

**TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN A
RURAL NEWFOUNDLAND SCHOOL**

by

DARIN TODD KING

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Education (Administration).

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ABSTRACT

Teacher Perceptions of Parental Involvement

in a

Rural Newfoundland School

by

Darin Todd King

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the parental involvement program of a rural Newfoundland Kindergarten - Grade Eight school and the school district to which it belongs, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of this program, and to develop an action plan for the improvement of parental involvement in this school and district, from the perception of teachers.

Data was collected through school visitations, personal interviews, printed materials, and personal knowledge of the researcher. The results were tabulated using a home-school planner (Appendix A).

Five components of a home-school relations program were identified and studied; they include the home and school as co-communicators, co-learners, co-teachers, co-supporters, and co-advisors/decision makers.

Recommendations for further research include an ongoing school-parent relations needs assessment; a study comparing parents and students perceptions of parental involvement in schools; a comparative study of parental involvement in several rural schools in Newfoundland; and a comparison of the parental

involvement at various levels of schooling (Primary, Elementary, Intermediate, and Senior High).

It was concluded that schools must endeavour to foster strong parent-school relationships, to capitalize on the creativity, insight, and talents of teachers, students, parents, and members of the community, and offer the highest quality of education, ultimately resulting in improved student achievement. Improvements in home-school relations, however, must be well-planned, based on sound research, supported by the district office, and put into action by the school committee.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As we journey towards the twenty first century the status of educational programs and offerings must be re-assessed. The questions to consider are a) are they satisfactorily meeting the needs of students ? and b) are they adequately preparing students to be life-long learners, giving them the skills necessary to become productive members of an increasingly changing society where technology is playing such an important part ? Upon careful analysis of the education system the answers to these questions become obvious - changes must be made to ensure that students receive the skills and instruction they deserve and require to become functioning, productive members of an increasingly complex society.

In attempting to address this issue, advocates of reform suggest that the management of schools be transferred to the local school/community level, a system referred to as site-based management. Under this system administrators, teachers, parents, and community members would comprise a school council responsible for governing the community school(s). Our Children, Our Future, Newfoundland's Royal Commission on Education, states, "The Commission has recommended the establishment of school councils with the expressed intention of giving the community a more direct voice in educational matters." (p. 376) The Commission believes that this shift in school management will enable student achievement expectations to be raised.

Teachers, students, and parents have too often been prevented from contributing the full measure of their own creativity, insight, and talents to the operation of their schools. Everyone - from child to parent to public volunteers to teachers - should have a role in school life. (p. 225)

Local governance over schools possesses many potential advantages, including:

- a) a system that is more responsive to the community and students needs.
- b) the potential for increased public relations.
- c) increased support for schools.
- d) greater public confidence in education, and
- e) more potential for partnerships with outside agencies, businesses, and the community.

Changes necessary to move towards site-based management include the increased involvement and support of parents in the educational system.

This paper will discuss the shift from a traditional school to a community school, and the importance of parental involvement in improving both the quality of education and student academic achievement. The focus will be on a rural Newfoundland K - 8 school, and will include an analysis of the current level of parental involvement at this school as well as an action plan to improve upon this relationship. A discussion on the role of the District School Board in supporting this action plan will also be included.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Traditional Schools

The traditional role of the school has been one of meeting the needs of students mainly between the hours of 8:30 - 3:30 pm daily, closed on weekends, holidays, and during the summer. In other words, as William A. Carr observed in 1942:

Many schools are like little islands set apart from the mainland of life by a deep moat of convention and tradition. Across the moat there is a drawbridge, which is lowered at certain periods during the day in order that the part-time inhabitants may cross over to an island in the morning and back to the mainland at night. Why do these young people go to the island ? They go there to learn how to live on the mainland. After the last inhabitant of the island has left in the early afternoon, the drawbridge is raised, janitors clean up the island, the lights go out. (Sullivan, 1978, p. 34)

The need to help students become life-long learners in schools of the 90's makes the situation described by Carr unacceptable. Rather than isolate the community, a partnership must be formed with it, allowing the schools to become learning centers for all community members, and to help students develop to their maximum potential. "This fundamental change is a recognition that participation by parents, teachers and others in the community can bring both improvement in

educational achievement and an increase in public advocacy for education."
(Williams, 1992, p. 230)

Community Schools

A distinct difference between the traditional school and the "site-base managed" school is the adoption of a "community-school" focus, placing the school as the focal point of the community. This philosophy promotes the operation of schools in a non-traditional role, serving the needs of the whole community, sometimes operating for 16 - 18 hours per day. They are regular schools, but there is an emphasis upon the value of community involvement. The schools reach out to involve people by creating opportunities for them to belong, learn, and give to the school, thereby creating a sense of community. In supporting the belief that the school must meet the needs of the community, Williams (1992) states that there must be a, "...fostering of the belief, particularly among those in positions to influence decisions, that effective links between the school and the community are of value and must be supported." (p. 376).

