project recommendation stated that school councils place an increased level of focus on stimulating parental involvement within their school community. The group recommended that school councils:

- A) Create an action plan at the beginning of the school year to address gaps or opportunities for parental participation; this plan should be reviewed half way through the school year.
- B) Publish an annual evaluation of parental involvement in their school and recommend strategies for increasing parental involvement (e.g. information, training, translations, etc.).
- C) Have a specific focus on engaging parents and fostering parental involvement generally within their school communities. (PVEP, 2005, p. 24)

Similar to the RCL (1995) and EIC (1998) reports, the PVEP (2005) report was not clear about “how” organizers might go about the task of organizing and stimulating effective and helpful forms of parental involvement. The PVEP did reference the handbook developed by the EIC as a tool providing clear direction to local site-based teams on how to “collaborate in stimulating a range of effective types of parental involvement through locally developed action plans” (PVEP, p.13). As noted earlier, this recognizes and leverages the framework of Epstein.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

### Research Objectives

The prime objective of this study is to determine whether a school council focused on stimulating parental involvement has the ability to influence the rate of participation among parents within its school community.

A secondary objective is to determine whether parents have similar preferred types of involvement, or whether there are distinctly different subsets of parents that might assist school councils and educators develop and communicate programs of appeal to the unique interests of these different target groups.

### Key Research Questions

1. Can a school council focused on stimulating parental involvement within their school impact the rate of participation?
2. What are the rates of parental participation for a variety of types of involvement?
3. Are there parents who are actively involved with their children's education at home who are unwilling or unable to volunteer at the school or become part of the school council?

### Theoretical Framework

This study will use the six types of involvement framework developed by Epstein (1995) as the basis for defining the types of involvement that Ontario's school councils might foster in their efforts to improve student learning. However, this study will modify the framework for suitability within Ontario by renaming some of the categories and by

subdividing one of Epstein's categories into three. The result will be eight plain-language categories of parental involvement usable by school councils as follows:

1. Building Parenting Skills
2. Communicating
3. Volunteering
4. Attending School Events (new)
5. Fundraising (new)
6. Helping at Home
7. Participating in Decision Making
8. Collaborating with the Community

### Hypothesis

It is the hypothesis of this study that school councils can influence the rate of participation in parental involvement activities by focusing their efforts on the various types of involvement contained within Epstein's (1995) model of parental involvement, with slight modifications to suit the Ontario context.

Given the evidence that exists linking parental involvement to student success (K. Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Epstein, 2001a; Henderson & Berla, 1994), it follows that a school council focused on stimulating parental participation in various forms of involvement may have the opportunity to indirectly have an impact on student achievement and, in doing so, contribute to achieving the purpose for school councils of improving pupil achievement as identified in *Ontario Regulations 612 and 613* (2000).

## Methodology

### *Choice of Methodology*

The methodology selected for this study was mixed. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used for data collection and analysis. Qualitative methods were used to understand the degree of focus of the councils on stimulating parental involvement. Qualitative methods were also used to understand the actions taken by the school councils involved in the study and the kinds of activities initiated to stimulate parental involvement within the school. Quantitative methods were used to determine the rates of parental participation in various kinds of activities. In total, there were three schools and 314 parents involved in the data reported in this study. The limited number of schools, participants, and the absence of schools of a diverse nature are factors that limit the ability to generalize results of the study to all schools.

### *Methodology: First Stage*

The purpose of this first stage was to identify schools with functional school councils that vary in their level of focus on stimulating other parents within their school communities to be involved in the education of their children. The study broke these schools into two cells for inclusion in the study as follows:

1. schools with functional school councils and an established focus on stimulating parental involvement within their schools, and
2. schools with functional school councils and either a limited or developing focus on stimulating other parents within their school communities to be involved in the education of their children.

Dysfunctional school councils (through either internal discord or a difficult relationships between parents, staff, and/or administration) were not included in the study following a discussion held with several senior board staff members within the school district involved in this study. The study was not intended to centre out any particular council or staff or administrator, and it was felt that despite assurances of confidentiality, the possible exposure of a dysfunctional council would expose some people to unnecessary personal risk.

Six sites were selected purposively from within one school district in Ontario that has a formal policy suggesting that school councils promote family, school, and community linkages, a formal communication protocol, and a record of providing relevant professional development to school council participants (Jantzi, Leithwood, & Steinbach, 1998). The school district was asked to recommend several schools that display the necessary characteristics for possible inclusion in the study. This was a necessary step to avoid burdening all principals and school council chairs in the school district with the prescreening interview.

Available data were also used by the school district involved to confirm similar socioeconomic compositions in order to identify schools with matching socioeconomic characteristics for inclusion in each research cell within the study. This step was included in an attempt to control variation in parental participation levels that may occur due to differences in socioeconomic factors (Epstein, 2001b).

From a list of six suburban schools identified, a brief prescreening questionnaire with four multiple-choice questions was administered to four of the schools through a phone interview with the principal and separately with the school council chair. Each

phone interview lasted no more than 10 minutes and provided an explanation about the purpose of the study. One school declined to participate prior to administration of the prescreening phase, and I was unsuccessful in contacting one of the schools. One school was removed from the study as a result of a distinctly unique cultural demographic identified during the initial interview with the principal.

The questions in this stage were designed to determine that both principals and school council chairs agree:

1. About the degree to which the school council focuses on stimulating parental involvement within the school,
2. About the degree of support that teaching staff provide to parents be helpful and involved in their child's education, and
3. That the school council is functional rather than dysfunctional.

During the interviews, it also became possible to determine the length of time that the schools had focused on stimulating parental involvement. This became a key differentiating factor, enabling a distinction between established programs versus developing programs to stimulate parental involvement. Data provided by the school board were also used to validate the findings at this stage.

From those who met the prescreening criteria, and expressed an interest in participating, a purposive, nonrandom sampling procedure (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2002) was used to place the three remaining schools into one of the two cells of the study. One is a school with a school council that demonstrated an established focus on stimulating parental involvement within their schools. Two are schools that demonstrated a developing focus on stimulating parental involvement within their schools. There were

no schools identified in the prescreening phase without some focus on stimulating parental involvement.

*Methodology: Second Stage*

This stage of the study was intended to identify actions taken by the school council or staff members to stimulate parental involvement within the schools in the study in order to identify the conditions present that may have had a potential impact on the rates of parental involvement within the school.

Interviews, qualitative in nature, typically half an hour in length were guided by a general schedule of interview questions (Jantzi, Leithwood & Steinbach, 1998) and were held again with the principal or school council chairs of each school in the study.

For the school in cell 1 with a school council that identified an established focus on stimulating parental involvement, questions were guided by the six types of involvement conceptual organizer developed by Epstein (1995), modified for use in Ontario by subdividing one, Epstein's category of volunteering, into three separate categories, volunteering, attending school events, and fundraising.

For the schools with school councils with a developing level of focus on stimulating parental involvement, most of the open-ended questions identified the types of action that they took to stimulate parental involvement. Additional questions sought information to identify what else those school councils focused on and what conditions were present as a result of any action taken. Questions also sought to ask about the degree to which the teaching staff may have taken action or created conditions to stimulate parental involvement, even though the school council did not have a more established level of focus on providing support for that activity. These data were

supplemented and further validated with data on file with the school board indicating the previous year's activities of the school council.