Characteristics of a Community School

Some of the characteristics of a community school are:

- a) the school curriculum is consciously oriented towards the community.
- b) there is an effective involvement of parents and other community members.
- c) a collegial atmosphere is encouraged - parents and other community members are regarded as partners.

- d) community members assist teachers in the classroom.
- e) educational activities for people of all ages are encouraged by school personnel.
- f) school staff and students are active in inter-agency cooperative activities.
- g) school and community facilities are adapted for community education purposes.
- h) school facilities are open for community use.
- i) school staff encourage students to study community issues and problems.
- j) a vital goal of school personnel and students is to foster a sense of community.

Advantages of Community Schools

The advantages of community schools over the traditional schools are abundant. Children learn and grow as a result of their total environment; thus, if the school is working to improve the community, it is also improving the environment of the child, leading to an improved learning situation.

A community school can also improve the educational climate. The school becomes a neighbourhood centre and more of a family place, where everyone is welcomed. Through the community school concept more community members will be frequenting the school, resulting in more socialization among parents, teachers, and children. Such interaction will contribute to the development of lasting relationships between these groups, and ultimately to the learning

experiences of all concerned. This idea is brilliantly summarized by Wilson and Corcoran (1988):

The establishment of more collaborative links with the community brings concrete benefits to schools and their staffs. First, collaborative links with the community strengthen the technical aspects of the school. Community people represent an enormous pool of expertise that creative people can tap... Second, strong community involvement makes schools more accessible and attractive places and builds political support across constituencies. As people come to know the schools and to feel that they can contribute to their success, ignorant criticisms diminish... Third, participation in school activities by adults other than school staff communicates an important message to students. If adults are willing to take time from their schedules to help schools, it must be an activity of some significance... Finally, collaborative activities shape the school-community culture that encourages a sense of concern about the quality of life that is so often missing in today's harried, noisy world... Fostering all kinds of involvement of school staff members in the community and of community members in the school sends a message to the school's neighbours. It says, "we care about you, we want to know you, and we want you to know us. (p.116-17)

Parental Involvement in Education

In the past the role of the school in a student's life was mainly academic. It was responsible for ensuring that each student studied and received the knowledge they needed to succeed in society. Parents were responsible for the child's social and emotional development as well as the shaping of their values and beliefs.

Today the traditional family has disintegrated, and its ability to cope with societal demands has lessened drastically. This trend has forced the school to take a much more active role in the total development of the young. "Examples of the expanded role of today's schools include sex education classes, courses on AIDS prevention, dental and eye examinations, and driver education." (Parents and Schooling in the 90's, 1991, p. 2)

Educators must realize that the ultimate responsibility for a child rests with the parents of that child. The time educators have with a child in school is only a portion of the time that child spends learning. Therefore, to ensure that students reach their maximum potential, a partnership based on trust and understanding must be formed between schools and parents, where both parties strive for that which is in the best interests of the child. Carolyn Shields (1994, p. 16) suggests that parents are one of the missing links in schools today. "Parents are one of the most powerful determinants of the educational achievement of the child, outweighing in their impact and influence (some researchers claim) all inputs

which a school and teachers can provide." This is further supported by Coleman (1966) when he identified three family actions that impact upon a student's achievement in school: a) shared expectations of students and parents for academic performance; b) the amount of time parents spend in support of these expectations; and c) students' attitude toward performing necessary work to gain success.

Parents have a right to know what is happening in school, and teachers can be more effective when they have an understanding of the child's home life.

If teachers do not interact with parents, they cannot be informed about or understand the parents expectations for their children and for the teacher...If parents do not interact with teachers, they cannot be informed about or understand the school's expectations for their children. (Epstein, 1986, p.8)

One of the barriers schools face in involving parents is unsupportive parents who have an anti-teacher attitude. There is often a lack of support at home; parents do not supervise children's work, and they openly criticize teachers and schools. These actions leave the child with a negative attitude towards education and cause increased difficulties in the teaching-learning process. As a result, teachers are often reluctant to involve these people for fear of repercussions.

Benefits of Parental Involvement

Through a partnership between parents and the school many benefits can be realized. Some of these include:

1. Pupils will perform better in the classroom. Anne Henderson (1987) found that when parents take an interest in their child's schooling it has a positive impact on their work. "... creating a positive learning environment at home, including encouraging positive attitudes toward education and high expectations of children's success, has a powerful impact on student achievement." (p. 3)
2. Teachers know the parents and are thus better able to understand the students.
3. Teachers can use the knowledge and expertise of parents to aid in their teachings.
4. Parents will not feel "left-out" of what the school is doing.
5. Parents can carry out their responsibilities in a more responsible fashion when they are aware of what is happening at school. "Programs designed with strong parental involvement produce students who perform better than otherwise identical programs that do not involve parents as thoroughly, or that do not involve them at all." (Henderson, 1987, p. 1)