*Methodology: Third Stage*

The third stage involved the use of a parent survey instrument to gain data about the rates of parental participation in a variety of different types of involvement activities. The survey also asked parents to self-identify as school council members and/or as volunteers (other than on a school council) and/or as parents involved in home learning activities such as reading to children, helping with homework, and communicating with their child's teacher. It was possible for parents to identify themselves as active in all of these areas.

Parents in grades 1 through 6 in the three participating schools were asked to respond to a item survey and return it to the school within 3 days of receiving it. Five parents of kindergarten children also answered the survey in one of the schools in cell 2. An open-ended question 67 was added to seek any methods of parental involvement that were not adequately covered in questions 1 through 66.

This instrument was based on previous survey instruments developed by Epstein and her six types of involvement conceptual organizer for parental involvement (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997). The questions were adapted for use in Ontario (Lasky & Moore, 2004), primarily by removing terminology more commonly associated with the U.S. school system (e.g., references to the PTA, a common Parent Teacher Association in the U.S. that is not common in Ontario), and the conceptual organizer was expanded to cover eight different types of involvement by splitting Epstein's category of

volunteering into three separate categories covering volunteering, attending school events, and fundraising.

### An Overview of Schools in the Study

Only one school met the criteria (Table 2) to be included in the first cell of the study. This is a school with a higher level of focus and an established approach to assessing, planning for, and developing programs to stimulate parental involvement among the school community. The school council partners with the principal to develop specific action plans within a modified version of Epstein's areas of involvement. The use of Epstein's organizer was coincidental and was not a criterion for involvement in the study or for placement into the first cell of the study. The Epstein approach was introduced to the school council by the principal and, as such, it is a principal-led approach that is accepted and participated in by the school council. The approach was first introduced to the school by the principal 2 and a half years ago, and several participants have been actively involved in it over that entire time period. As such, I describe this school as one with an established program to stimulate parental involvement, led by the principal, with the active support and collaboration of the school council. The school in this cell will be given the pseudonym of Alpha school for the balance of this report.

Two schools were included in the second cell of the study. Both of these schools have school councils with a focus and developing approach to stimulating parental involvement. There were no schools identified without any focus on stimulating parental involvement. The schools categorized within the second cell of this study both have a less established program for stimulating parental involvement than the school included in

Table 2

*Criteria Differentiating Schools in Cells 1 and 2*

Differentiating criteria	Schools in Cell 1	Schools in Cell 2
	Established focus	Developing focus
Level of school council activity over past 2 years co-ordinating and supporting parents to be involved in the education of their children <sup>a</sup>	Very active	Somewhat active
Length of time that the council and principal have collaborated to focus on stimulating parental involvement	Alpha school - 2 and a half years +  (a level of focus was reported to be in place prior to the arrival of the current principal)	Beta school – 1 year  Delta school – less than 6 months
Tenure of the current principal within the school	Alpha school - 2 and a half years	Beta school – 2 years  Delta school – 5 months
Tenure of the current school council chair or cochairs	Alpha school - 2 years	Beta school – 1 year  Delta school – 1 year

<sup>a</sup>Responses obtained separately from principals and school council chairs to determine if the council was very active, somewhat active, not very active, or not active at all.

cell 1, primarily on the basis of time committed to this focus. The participants are relatively new in their roles, with school council leadership in each of these two schools new to their roles within the past year. The schools in this cell will be given the pseudonyms of Beta school and Delta school for the balance of this report.

Cell 1: The Activities of Alpha School, a School Council with an Established Program to  
Stimulate Parental Involvement

*Overview of Alpha school*

Alpha school has a more established focus on stimulating parental involvement. Upon arriving at the school 2 and half years ago, the current principal was able to leverage the work of the previous principal who was successful in building a collaborative relationship with the school council, a separate and active parents' group, and a staff that was willing and comfortable inviting parent volunteers into school life. The principal described the school staff as very invitational and welcoming to school volunteers.

When the current principal arrived at Alpha school, she began using a modified version of Epstein's framework (see Appendix A) to co-ordinate a balanced program of parental involvement with the school council, parents, and her staff. Several years ago, as a vice-principal in another school, the principal in this school participated in board organized training for principals and vice-principals on the topic of stimulating effective parental involvement co-operatively with their school councils. I was the trainer who led that professional development session, which explains this principal's use of a modified version of Epstein's framework. It is a framework that I have been sharing with educators and school councils since the year 2000, although I had no contact with this

principal in the period between that November 2000 training session and the beginning of this research project in April 2005.

One of the first steps that she took in Alpha school was to gain the support of the school council and the separate parents' group to merge into a renewed school council. She also recruited two long-serving parents from the parents' group to become cochairs of the new school council. These cochairs have remained in place for 2 years, and brought several years of experience leading volunteers and the parents group to their new positions.

While a couple of key factors differentiate Alpha from those schools in cell 2, it is primarily the length of time that the current principal and school chairs have been in place and working together that distinguishes this school as one with an established program to stimulate parental involvement versus the schools in cell 2 where the programs continue to develop.

The following sections describe the conditions present within Alpha school that may have had an impact on the rate of parental involvement. Many initiatives were undertaken collaboratively by the principal and the school council, along with support from school staff and volunteers. The information is presented according to the major categories of involvement identified within the modified version of Epstein's (1995) organizing framework. Alpha school used this framework to plan activities to stimulate parental involvement within the school.

*Communications.* The school and school council share information regularly with the Alpha school community through newsletters, a refurbished website, and emailing of council minutes. Regular communication between home and school is encouraged

through the use of agenda planners, telephone calls, and notes to clarify expectations for homework. Homework assignments are made in writing, and notes are shared with home when assignments are incomplete.

*Volunteering.* Volunteers are invited to participate through recruiting drives and invitations in the school newsletter and on the website. There are training workshops for volunteers to enable them to effectively support Alpha school's focus on literacy through a *Come in and Read* program. Other in-class volunteers are provided with instruction, direction, and specific materials to enable them to effectively assist students and teaching staff in a variety of ways. The school librarian takes an active role in bringing in volunteers, and in providing them with direction.

*Attending school events.* Parents are encouraged to attend *Meet the Teacher Night*, graduation, and award ceremonies. The school has developed several evening events for parents and their children including a *Pajama Story Night* for primary students, and literacy nights also featuring author visits to the school during the day to work with the children.

*Fundraising.* Much of the school council's fundraising activities have been focused on supporting the school plan for continuous improvement with a strong emphasis on literacy. Many of the activities have supported the creation of a book room in the school, featuring a series of leveled reading books for student use, guided by teaching staff. The agenda planners are a cost-shared initiative designed to both distribute information from school to home and to maintain a channel of communication between home and school for the year. Some of the fundraising activities have been used to support visits from authors. In addition to literacy, some fundraising monies have been

used to renew some of the musical instruments in the school. In the past, funds have been used for playground equipment, gym equipment, cooling fans, and to provide treat breaks for students during the Educational Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) testing weeks.

*Helping at home.* Alpha school has a homework policy which is printed in the school agendas. Classes also produce a monthly newsletter to assist in keeping parents informed about the topics being covered at school. The literacy events held at the school are one of the ways to indirectly provide instruction to parents about methods and the importance of reading to children at home. Alpha school also uses a variety of other tools to encourage support at home. These include reading journals signed by parents, library visits, book fairs, and advice from some of the authors who visit the school.

*Participating in decision making.* The school council plays a role in reviewing and updating the school plan for continuous improvement and in supporting a variety of initiatives for volunteers, fundraising, and literacy. The school plan was reviewed in May 2005, as discussions were occurring with the school regarding this research study.