Michael Fullan draws upon further research to support the involvement of parents in the education of their children. After reviewing studies carried out by Dauber and Epstein (1989), Epstein (1988), Epstein and Dauber (1988), Fantini (1980), Mortimore et al (1988), Rosenholz (1989), Wilson and Corcoran (1988), and Ziegler (1987), he concluded, "Studies conducted in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada over the last decade increasingly point to the

necessity of parent and community involvement for classroom and school improvement. (p. 228) Epstein (1988, ch.1) concluded:

There is consistent evidence that parents' encouragement, activities, interest at home and their participation at school affect their children's achievement, even after the student's ability and family socio-economic status is taken into account. Students gain in personal and academic development if their families emphasize schooling, let their children know they do, and do so continuously over the years. (p. 228)

Barriers to Parental Involvement

Although there are obvious benefits to a close parent-school-teacher relationship, there are also barriers that prevent this relationship from developing.

1. Parents often have a fear of school and what it stands for. This often stems from their own schooling experiences.

2. Parents can be suspicious of teachers.

3. Communication problems may exist between parents and the school.

"A major barrier to teachers' including parents in their children's education is the lack of the teachers' understanding of the needs for parental involvement, the needs of families represented in the schools, and ways to accomplish parent involvement." (Foster and Lovens, 1992, p. 13)

4. Outside influences on parents may often be anti-school.

5. Parental work schedules frequently make it difficult for them to

attend school-related meetings.

6. As teachers get to know parents and the home environment they recognize that all parents do not fulfil their basic parental/child rearing obligations. When they intervene to help the child, friction is sometimes created, and, as a result, parents may become defensive, and home-school relations may become dormant.

7. Many parents fail to see the benefits of schooling - they think there will be no work for their children, thus there is no benefit to school. As a result these parents do not become involved with the school related activities or show interest in their child's work. McLaughlin completed a study on teachers and teaching practices, and found, "Parent involvement, then, is an important source of dissatisfaction for teachers in that it is generally low, and where it exists, often disruptive." (p. 30)

8. Some parents who have a desire to become involved with the school may either feel neglected, or that teachers do not listen to them. Sausser (1991) studied parental involvement in schools, and found that, "...parents have a definite idea about how they want to participate or to become involved in schools; however, their interests do not coincide with the desired roles educators would have them fill." (p. 3) David Williams conducted studies involving parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members, and found that there was a wide discrepancy between the attitudes of parents and educators.

For their part, parents are eager to play all roles at school, from tutor to classroom assistant to decision-maker. While they feel that some activities, such as helping their child with homework, should have more priority than others, they also feel that all roles are relatively important. But professional educators tend to consider only the most traditional roles, such as "school-program supporter" or "audience at school functions," to be "important." This means that educators tend to relegate parents to insubstantial, bake-sale roles, leaving parents feeling frustrated, belittled, and left out. (Henderson, 1987, p. 2)

It is crucial that schools and teachers play an active role in promoting home and school relations. Joyce Epstein (1986) completed a study on home and school relations, and found that:

Teachers control the flow of information to parents. By limiting or reducing communications and collaborative activities, teachers reinforce the boundaries that separate the two institutions. By increasing communications teachers acknowledge and build connections between institutions to focus on the common concern of teachers and parents - a child who is also a student. (p. 16)

There have always been, and probably always will be, tensions and misunderstandings between parents and the school. However, if the necessary partnerships are not formed between parents and the school, children will never

receive the quality education to which they are entitled.

Planning For Parental Involvement.

The work of Lyons, Robbins, and Smith (1982), Epstein (1987), and Chrispeels (1987, 1988, 1992, and 1993), suggests that a plan for home-school relations must encompass five components. These include the home and school as co-communicators, co-learners, co-teachers, co-supporters, and co-advisors/decision makers. The term "Co" is used to emphasize that the roles are to be performed by both the home and the school. Unlike the traditional view where they were clients being served by the school, parents must now play a "partnership" role to ensure the success of schools.

According to Chrispeels (1993), the five components form a pyramid, increasing in complexity.

Each role is likely to involve fewer teachers, school staff, parents, and community members than the previous role. To some extent the levels of participation is also an indication of the increasing complexity of skills and knowledge required to fulfil that role. (p. 46)

Home and School as Co-Communicators

The communication component is the most crucial to the success of home-school relationships. Communication involves an exchange of information between parents, teachers, and the school to help the student learn. "Without adequate communication between families and school personnel other partnership efforts are

likely to falter." (Chrispeels, 1993, p. 46)

The key to a successful communication system is to make it two-way. Both the school and the parents have information that is crucial to the success of the child. Maintaining open communication lines will keep parents informed about school policies, procedures, and their child's progress, helping them to feel valued and involved in the school life and their child's education. In return, a school that successfully communicates with its parents will receive valuable information about the child as well as support for school programs. Parents will attend open houses, concerts, awards nights, and other school-family events. "Improve Communication - allow time at small and large group meetings for dialogue to replace debate; communicate the belief that all viewpoints are valid and must be heard." (Shields, 1994, p. 18)

A lack of communication skills, parent-teacher tensions, and differing perspectives can lead to a breakdown in communication. Seely (1981) suggests that because of the way education is set up, teachers often feel uncomfortable and lack confidence in dealing with parents. This situation is a result of teachers and parents being placed in competitive situations. It is true that each group spends a large amount of time with a student, and both shape and mould the student as they see most appropriate, but their roles should be complimentary, not competitive.