*Building parenting skills.* Speakers are brought in for parents from time to time, with some of the key topics being antibullying and character education. These are in addition to the events held with authors and the literacy training activities provided primarily for school volunteers.

*Collaborating with the community.* The school leverages tutors from the high school to provide additional support to students throughout the school. Over the course of this school year, 18 high school students obtained a portion of their community service hours as co-op students working within the school. The school has leveraged community

programs such as Junior Achievement for guest speakers and leveraged community resources for some of the school's fundraising activities (e.g., poinsettias from a local florist for fundraising around Christmas).

Cell 2: The Activities of the Beta and Delta Schools, the Schools and School Councils  
with Developing Programs to Stimulate Parental Involvement

*Overview of Beta School*

In Beta school, the commitment and approach for stimulating parental involvement were introduced a year ago, when the recently arrived principal teamed up with a new school council chair. The principal had a history of working collaboratively with the school community to engage parents and had led the school council at a prior school to focus on stimulating parental involvement. In this prior school, the principal engaged me to lead a joint training session for herself and her school council on ways that they could collaborate to lead a program to stimulate parental involvement. The training included Epstein's (1995) framework, although there was no explicit reference to use of the framework in Beta school by either the principal or school council chair. Similar to the Alpha school principal, I had no contact with this principal between the time of the training session at her previous school and the beginning of this research project in April 2005.

In Beta school, a new school council chair was appointed at the beginning of this school year. From the interviews, it is apparent that the principal and the school council chair work well together and are highly committed to engaging parents in the education of their children.

One of the first initiatives of the new school council this year was to survey Beta school parents to understand their interests. This survey provided the new school council chair and the principal with a method to focus their efforts on initiatives identified by parents as being of interest.

The following sections describe the conditions present within Beta school that may have had an impact on the rate of parental involvement. Similar to the earlier section on Alpha school, the information is presented according to the major categories of involvement identified within the modified version of Epstein's (1995) organizing framework. Although Beta school did not explicitly use this framework to plan activities to stimulate parental involvement within the school, many of the activities that were initiated can be organized for description using this framework.

*Building parenting skills.* Information sessions for parents were a direct outcome of the parent survey, and the school council partnered with other area school councils to bring guest speakers into the area on drug awareness, bullying and parenting.

*Communications.* A new school sign was purchased jointly by the school council and the principal to inform parents and the local community about upcoming events or notes of interest about the school. The new school council began collecting email addresses at school events and began distributing some information through this channel this year. For next school year (2005/2006), the school council plans to expand the usage of this method for communicating with parents. For special events at the school, volunteers would also stand in the school parking lot handing out flyers to announce the date and time of the events and invite parents to attend. Special notes were also sent

home with children to announce school events. For the next school year, an updated school newsletter is planned to replace one described as traditional and unread.

*Helping at home.* There was a limited focus in this area this year with so much effort being placed in other areas. The school council has not been involved in updating the school's homework policy. A focus on literacy was dealt with through a *Snuggle Up and Read Program* described in the fundraising section.

*Volunteering.* The school council chair described the volunteer program as developing. During this school year, the school council formed a *Parent Volunteer Network*, along with a *Grandparent Brigade* to engage the numerous grandparents acting as caregivers for children within this community. The council organized a couple of separate volunteer meetings during the year (i.e., separate from the school council meetings). The school council chair considered these meetings to be useful as they were able to focus entirely on the needs and issues surrounding volunteering activities. For next school year, a regular series of separate volunteer meetings are planned to further develop this resource.

*Fundraising.* The school council chair described the fundraising program as weak, as the council continues to shift its focus from traditional bake sale fundraisers to school events that involve both children and parents and charging a small fee at the door. The council organized two *Snuggle Up and Read* events as an outcome of the school survey early in the year. The school council chair considered these events to be successful through both attendance and feedback from parents and children.

*Attending school events.* In addition to the events noted earlier, the school council brought parents into the school to discuss and seek creative solutions to the issues

surrounding an increasing trend towards split classes. Following dialogue and an exploration of the issue, the school council secured the services of a board consultant to assist teachers and parents in split classrooms better deal with some of the challenges. These services will be introduced next school year. In addition, and again leveraging the collaborative spirit established between the principal and the school council, the principal provided the school council with all of the facts surrounding numbers of students and the available teaching resources as a basis for finding a classroom distribution containing fewer split classes. A parent with a background in computer modeling developed a model and a school class distribution that reduced a planned number of split classes for the next school year from five to two. This distribution list was accepted and implemented by the principal.

*Collaborating with the community.* The school was facing behavioral problems with students visiting local area businesses and the local community centre. Three steps were taken to address the issues. First, the vacant school council community representative position was refilled, inviting a member of the local community centre to join the school council. The person will take up the post next school year following discussions this year. However, the dialogue between Beta school and the community centre resulted in the lifting of a community centre ban on students. Second, the school council arranged a meeting between Beta school parents and the owners of businesses frequented by the students at lunch time, providing store owners with an opportunity to let parents know what was happening and to discuss methods of addressing the issues. Feedback from store owners indicated to Beta school that frequency of behavioral problems was reduced following the meeting between parents and store owners. Third,

one particularly supportive store owner was recognized by the school and school council for support of the school and its students. This store owner was known to invite the students in and to allow them to use available seating even if they were not buying anything. A certificate was created and presented to the store owner, who proudly displays it in the store.

### *Overview of Delta School*

In Delta school, the second of the two schools in this cell, the commitment to focus on parental involvement was new as of February (4 months prior to the survey for this study) when a new principal arrived at Delta school. Both the principal and the school council chair described the school council in place as being primarily involved in fundraising.

Upon his arrival, the new principal created a committee to begin working on a new school plan for continuous improvement to bring the plan up to board standards and to involve staff, parents, and the school council in creating it. With the recent change in school leadership, both the school council and the site leader were getting to know each other, how they operate, and how they can best collaborate in the interests of students. From the interviews, I gained the impression that while both believe strongly in stimulating parental involvement, they did not have the time or the resources to have much impact at the school by the time of this study.

The following sections describe the conditions present within Delta school that may have had an impact on the rate of parental involvement. Similar to the earlier sections on Alpha school and Beta school, the information is presented according to the major categories of involvement identified within the modified version of Epstein's

(1995) organizing framework. There are descriptions for only a few of the eight categories within the modified framework, as the focus on stimulating parental involvement at Delta school was only recently initiated by the new principal and school council chair. Although Delta school did not explicitly use this framework to plan activities to stimulate parental involvement within the school, the initiatives are organized within this framework for descriptive purposes.

*Volunteering.* At the end of this school year, the school and school council held a volunteer appreciation luncheon for Delta school staff and volunteers. While well-intentioned, the principal indicated that in the future it needs to be organized and announced a little earlier to ensure that people are aware and that everyone who volunteered over the course of the year could be contacted and invited.

The principal indicated that encouraging volunteerism within Delta school had not been a strong focus. He indicated that specific teachers within Delta school who encouraged volunteers had a good response, particularly when there were meaningful activities to be involved in. Literacy training was one of the areas where volunteers were trained to provide additional assistance to students.

*Fundraising.* The principal indicated that one of the key areas of focus for fundraising was to replace an outdated play structure. There was little evidence from the interviews that fundraising was being used to support elements of the school plan for continuous improvement, given both the school council chair's and principal's comments that they were essentially just creating a plan.