Educators become frustrated when their attempts to communicate with, and involve, the home are foiled. Often parents don't act on information they receive

from the school, or don't communicate with the school when requested to do so. This causes teacher frustrations, and increases the difficulties of creating and maintaining open, regular communication between them.

Home and School as Co-Supporters

Epstein (1987) has suggested that the role of the parents in supporting the school has two components. The first, as part of parental obligations, is to provide food, shelter, clothing, safety, nurturing, guidance, and love for the child. The second role is that of supporting the school in terms of volunteering, fundraising, carnivals, open houses, parent-teacher associations, assemblies, and fun nights.

As a co-supporter the school also has an important role to perform. With a constantly changing society, family break-ups, drug and alcohol abuse, poverty, and two working parents, schools must provide more support for students. A safe and positive learning environment is essential before, during, and after the regular school day.

Schools, however, cannot satisfy all the needs of students. Thus, as Chrispeels (1993) claims, "...the school support role requires schools to collaborate with other social service, community, and government agencies in ways that have not previously occurred." (p. 48)

Providing opportunities for parents to support the school will serve several purposes. First, it will allow parents to feel more comfortable in dealing with the

school and make them feel valued, and, second, it will provide much needed support for the school, especially in fundraising activities. Lyons (1982) found that these activities build parental confidence, help parents become more involved, and demonstrate to teachers and students that they care.

Home and School as Co-Learners

As learners parents should be given the opportunity to participate in activities that will help them gain new knowledge, and ultimately benefit not only themselves but also their children. This relationship must be fostered through parent-teacher nights, parent workshops on academic topics, such as homework or studying, or volunteer training. School newsletters, progress reports, and report cards all help parents to learn about school programs and their child's achievement. This component of home-school relations occurs mainly in a uni-directional way, with a focus on parents as learners. Schools and teachers must also become learners to learn about students, their learning styles, and their families. This will help them to encourage students and their families in more active learning processes, both at school and at home. Acquiring a greater knowledge about family backgrounds and student interests will help teachers gain a greater appreciation of students.

Home and School as Co-Teachers

One of the important roles that parents are often able to perform is that of teachers. Through volunteer groups they are able to come to the school and work

with students. At home, parents can work with their children using their newly acquired skills as learners to help them study or complete homework assignments. They may also get involved through other areas, such as a computer club or after school tutoring.

The California State Department of Education (1985) claimed that parents are the first and foremost teachers of children. They should help their children by reading and listening to them, listening to them read, asking about school work, and helping with their homework. This happens without question in many families simply because of the backgrounds of the parents and their prior schooling experiences. In other families, however, parents play a lesser role in their child's education.

As students get older parents tend to feel less comfortable working with them. Homework can become a bother when parents are unsure how to complete it and students don't understand the assignment. "...less educated parents...feel less confident about helping their children at home." (Chrispeels, 1987, p. 15). Epstein (1985) found that nearly all parents want to help, but they are not sure how. They look to schools and teachers to guide them. To compensate for their uncertainty, schools must be active in arranging community volunteers, peer tutors, and adult tutors to extend the learning opportunities for some students.

A disadvantage to involving parents as teachers is that they may not support the strategies of the school and teacher. Differences of opinion could create

confusion for the student and complicate the learning situation at school. Also, when working in a classroom some parents try to "take over" and contradict the teacher's authority. This creates an unwillingness of teachers to involve volunteers in their classes.

Parents and School as Co-Advisors/Decision Makers

This category is at the top of Chrispeel's pyramid and will involve fewer staff and parents. It is also the most underutilized. Schools must involve parents in school councils and parent organizations, establishing goals and objectives for the school, and in policy development. Parents can provide the school with much-needed advice on various issues. Often schools fear outside involvement, and, as result, they often do not consult parents or involve them in decision making.

Parent-teacher associations can perform an important supporting role for schools. Involving parents in this manner can empower them, help them develop confidence, and increase the probability that they will attend school activities. These organizations can support parents as well as the school.

Strong parent-organizations can initiate workshops or classes on parenting skills or teach parents how to tutor or monitor their children in specific subjects...parent-teacher organizations with genuine responsibilities for elements of the school program represent another important way in which schools can reach out to involve parents. (Hillard, 1992)

Chrispeels (1987, p. 13) indicates that, "PTA's and other parent groups

usually lead parents in this support role - one role that can have important implications for student achievement." This was supported by Jencks (1972) who found that schools with active PTA's demonstrate higher student achievement than schools without.

One concern about involving parents at school in this capacity is that some parents who have varying political, social, cultural, and economic values from teachers may not support the goals of the school. The involvement of domineering parents can lead to the formation of cliques and special interest groups, who try to run the school and impose their hidden agenda upon it. They may block others from becoming involved and reduce the effectiveness of the parent-school relationship. In its report on site-based management, the Professional Development Committee of the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union (1994) stated that a disadvantage to involving parents in advisory/decision making roles is that special interest groups may exert undue influence on school programs and practices. "The structure offers the potential for well-organized groups to achieve their agendas at the expense of others in the school." (p. 7)

Another area of concern with parental involvement is the unrealistic expectations of parents about their child's capabilities. Teachers are often scrutinized when students do not succeed, and the question often asked is, "Why can't the teacher teach ?", not, "Why isn't Johnny succeeding ?" McLaughlin (1985) found, "When asked to identify the least rewarding aspects of teaching,

teachers agreed that the factor contributing the most to their sense of dissatisfaction was the general absence of respect and recognition for their work." (p. 29)

Accountability creates tension for teachers as well. Parents become involved with the school and make suggestions, but if teachers do not carry them out they may become frustrated towards the school and unwilling to become further involved. However, teachers are ultimately accountable for what happens in their classrooms, and they have to do what they feel is in the best interests of their students, sometimes requiring them to dismiss parent suggestions.

A further issue with involving parents in schools is that of confidentiality. The work taking place at school is confidential, but parent volunteers sometimes forget this, and repeat to friends what they have observed during their school visitation. This unprofessional behaviour can create a tremendous amount of conflict for all involved, and it might destroy the credibility of a volunteer program.

As the demands of society change, so must the education system to ensure that students are adequately prepared to meet these demands. To ensure that all resources are maximized in providing the best possible education for students educators must work harder at forming a partnership with parents and involving them in all aspects of schooling. As Fullan (1991, p. 227) states, "The closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement."

CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to a) evaluate the parental involvement program of a rural Newfoundland Kindergarten - Grade Eight school and the school district to which it belongs, from the perception of teachers, b) identify the strengths and weaknesses of this program, and c) to develop an action plan for the improvement of parental involvement in this school and district.

Development of the Data Collection Method

The data used in the description of the school and school district was collected from visits to the school and central office, interviews with teachers and central office staff, printed materials available at the school and central office, and personal knowledge of the researcher. An adaptation of Chrispeel's (1985) Home-School Relations Planner (APPENDIX A) was used to organize the data according to the types of parental involvement at the school. The categories used were:

- a) Home and School as Co-Communicators
- b) Home and School as Co-Learners
- c) Home and School as Co-Teachers
- d) Home and School as Co-Supporters
- e) Home and School as Co-Advisors/Decision Makers

Description of the District School District

Profile

The district is comprised of 12 schools, 175 teachers, and 2300 students (approximately). The breakdown of the schools is: K-8=3, 9-12=2, 10-12=1, K-3=2, 4-9=1, K-12=1, K-9=1, and K-6=2. Three of these schools will close at the end of 1995. The district office has one superintendent, one assistant superintendent, four program coordinators responsible for primary, elementary, intermediate, and senior high education, one itinerant teacher for student support services, two educational psychologists, and one speech-language pathologist (shared with another school board).

Belief Statements

Each school in the district is a participant in the Challenge For Excellence school improvement program. The following belief statements, taken from the district school board policies and procedures handbook, are representative of this district:

- a) Each child differs in physical and mental growth patterns.
- b) Each child should be allowed to develop at an individual pace physically, mentally, and socially in an atmosphere uncharged with stress and pressure.
- c) Each child should have opportunities to work in a stimulating environment and at a successful level.
- d) Each child should be provided with experiences that will encourage the

desire and love of learning that stems from real and definite needs.

e) Each child shall be taught to live demographically and the spirit of self direction and problem solving shall be part of school life's experiences.

f) Each child shall be taught to think rather than to rote-learn and to recite facts of little relevance.

Goals

The goals of the district are to:

a) provide educational services in accordance with the curriculum enriched by whatever means may be desirable and feasible for all students attending schools under the jurisdiction of the board.

b) carry out the powers and duties conferred on the board under the provisions of the Schools' Act and amendments thereto.

c) exercise its responsibilities in accordance with the policies of the Integrated Education Committee as may be determined from time to time.

Programs

All students enroll in the basic curriculum of mathematics, science, language arts, social studies, religious education, and health. Music is offered to K - 6 students, while some schools make it available to students beyond this level. French begins in grade three and continues through senior high. The senior high students may choose an assortment of courses as outlined in the Newfoundland Department of Education curriculum guide. These include courses in mathematics,

English, science, social studies, and technology education. The senior high follows a three stream program: basic, academic, and advanced.