*Participating in decision making.* The school council is undergoing a renewal at Delta school. There is a limited group of people accepting the leadership roles on the

school council. The principal indicated that there may have been some tension in the past, and it may have resulted in a decline in interest in being part of the school council. He believes that it will take time to rebuild a group of volunteers willing to be part of council and perhaps to take on other roles within the school.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Question 1: Can a School Council Focused on Stimulating Parental Involvement Within Their School Impact the Rate of Participation?

Parents in this study self-identified according to three groups, according to the overall types of involvement that they participate in. The percentages reflect the respondents that indicated that they participate in these types of involvement. A fourth category was added to identify those who claim not to be involved in any of these types of involvement. Results are shown in Table 3.

The stronger results in cell 1 indicate that the focused and established approach to stimulating parental involvement within Alpha school resulted in a significantly higher rate of parental participation in volunteering in the school or as a member of a school council than Beta and Delta schools in cell 2, the schools with a developing focus on stimulating parental involvement. There is no significant difference between the two cells in the rate of parental participation in helping children with schoolwork at home.

Individuals who fall into the category of *none of the above* share many of the same characteristics of those who help children with schoolwork at home with one exception: They claim not to help their children with homework. The sample size of these individuals is too small to test for any degree of significance on this attribute; however, it is possible that these individuals interpreted “schoolwork” as “homework” and accordingly responded negatively to the statement, “I help my child with schoolwork at home.”

Table 3

*Overall Types of Involvement Participated in by Parents in the Study*

	Total	Cell 1	Cell 2
Claimed participation	<i>N</i> = 314	<i>n</i> = 110	<i>n</i> = 204
I help my child with schoolwork at home	95.5%	97.3%	94.6%
I have volunteered in my child's school in the past 12 months (other than school council) <sup>a</sup>	32.5%	39.1%*	28.9%
I am or have been a member of school council <sup>b</sup>	16.6%	22.7%*	13.2%
None of the above	4.5%	2.7%	5.4%

Note. Chi-square test for significance used comparing cells 1 and 2.

<sup>a</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 4.52, p \leq .05$ . <sup>b</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 4.51, p \leq .05$ .

\* $p \leq .05$ .

## Question 2: What are the Rates of Parental Participation for a Variety of Types of Involvement?

Parents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement to a variety of statements indicating whether or not they participate in a variety of types of educational activities. Responses to these statements were used to determine participation rates in a variety of types of involvement.

In Table 4, the activities have been grouped according to the overall type of involvement represented by the activity. In addition, the highest participation rate within each of the overall types of involvement was used to rank order the presentation of each major category of parental involvement. This results in an order of major categories of involvement as follows:

1. communications
2. helping at home
3. attending school events
4. building parenting skills
5. volunteering
6. fundraising
7. participating in decision making

In addition, an eighth major category of involvement was identified using responses to an open-ended question on the survey instrument asking respondents, “Are you involved in your child’s education in ways that are not mentioned?” There were a number of survey respondents that indicated that they co-ordinate learning activities for their children outside of the schools, giving examples such as music lessons, tutoring,

Table 4

*Preferred Types of Involvement by Participation Rate*

	Total study N = 314	Cell 1 Established program n = 110	Cell 2 Developing program n = 204
<b>Communications</b>			
14 I regularly receive and read notices and newsletters from the school	97.8%	96.4%	98.5%
24 I use a school journal to communicate with my child's teacher	67.5%	68.2%	67.2%
<b>Helping at Home</b>			
2 I help my child with schoolwork at home	95.5%	97.3%	94.6%
55 I help my child with homework almost every night	74.5%	77.3%	73.0%
57 I read to my child	72.9%	75.5%	71.6%
<b>Attending School Events</b>			
39 I attended all parent teacher interviews this year	86.3%	90.0%	84.3%
40 I attended the meet the teacher night	88.9%	89.1%	88.7%
41 I attended all concerts or special events at the school when my child was involved	73.6%	80.0%	70.1%
<b>Building Parenting Skills</b>			
7 I read books about parenting	78.3%	72.7%	81.4%
10 I have attended seminars or guest speakers at the school to hear about parenting issues	27.7%	30.0%	26.5%
<b>Volunteering</b>			
1 I have volunteered in my child's school <sup>a</sup> In the past 12 months (other than school council)	32.5%	39.1%*	28.9%
29 I have helped supervise class field trips this year	28.7%	34.5%	25.5%
30 I have volunteered in my child's classroom this year	20.7%	22.7%	19.6%
32 I help organize special events for students	19.1%	20.9%	18.1%
<b>Fundraising</b>			
34 I help with fundraising activities	22.0%	22.7%	21.6%
<b>Participating in Decision Making</b>			
3 I am or have been a member of school council <sup>b</sup>	16.6%	22.7%*	13.2%
<b>Collaborating with/Co-ordinating Community Learning Activities<sup>c</sup></b>			

Note. Chi-square test for significance used comparing cells 1 and 2.

<sup>a</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 4.52, p \leq .05$ . <sup>b</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 4.51, p \leq .05$ . <sup>c</sup>Comparable rates for these types of activities were not obtained in this study.

\* $p \leq .05$ .

swimming lessons, Cubs, Scouts, Brownies, Guides, Sparks or Beavers, church activities, and sports activities. From an organizer's perspective, this last category can be correctly described as Collaborating with Community. From a parent's perspective, this category of involvement can be described as follows:

8. coordinating community learning activities

However, questions in the survey instrument were not designed to determine rates of participation in this activity. As a result, a rate of parental involvement in this type of activity cannot be identified through the open-ended responses. Future survey instruments should be designed to better understand the rate of parental involvement in co-ordinating community learning activities.

Among the seven major categories of involvement identified above, a statistical difference exists between cells 1 and 2 for volunteering and participating in decision making. A chi squared test of significance was used to determine that there is a significant difference between cell 1 and cell 2 at a 95% level of confidence with 1 degree of freedom.

For the other five major categories of involvement, communicating, helping at home, attending school events and building parenting skills, and fundraising, a statistical difference is not evident.

Alpha school in cell 1, with a school council engaged in an established program of stimulating parental involvement **did have a significant impact** on the rates of involvement in **volunteering and participating on a school council**. On these two measures, a significantly higher rate of participation exists versus the schools in cell 2, with developing programs of stimulating parental involvement. Of note, these are both

highly visible forms of parental involvement in which some portion of the activity takes place at the school.

On the remaining types of involvement, including **communications, helping at home, attending school events, building parenting skills, and fundraising** a significant difference was not evident. The resulting conclusion is that the school in cell 1, with a school council engaged in an established program of stimulating parental involvement, **did not have a significant impact** on the rate of parental participation in these forms of involvement relative to the schools in cell 2, with developing programs of stimulating parental involvement. Of note, only “attending school events” is a visible form of involvement, as it takes place at the school. Fundraising may be visible or it may be an individual activity that takes place away from the school. The other forms of involvement can take place at home and, as such, are not highly visible forms of parental involvement. For clarity, these results are shown in the Table 5.

It should be noted that on many of the measures shown in Table 4, there were directionally higher rates of participation in cell 1 however, a statistical difference did not exist.

Question 3: Are There Parents who are Actively Involved with their Children’s Education at Home, Who Are Unwilling or Unable to Volunteer at the School or Become Part of the School Council?