Description of the School

Profile

This is a co-educational day school located in rural Newfoundland, with an enrollment of 389 students. It opened in 1972 as a grade three to eight (middle) school, but is currently kindergarten - grade eight. It will become Kindergarten - Grade nine in 1995. There are 24 teachers on staff, including one full time principal and a vice-principal who teaches 85% of the time. Specialist teachers include a 0.75 unit music, 0.75 unit French, 0.5 unit learning resources, 0.5 guidance, 0.5 educational therapy, and 2.75 units of special services. (One full unit is equal to one full time teacher.) The school is currently a participant in the Challenge For Excellence school improvement program.

Mission Statement

The mission statement of the school proclaims that the school is a caring , secure environment committed to the total development of the child. Through positive leadership and a challenge for excellence, students will continue the life-long learning process.

Belief Statements

The staff of this school believe that:

- a) learning is a life-long process and must be child centered.

- b) the school must be a secure, non-threatening environment, fostering the total development of the child.
- c) the school will operate best in a spirit of co-operation.
- d) positive attitudes towards learning promote positive learning experiences.
- e) they must keep abreast of current educational thought and practice.
- f) they must be leaders in society, demonstrate strong educational leadership, and challenge and respect the individuality of teachers.

They also believe that students:

- a) must be the central focus of all school decisions and have the right to the best possible education.
- b) must be treated with dignity and respect.
- c) need to learn how to learn and must be exposed to a wide variety of learning experiences.
- d) must be encouraged to strive for personal excellence.
- e) need structure, discipline, and guidance.
- f) need to, want to, and can learn.

Programs

All students enroll in the basic curriculum of mathematics, language arts, science, social studies, health, religious education, and physical education. French is offered to all students but some students receiving special services are removed from this class for individual attention. Music is offered from K - 6.

There is a full time special services teacher for each of primary and elementary, while the intermediate students receive 0.75 of a unit.

Procedure

A covering letter (APPENDIX B) was distributed to teachers and office staff prior to interviewing. The letter explained the purpose of the study and guaranteed anonymity to respondents. At this time a verbal explanation on the study was also given.

A visit was made to the school and permission and support was given by the principal to proceed with the study. The district superintendent was also contacted and permission was granted.

Teachers and central office staff were approached individually and discussions were held in an informal manner. They were informed by the researcher that a study in the area of parental involvement in education was being conducted as part of the requirements for a graduate thesis. They were guaranteed anonymity, informed that some of the data collected may be used in a published paper, and guaranteed a viewing of the finished work should they wish to see it.

Subjects

The subjects used in this study included teachers at the selected school as well as district office personnel.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

District School Board Analysis

The district school board is comprised of elected and paid staff. Twelve elected members are chosen to represent five wards throughout the district, while three represent the denominations served by the board - Anglican, Salvation Army, and the United Church of Canada. To be elected to the school board a person must be a) a member of one of the three faiths represented by the school board, b) of legal voting age, and c) a resident of the community which she or he wishes to represent. The denominational representatives are appointed by the respective churches.

The district has a number of standing committees, including the executive, finance, bussing, staffing, school board - teacher liaison, labour management - occupational health and safety, long term capital planning, class size, church-school liaison, student discipline, and local school committees. Each of these contain elected school board members in addition to professional office staff..

The district also forms ad hoc committees from time to time which involve parent/community members. During this past year the district was faced with the closure of three schools and arrangements had to be made to ensure all students affected would make the transition smoothly. In each town affected by the closures the superintendent formed School Closure Transition Teams, which

comprised of administrators, teachers, parents/community members, and students. The committees were formed through a process involving consultation with the local parent-teacher association, the school administration, and the community.

The district school board actively supports parental/community involvement in its schools. Ongoing initiatives include parent/community volunteer programs, remediation programs using parent/community tutors, parent/school information sessions, and parent-teacher associations. During the past year the school board instituted a strategic action plan for the improvement of student achievement. This plan requires all schools to hold information sessions with parents bi-annually to provide them with information on school and district policies, procedures, programs, and to offer parents the opportunity to ask questions and/or make comments/suggestions.

The district offers a pre-kindergarten awareness program to all parents with kindergarten children registered for the upcoming school year. Through regularly scheduled sessions the program introduces parents to the school and provides them with information about the types of things their child will be doing in Kindergarten. The Kindergarten teacher, school administration, and public health nurse also provide information on how parents can prepare their child for their first year of schooling.

During the 1994-95 school year this district introduced three new initiatives linking parents and the school. The first was a program called STEP (Systematic

Training is Effective Parenting), administered by guidance counsellors, which aimed to provide parents with skills to help them cope with academically and behaviorally challenged students at home.

The second initiative was a study skills program, introduced under the auspices of the District's Strategic Action Plan for the improvement of student achievement. The booklet was presented to parents and students, and included strategies to help students cope with their school work in a more responsible manner. It also included tips for parents and students to help with home review and study of school work.

The third initiative, a ten week program entitled "Parents Are Teachers Too", was held at one of the schools in the district. It was used to help parents become better equipped to assist their children with school related tasks. The content covered basic child development, issues concerning the nature of reading and writing, basic strategies for assisting children with reading, writing, math, and other school subjects (eg. comprehension skills, vocabulary development, and writing conferences), research strategies and advice on literacy resources. Parents were given the opportunity to observe strategies, and to practice them on their own children.

There is a district policy on the Community Use of Facilities, limited to statements covering outside groups using the school, rules governing the use of the school, and rental rates. There is no existing policy on school and Community

involvement in education in this district.

School Analysis

The staff of this school indicated that a variety of activities involving parents are taking place. These are outlined below, under the appropriate headings. In some areas there was considerable overlap, with activities fitting in more than one category. As a result, several sub-categories have been established to ensure a clear explanation of the data and to avoid repetition.

Home and School as Co-Communicators

At the beginning of each school year an information package is sent home to parents. It includes information on student services and school operations. Within the first month of school there is a Back To School Night where parents are invited to the school to meet their child's homeroom teacher. At this session the teacher provides a list of names of the student's teachers, shares information on the program of studies to be offered, explains classroom policies and expectations, reviews school policies and expectations, and goes over student evaluation and homework. Course outlines are also distributed, and parents are given an opportunity to ask questions and look around the classroom. Time to chat with each other is also available. This time is not designed for parent/teacher conferencing regarding a specific child. Should a parent request a conference an appointment can be made for another time that is convenient to both the parent and the teacher.

Information memos regarding on-going school events/announcements are sent home via students three times annually, November, March, and June. Local cable tv and radio stations are used for advertising but there is no formal procedure dealing with this. It occurs on an irregular basis, as teachers feel the necessity to do so. Holiday greeting memos are sent home in season.

Teachers regularly communicate with the home through notes and telephone calls. This type of communication is used to deal with any problems that arise with students, as well as to inform parents of positive student behaviour and work.

Home and School as Co-Supporters

Parents and the community are invited to the school regularly to support Halloween, Remembrance Day, Christmas, Easter, book fairs, mathematics, reading, and science curriculum initiatives. Parent/community volunteers are used to support math, science, and reading curriculum events, the resource centre, winter carnival activities, and hot dog/popcorn sales. Volunteer recruitment occurs both in late September and in January.

The school has a full time counsellor who offers support to students and parents in crisis situations. The counsellor works with a group of students on a regular basis, and accepts referrals from teachers or parents. Teachers may refer students for behaviour, academic, or personal reasons if they are concerned about the welfare of the child.

Home and School as Co-Learners

At the beginning of the school year all parents who attend the Back To School night are given pamphlets on school guidance services, learning resources and the library, and the school staff, to help them learn about the school and the programs it offers. During the school's annual Reading Celebration Month all parents are sent a copy of a Home Reading Guide to help them learn how they can work with their child at home in the area of reading.

Home and School as Co-Communicators/Supporters/Learners.

Student progress reports are sent home via students. Parent-teacher interviews are held shortly after this, with appointments arranged through a parent call-in system. This provides an opportunity for the school and home to communicate with, support, and learn from each other. Teachers use parent-teacher interviews as an opportunity to learn about the family background of the students and their parents. They also telephone home periodically to share concerns or comments with parents, or to find out information about the student and his/her family.

Home and School as Co-Learners/Co-Teachers

The school district's Pre-Kindergarten Awareness Program for parents of incoming Kindergarten students (for the next school year) is held annually.

In 1994-95 a study skills booklet was published by the central office. It was presented to parents at an information session. The STEP program was introduced

in 1994-95 as well.

Home and School as Co-Teachers

The school has a volunteer reader program operating where parents/community members come to school to read to primary students on a scheduled daily basis. There is an annual Reading Celebration Month where the importance of reading is emphasized. Various activities involving parents and the community as teachers are carried out, including guest readers and a Family Reading Challenge.

There is a math tutorial program for one class of grade seven students. A retired teacher visits the school twice weekly to work with students from this class having difficulties in mathematics.

Home and School as Co-Advisors/Decision Makers

The school administration promotes an open-door policy, always there to listen to concerns or comments from parents and the community. Through school - home communications parents are regularly urged to contact the school if they have any questions or suggestions on school related issues.

Home and School as Co-Learners/Advisors/Decision Makers

A Parent-Teacher Association exists at this school, but it is inactive. The executive have met approximately three times during the past school year, for the purpose of keeping in touch with each other and to keep some form of association active, but there is no active membership. Two meetings were called to rejuvenate

the association, and neither meeting was attended by parents or teachers. There has been limited involvement between the PTA and the school during the past year.