As individuals self-identified the kinds of involvement they prefer to participate in, it is possible to identify two distinct types of parents from the data obtained. The first are those parents who indicate that they have actively volunteered in the school in some capacity or served on a school council. There are 123 such respondents in the database,

Table 5

*Types of Involvement with Significant Versus Nonsignificant Differences in the Rates of Participation*

Category of involvement (in order of participation rate)	Does a significant difference exist between cells 1 and 2?*
Communicating	no
Helping at home	no
Attending school events	no
Building parenting skills	no
Volunteering	yes*
Fundraising	no
Participating in decision making	yes*
Co-ordinating community learning activities <sup>a</sup>	undetermined

<sup>a</sup>This category of involvement was identified through the open-ended responses, and the rates of participation identified cannot be measured adequately to test for significance.

\* $p \leq .05$ .

representing 39.2 % of parents.

The second grouping that emerges features those who are primarily focused on helping their own children but do not claim to be volunteers. There are 191 such respondents in the database, representing 60.8 % of parents. This group includes those who initially indicated that they were not involved in any school activities. Upon further investigation, it is evident that these individuals (15) all indicate that they are involved in various activities to support their children at home, although they indicate that they do not help their children with homework.

Table 6 identifies the rates of participation for these groups relative to each other and to the overall study rates. Two interesting findings arise from this analysis. The first key finding is that both groups are highly involved in the top four categories of involvement:

1. Communicating,
2. Helping at home,
3. Attending school events, and
4. Building parenting skills.

The second key finding is that all study participants (including both cells 1 and 2) who identify themselves as volunteers either in the school or on a school council demonstrate significantly higher rates of participation in many of the specific types of involvement included in the study.

Further analysis indicates that study participants in cell 1 demonstrate a significantly higher rate of participation in volunteerism (Table 7), either in the school or as a past or current member of the school council than the study participants in cell 2.

Table 6

*Rates of Participation for Parents Who Actively Volunteer and Parents Who Primarily**Help at Home*

Preferred Types of Involvement By Participation Rate	Total study N = 314 100.0%	Actively volunteer n = 123 39.2%	Primarily help at home n = 191 60.8%
<b>Communications</b>			
14 I regularly receive and read notices and newsletters from the school	97.8%	96.7%	98.4%
24 I use a school journal to communicate with my child's teacher	67.5%	69.1%	66.7%
<b>Helping at Home</b>			
2 I help my child with schoolwork at home <sup>a</sup>	95.5%	100.0%**	92.7%
55 I help my child with homework almost every night	74.5%	78.0%	72.3%
57 I read to my child <sup>b</sup>	72.9%	81.3%**	67.7%
<b>Attending School Events</b>			
39 I attended all parent teacher interviews this year <sup>c</sup>	86.3%	91.1%*	83.2%
40 I attended the meet the teacher night	88.9%	87.8%	89.5%
41 I attended all concerts or special events at the school when my child was involved <sup>d</sup>	73.6%	80.5%*	69.1%
<b>Building Parenting Skills</b>			
7 I read books about parenting	78.3%	82.1%	75.9%
10 I have attended seminars or guest speakers at the school to hear about parenting issues <sup>e</sup>	27.7%	41.5%**	18.8%
<b>Volunteering</b>			
1 I have volunteered in my child's school <sup>f</sup> In the past 12 months (other than school council)	32.5%	82.9%***	0.0%
29 I have helped supervise class field trips this year <sup>g</sup> I have volunteered in my child's classroom this	28.7%	55.3%***	11.5%
30 year <sup>h</sup>	20.7%	48.8%***	2.6%
32 I help organize special events for students <sup>i</sup>	19.1%	39.0%***	6.3%
<b>Fundraising</b>			
34 I help with fundraising activities <sup>j</sup>	22.0%	41.5%***	9.4%
<b>Participating in Decision Making</b>			
3 I am or have been a member of school council <sup>k</sup>	16.6%	42.6%***	0.0%

Note. Chi-square test for significance used comparing those who volunteer versus help at home.

<sup>a</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 9.44, p \leq .01$ . <sup>b</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 7.17, p \leq .01$ . <sup>c</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 3.86, p \leq .05$ .

<sup>d</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 4.98, p \leq .05$ . <sup>e</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 19.10, p \leq .001$ . <sup>f</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 234.60, p \leq .001$ .

<sup>g</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 70.09, p \leq .001$ . <sup>h</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 97.13, p \leq .001$ .

<sup>i</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 51.89, p \leq .001$ . <sup>j</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 44.79, p \leq .001$ . <sup>k</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 96.77, p \leq .001$ .

\*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

## Discussion of Findings

Alpha school in cell 1, with an established principal and school council program of stimulating parental involvement, indicates a significantly higher rate of active volunteerism within the school than Beta and Delta schools in cell 2.

Study participants who claim to be active volunteers either within the school or on a school council demonstrate significantly higher rates of participation across a wide range of parental involvement activities, including those that primarily take place at home, versus individuals who indicate that they are primarily focused on helping their children at home. These results indicate that a school council with an established program of stimulating parental involvement can stimulate a higher rate of active volunteerism and that active volunteers demonstrate higher rates of participation across a range of parental involvement activities.

Other studies have demonstrated a linkage between parental involvement and student achievement (Brough & Irvin, 2001; K. Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Epstein, 1995, 2001b; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Ross, 1994; Umphrey, 1998). From the results of this study, it is evident that a principal and school council can collaborate to stimulate higher rates of parental volunteerism which has an impact on parental participation rates across a spectrum of types of involvement. Given the established linkage between parental involvement and student achievement, these results demonstrate how a principal and school council focused on stimulating parental involvement can have an indirect impact on student achievement.

Table 7

*Comparison of Claimed Volunteerism Between Cells 1 and 2*

	Total	Cell 1	Cell 2
Total claimed active volunteerism	<i>N</i> = 314	<i>n</i> = 110	<i>n</i> = 204
I have volunteered in my child's school in the past 12 months (other than school council) or I am or have been a member school council <sup>a</sup>	123 39.2%	53 51.0%*	70 34.3%

Note. Chi-square test for significance used comparing cells 1 and 2.

<sup>a</sup> $\chi^2(1, N = 314) = 5.77, p \leq .025$ .

\* $p \leq .025$ .

Table 8

*Summary of Participation Rates in Visible and Invisible Types of Involvement by  
Volunteers and Parents Primarily Focused on Helping at Home*

Type of parent	“Visible” types of involvement	“Invisible” types of involvement
Parents who indicate that they primarily help at home (and do not claim to volunteer) 60.2% of survey respondents	83.2% attending school events 2.6% volunteering in class 9.4% fundraising 0.0% participating on a school council	98.4% communication 92.7% help at home with schoolwork 75.9% build parenting skills n/a co-ordinating community learning activities
Parents who indicate that they have volunteered 39.8% of survey respondents	91.1% attending school events 48.8% volunteering in class 41.5% fundraising 42.6% participating on a school council	96.7% communication 100.0% help at home with schoolwork 82.1% build parenting skills n/a co-ordinating community learning activities

*Note.* The terms visible and invisible are not absolute terms. Rather, they refer to whether or not an individual can easily be observed participating in the various activities. The rates of involvement shown are taken from Table 6. Where multiple activities are represented by the category of involvement shown above, the highest rate of involvement from among those multiple activities is shown to demonstrate the highest rate of participation claimed by study participants.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that a link does appear to exist between a school council focused on stimulating parental involvement and the rates of parental involvement within the school. A school principal and school council working collaboratively to stimulate programs and activities within eight categories of parental involvement may be a method for school council participants to make a meaningful contribution within a school community in support of student learning and work towards achieving the purpose identified for school councils by the EIC (1998) and in Regulations 612 and 613 (2000).

Results from this study also confirm the existence of two distinctly different types of parents including those who primarily help their children at home and those who are willing and able to engage in various types of volunteer activities within the school. There are many individual factors involved in a personal choice of this nature including available time, work schedules, the presence of other children in the home, etc. (Epstein, 2001b). Both types of parents are involved in supporting their children's education at home in a variety of ways and with participation rates that might be considered to be fairly high. A vast majority of parents indicate taking an active role in:

1. Communicating,
2. Helping at home,
3. Attending school events, and
4. Building parenting skills.

The problematic element inherent in these kinds of involvement for organizers and promoters of parental involvement programs is that, for the most part, participation can be either “invisible”, as they take place primarily at home, or, in the case of attending school events such as parent-teacher interviews or the annual meet-the-teacher night, they take place so infrequently that they do not provide organizers and promoters of parental involvement programs with a sense of progress or accomplishment. Without data or visible proof of parental involvement, principals, teachers, parent organizers, and school council organizers may perceive parents to be apathetic or disinterested, causing organizers to become discouraged and demotivated (Lasky & Moore, 2003) and withdraw effort or support to actively promote parental involvement.

Despite a potential absence of feedback, organizers and promoters of parental involvement should remain confident that the majority of parents are interested in helping their children, as evidenced by the participation rates shown in this and other studies (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, 2004; Epstein, 1995). It may take a variety of approaches, different communication strategies to reach the different types of parents, and the resilience to continue without the benefit of obvious or positive feedback. Organizers may also wish to consider developing a mechanism to monitor participation rates over time. Such a mechanism could become a valuable source of feedback to determine if initiatives are making a difference and identify areas where organizers might need to focus in order to further support parents and students.

This study also demonstrated that a principal and school council leveraging a modified version of Epstein’s (1995) framework over a period of time, as was the case for Alpha school in this study, can positively influence rates of parental involvement.

Evidence in this study confirmed an ability to generate a significantly higher rate of volunteerism, and among volunteers, significantly higher rates of parental participation in a variety of activities to support their children's learning. This study also found directionally higher rates of home support for students in Alpha school.

#### Recommendations for Organizing Programs to Stimulate Parental Involvement

School councils and other organizers of programs to stimulate parental involvement in education may wish to consider some or all of the following recommendations.

*1. Stimulate activity within eight strategic categories of involvement.* By understanding and recognizing the ways that parents prefer to be involved in their child's education, school councils can collaborate with principals and teaching staff to stimulate engaging activities within each of the seven categories of involvement confirmed as preferred types of involvement during this study. In addition, school organizers can tap into community resources where they are beneficial to students (collaborating with community), as recommended by Epstein, and encourage parents to take advantage of community learning activities for their children.

School council leaders, principals, and other organizers of programs to stimulate parental involvement in education may wish to consider adopting and using the *Parental Involvement Leadership Model for Ontario* shown in Appendix B. This chart demonstrates how school leadership, including a principal and school council, can approach the task of stimulating a range of programs and initiatives to address each of the eight strategic categories of parental involvement. The chart in Appendix B also distinguishes between a variety of typical programs and initiatives to involve parents and

the eight strategic categories of parental involvement. This model builds on Epstein's (1995) six types of involvement framework in support of family, school and community partnerships.

2. *Encourage volunteerism by adopting good volunteer management practices.*

School councils, principals, and other organizers of parental involvement programs may also consider embracing good management techniques for creating a welcoming and productive environment for volunteers. This may involve volunteer meetings that are separate from school council meetings, relevant training and development, and appropriate recognition programs.

It is also worth recognizing that establishing a program for good volunteer management may lead to a higher level of volunteerism within the school and, based on the results of this study, that school volunteers demonstrate higher rates of participation in a wide range of activities to support their children.

Organizers may wish to consider adopting and using the *Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement* developed by Volunteer Canada (2001) and the expertise that exists in organizations that depend on effective volunteer management for success.

3. *Encourage and support parents who prefer to help at home.* Organizers of programs to stimulate parental involvement may also wish to acknowledge and demonstrate respect for parents who prefer to help their children at home and in the community and seek ways to provide these parents with the information that they need to provide good, quality support for children at home. Organizers may consider leveraging the events that bring parents and children to the school to present parents with a welcoming, encouraging environment where they can feel comfortable seeking additional

information if they need it. It may be necessary to exercise caution to avoid creating feelings of guilt among parents who may not be able to volunteer for a variety of reasons (e.g., time, other family responsibilities, etc.) but invites participation in ways that demonstrate respect for their preferences.

*4. Design communications to acknowledge and anticipate the different informational needs of distinctly different types of parents.* Those who design and deliver communications may wish to consider leveraging various communication approaches to reach, acknowledge, and demonstrate respect for the preferences of distinctly different parents in order to meet their distinct informational needs. The recognition that at least two distinct groups of parents exist makes it necessary to tailor communications from time to time, depending on which group is the focus of a communication. Tailoring a message to speak directly to a specific group can improve the impact of the communication by demonstrating knowledge about an audience and respect for their preferences. For example, parents who primarily help at home will be most interested in communications to assist them in supporting their children at home or in community learning activities. Parents interested in volunteering will want to know about upcoming events and volunteering opportunities and what might be expected of them.

#### Future Research Directions

This study raises the following questions that might be considered for further research initiatives.

1. Can the results of this study be validated across a larger sample, including a more diverse representation of schools?

2. Can we design future survey instruments to better understand both the rate and perceived quality of parental involvement within a school? While rates of involvement may be high in some areas of involvement, it is possible that neither parents nor teachers are satisfied with the quality of involvement. Should that be the case, it may be necessary to focus on increasing the quality of parental involvement rather than simply trying to elevate the rates of parental participation.
3. Can we better understand the types of community learning activities that parents engage for their children and the rate of participation in this kind of activity? Understanding these types of activities may provide a more holistic view of a student's exposure to learning activities and provide school-based organizers of parental involvement programs with the ability to become a community hub for certain types of activities.
4. Is there a link between teacher-as-employee engagement, teacher openness to involving parents, and rates of parental involvement?
5. Is there a link between teacher-as-employee engagement, rates of parental involvement, and student achievement levels on standardized tests (e.g., EQAO)?

### Summary

This study provides evidence of a linkage between a school council working collaboratively with a principal and focused on stimulating parental involvement and the rates of parental involvement within the school. Given the linkages that exist between parental involvement and student achievement (Brough & Irvin, 2001; K. Cotton &

Wikelund, 1989; Epstein, 1995, 2001b; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Ross, 1994; Umphrey, 1998), stimulating parental involvement in education appears to be a viable method for school council volunteers to make a meaningful difference within their schools toward the goal of improving student learning.

This study also confirmed that slight modifications to Epstein's (1995) framework are appropriate for use in recognizing the activities that parents are involved in by distinguishing between traditional volunteering, attending school events, and fundraising. As a result, the modified framework shown in Appendix B may be a suitable approach to guide school councils and principals in their efforts to stimulate parental involvement within a school community.

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## Appendix A

### Parental Involvement Plan for Alpha School

Type of Involvement	Definition	Alpha School Accomplishments	Next Steps for Alpha School Council
1. Communication	Stimulate and nurture effective two-way communication (school to home and home to school) about children's programs and progress.	School Council/School Newsletters, Web-site, Agenda Planners (information and cost sharing), Emailing minutes of meetings, Homework assignments in writing, notices if incomplete, Meet the Teacher, Telephone calls	<b>Maintain the existing communication, School Council to give input to each monthly newsletter</b>
2. Volunteering	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Traditional kinds of volunteering- in class, school trips, help with individual students.</li> <li>2. Attending or organizing social events- which brings parents to the school to appreciate their children's work.</li> <li>3. Fundraising – focused on school priorities to support student learning.</li> </ol>	<p>Daily volunteers in classroom, on trips, helping from home etc</p> <p>Graduation/Awards</p> <p>Agenda planners, 2 playgrounds, gym equipment, Science equipment, paint, EQAO treats, fans, QSP Dance/Read-A-Thon to purchase leveled books</p>	<p><b>To maintain current level of volunteers and track the frequency;</b></p> <p><b>To encourage awareness of and participation in possible opportunities to volunteer through a parent survey/invitation to become involved;</b></p> <p>To train volunteers for reading with children, use of school equipment, etc.</p> <p>Establish a Fundraising Policy in conjunction with YRDSB policy and in collaboration with staff</p>

Type of Involvement	Definition	Alpha School Accomplishments	Next Steps for Alpha School Council
3. Learning at Home	Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.	Homework policy in Agenda Planner, Dress Code in Agenda Planner Help teachers produce monthly class newsletters... Intermediate students have planners signed every weekend... Reading journals, Library visits, Writing journals, tutors Book Fairs	Reviewing policy for students, Code of Behaviour, Dress Code, Homework Policy, Late and Absence Policy
4. Developing an effective school council	Effectively involving parents and staff in focusing on and recommending activities to support the school plan for continuous improvement.	Reviewed operating norms and focus for council, Input to School Plan, Sharing EQAO data, sharing Early Literacy results, Meet regularly to share initiatives through leader presentations, Participate in Board sponsored forums, training sessions,	Developing a constitution and by-laws, Completed June 2002
5. Collaborating with the community	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development	Fundraisers with community businesses Guest speakers from the community, Junior Achievement, YR police, Sponsors for Fun Fair, other fundraising events, lunches, Community Bulletin Board, Assist on Field trips to community e.g. Town Hall, Movie Nights, Electives, Field Trips	Increase awareness of community programs & resources;  <b>Parks &amp; Rec Posters on Community Bulletin Board, Flyers from Parks and Recreation,</b>

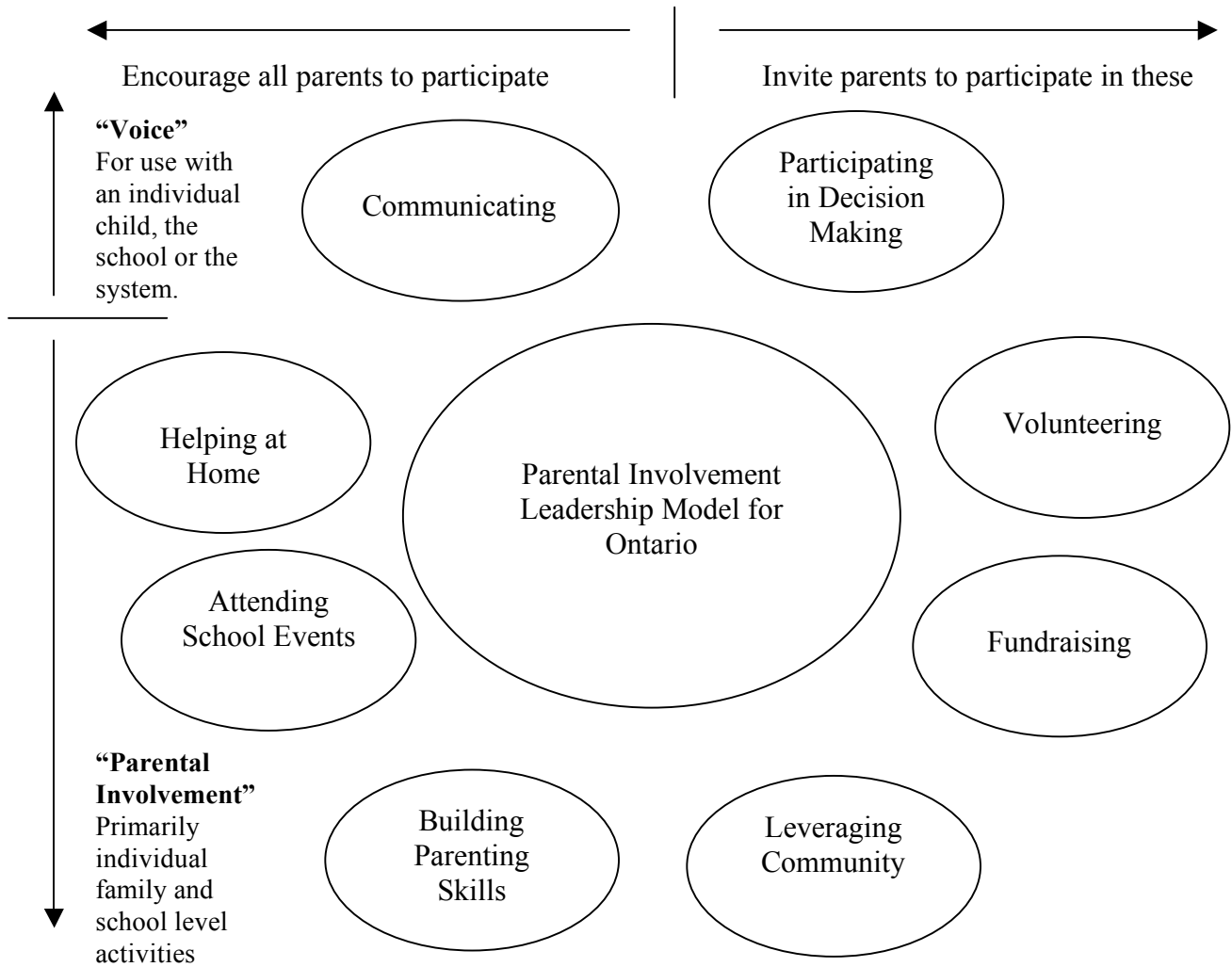
<b>Type of Involvement</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Alpha School Accomplishments</b>	<b>Next Steps for Alpha School Council</b>
6. Parenting	Assist parents with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students. Assist schools to understand families.	Speakers for Parents Newsletters home to include Tips for Parents Speaker Series: Anti-Bullying, Character Education Support to train parents to help with reading/writing	<b>Request an Early Years drop-in program for pre-schoolers and parents</b>

## Appendix B

### Parental Involvement Leadership Model for Ontario

The Parental Involvement Leadership Model recognizes the general categories of involvement that parents demonstrate a preference for through their participation.

These represent “multiple forms of particular involvement to be deliberately fostered, developed and supported” (Fullan & Quinn, 1996, p. 3).



Closely adapted from the work of Dr. Joyce Epstein, with minor adjustments to fit the Ontario context.

Typical Programs and Initiatives can be categorized within one of the Eight Strategic Categories of Involvement.

Eight Strategic Categories of Parental Involvement (Strategic Level)	Types of Parental Involvement Initiatives and Programs (Program or Tactical Level)
<p>Communicating</p> <p>Strategic Intent:</p> <p>Establish an informative two-way dialogue between home and school to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a sense of school community</li> <li>• Exchange information about upcoming events in the school or in a child's life</li> <li>• Enable parents and teachers to monitor a student's progress and reinforce key messages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School newsletters</li> <li>• Class newsletters to keep parents up to date on curriculum progress and how parents can help at home</li> <li>• Websites and use of email</li> <li>• Use of a voicemail system to share information</li> <li>• School signs to announce upcoming events or accomplishments</li> <li>• Telephone calls to home</li> <li>• A class parent telephone tree</li> <li>• Student 'courier packs' to get information to and from home</li> <li>• Use of student agendas</li> <li>• Distinct communications initiatives to meet address the informational needs of different types of parents</li> </ul>
<p>Helping at home</p> <p>Strategic Intent:</p> <p>Enable parents to provide helpful assistance to their children at home including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance and support to complete homework assignments</li> <li>• Guidance on course selections when required</li> <li>• Support to prepare for and participate on school teams, clubs and special events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clear school homework policy endorsed by the whole school</li> <li>• Homework instructions that enable parents to provide home support</li> <li>• Homework sign-backs</li> <li>• Homework assignments and due dates on a website, in a class newsletter, an email or on a voicemail recording</li> <li>• Tips to enable parents to help students (without doing the homework)</li> <li>• Course selection information</li> <li>• Career planning and post secondary prerequisite information to enable informed course selections</li> <li>• Information about the various extracurricular school teams, clubs and events that students might participate in</li> </ul>

Eight Strategic Categories of Parental Involvement (Strategic Level)	Types of Parental Involvement Initiatives and Programs (Program or Tactical Level)
<p>Attending school events</p> <p>Strategic Intent:</p> <p>Encourage parents to attend activities at the school to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn about ways to further support the learning and development of their children</li> <li>• Be welcomed as important contributors to the vibrancy and effectiveness of the school community</li> <li>• Demonstrate an active interest in the activities of the school to their children, which reinforces the importance of the school and learning to their children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a welcoming and memorable meet the teacher night</li> <li>• Provide advance notice for key events</li> <li>• Encourage all parents to attend parent teacher interviews, and reach out to those who cannot attend</li> <li>• Encourage both parents and students to attend events together or create events for both parents and students (e.g., Snuggle Up and Read)</li> <li>• Concerts</li> <li>• Academic nights (e.g., Science, literacy or music nights)</li> <li>• Sporting events</li> <li>• Seasonal events</li> <li>• Leverage some events for participation first and add a component of fundraising</li> </ul>
<p>Building parenting skills</p> <p>Strategic Intent:</p> <p>Build the confidence and capacity of parents by providing access to resources to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the growth and development of their children.</li> <li>• Gain knowledge and skills to remain resilient in the difficult task of raising a child</li> <li>• Become aware of issues facing their children, and how they might recognize and deal with those issues (e.g., bullying)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a parent resource centre within the school with books, DVDs etc. either within the library or within a dedicated Parent's Room</li> <li>• Organize guest speaking events to cover topics of interest to parents (helping children at home, building literacy skills at home, bullying, etc.)</li> <li>• Partner with other schools to expand available range of topics.</li> <li>• Announce other events occurring in the community that might be of interest to school parents</li> </ul>

Eight Strategic Categories of Parental Involvement (Strategic Level)	Types of Parental Involvement Initiatives and Programs (Program or Tactical Level)
<p>Volunteering</p> <p>Strategic Intent:</p> <p>Increase the capacity of the school to support student learning by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing volunteers with opportunities to develop and contribute</li> <li>• Encouraging parents and members of the community to volunteer in a variety of activities of their choosing</li> <li>• Supporting volunteers with training, direction and appreciation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively welcome volunteers into the school</li> <li>• Recruit, provide instruction and direction and recognize volunteers for their contributions</li> <li>• Encourage teachers to identify key roles for volunteers to assist with key curriculum goals (e.g., literacy), class field trips or special events</li> <li>• Field trip supervisors</li> <li>• Class readers</li> <li>• Math or Science helpers</li> <li>• Library or office assistance</li> <li>• Establish a joint parent/teacher leadership team to coordinate volunteering activities within the school</li> <li>• Hold volunteer meetings separately from the school council (many volunteers are not interested in school council issues)</li> <li>• Leverage resources from Volunteer Canada, including the Canadian Code for Volunteering to assist in creating rewarding experiences for school volunteers</li> </ul>
<p>Fundraising</p> <p>Strategic Intent:</p> <p>Enhance the financial resources of the school with additional funds to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support student learning through support for the school plan for continuous improvement</li> <li>• Provide additional educational resources or opportunities for teachers, students and parents</li> <li>• Support children and families with programs to enhance a healthy learning environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in education program (a one-time annual contribution rather than a continuous stream of piecemeal fundraising initiatives)</li> <li>• Magazine sales</li> <li>• Book fairs</li> <li>• Flower or tree sales</li> <li>• Bake sales</li> <li>• Organized charity events such as Jump Rope for Heart, Hoops for Heart, the Terry Fox Run</li> <li>• Hot lunch programs (which can also double as a service to parents and to children within the school)</li> <li>• Golf tournaments</li> <li>• School events</li> </ul>

Eight Strategic Categories of Parental Involvement (Strategic Level)	Types of Parental Involvement Initiatives and Programs (Program or Tactical Level)
Fundraising continued ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guest speakers (can be no charge, cost recovery, or profit making)</li> <li>• Easter egg hunts</li> <li>• Fireworks displays</li> <li>• Many other specific programs</li> <li>• Focus on raising the money for a specific purpose, which brings meaning to a fundraising drive</li> </ul>
<p>Participating in decision making</p> <p>Stimulate a sense of partnership and ownership in decisions that support students and the school by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing parents with the timely information they need to make decisions or assist their children with decisions regarding school affairs</li> <li>• Establishing conditions for an effective school council</li> <li>• Inviting parents and the community into a dialogue on major issues or decisions facing students or the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide parents with the information they need to make informed decisions with or for their children</li> <li>• Create conditions for an effective school council</li> <li>• Council training sessions</li> <li>• Planning nights</li> <li>• Guest speakers</li> <li>• Share school budget information</li> <li>• Share the school plan for continuous improvement, seek input and the support of the council</li> <li>• Encourage school council members to network with others in the board or elsewhere in the province</li> <li>• Encourage skills in teamwork</li> <li>• Establish a method for resolving conflicts</li> </ul>

Eight Strategic Categories of Parental Involvement (Strategic Level)	Types of Parental Involvement Initiatives and Programs (Program or Tactical Level)
<p>Leveraging community</p> <p>Strategic Intent:</p> <p>Mobilize community resources to enhance student learning and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help address task of teaching all students within a community environment</li> <li>• Foster community responsibility, participation and interaction</li> <li>• Embed the school as an increasingly integrated part of the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek out community resources helpful to the school to support curriculum, fundraising or to become more integrated within the community</li> <li>• Bring a Junior Achievers program into the school</li> <li>• Establish a music lesson service through the school</li> <li>• Encourage parents to take advantage of community sports teams, clubs, Cubs, Scouts, Brownies, Guides, Sparks, Beavers, church groups</li> <li>• Bring organizers of community groups and clubs and providers of learning opportunities to the school for a “community fair” event</li> <li>• Fill the Community Representative position on the school council</li> <li>• Bring local business owners into school events</li> </ul>

For Additional Information

Please visit:

[www.schoolcouncils.net](http://www.schoolcouncils.net)

[www.parentinvolvement.ca](http://www.parentinvolvement.ca)

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