The staff also identified some concerns with parental involvement in schools, the first being confidentiality. Teachers feel that often parents will come into the school to volunteer, enabling them to see the teacher and the students at work. When they leave the school, they repeat to others in the community what they have witnessed. This has caused concern for some teachers, who have become disturbed at this breach of confidentiality. In some situations, teachers indicated that parent volunteers have crossed their line of authority while in the class by trying to correct student behaviours and undermining the teacher's classroom operating procedures.

Another area of concern is the parents' lack of knowledge of how the school operates. This has resulted in volunteers doing things that contradict school and teacher policies and procedures, and has lead to confusion and chaos with the students.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Recommendations

School District

Individual schools may undertake various tasks or actions to improve the role of parents and the community with their schools. However, these will not sustain themselves without the presence of a comprehensive, long-term action plan that is supported by the local school board.

The superintendent is the chief officer of the school district, and his/her philosophy is reflected by all actions taken. The superintendent is the most important person in the district because the elected board, though independent of central office, is usually led by the superintendent, and central office staff usually support the wishes of the superintendent.

To facilitate an improvement in home and school relations in this district the superintendent should endorse the belief of parental involvement and communicate this to central office staff, school administrators, teachers and support staff, parents, and the general public. Then, and only then, will long term benefits of parental involvement be realized. Drawing from the work of several researchers, Fullan supports this role of the superintendent.

Initiation of change never occurs without an advocate, and one of the most powerful is the chief district administrator, with his or her staff, especially in combination with the school board support or mandate....it is the

superintendent and central staff who combine access, internal authority, and resources necessary to seek out external funds for a particular change program and/or to obtain board support. (1991, p. 54).

To facilitate the improvement of home and school relations in this district, and to support the initiatives of the individual school, the development of a board resolution which clearly states the importance of parental involvement is deemed necessary. The elected school board is responsible for the operation of the school district. Usually, under the direction of the superintendent, it determines board policy for the district. The elected members must show a commitment to parental involvement in education and authorize the superintendent to develop this initiative. More specifically, the elected board should:

- a) Promote the concept of parent/community involvement throughout its mandate.
- b) Guarantee that there is a reasonable procedure for ensuring that parents and citizens can be heard at all board meetings.
- c) Rotate the location of board meetings throughout the district.
- d) In consultation with the superintendent, set policy on school community relations.

The central office staff are also crucial to the success of any school district initiatives. Their attitudes about parental involvement will determine the strength of their advocacy, indifference, or hostility to the concept. They have daily with

the school and its staff, making it imperative for them to be in support of the concept. Anything otherwise will lead to non-acceptance of the board policy.

Once the elected school board and district office staff have accepted and endorsed the commitment to parental involvement in education, the superintendent should begin proceedings to develop a policy and put it into action.

The development of a District School Board School Community Relations Policy might follow the suggested timeline below:

- a) Through an in-service, district office staff and school administrators will be presented with the superintendent's beliefs. At this time information will be provided on the purpose of the policy, the district's plan for improving school - community relations, and the role of district personnel in this process.
- b) The superintendent will seek alternative sources of funding, such as a Canada-Newfoundland Human Resources Development grant, to support the district and school action plans for improving school-community relations. (Actions requiring financial support will be discussed later.)
- c) The Superintendent will establish a committee on School Community Relations, comprised of professional district staff, parents, and community/business members. The mandate of this committee will be to:
 1. assess the status of parent and community involvement in the district.
 2. hear briefs/presentations from community members and groups.
 3. develop a profile of items to be included in the policy. This may

include public relations, parental involvement in schools, community involvement in schools, business partnerships, use of school facilities, use of volunteers (recruitment, selection, and training), and direction for individual school policy development in this area.

4. Develop a working policy on School and Community Relations, with a recommendation to the superintendent and board for acceptance. The committee will report monthly to the District Superintendent. As frequently as possible the committee will use the news media to publicize its work and to inform the public about what it is doing

The Superintendent should arrange a news conference to announce the board's position on school-community relations. At this time members of the district committee will be introduced to the media. Members of the elected school board, district office personnel, school administrators, the local media (radio, television, newspapers), and interested parents and members of the general public should be invited to attend. It may be followed by a coffee social. In addition to these endeavours, the superintendent should build a parent involvement component into every message delivered to staff and the community.,

The following actions should be supported and implemented by the superintendent, though they may be incorporated under the jurisdiction of the School and Community Relations Policy.

1. Make communication to parents and the community regular and

consistent.

2. Keep all communication simple and free of jargon.
3. Help parents and communities understand how the educational system works.
4. Compile a master list of volunteers throughout the district and publicize it.
5. Assist in the creation and support of a district-wide parent publication.
6. The district office must support parent - teacher organizations, and help to create them if they don't already exist.
7. Create a district-wide Parent-Teacher Organization, made up of representatives from the school organizations.
8. Organize leadership training events for the chairpersons of local parent organizations.
9. Provide training for parents and community members to help them learn skills that will enable them to work effectively. These may include a) how to work more effectively with staffs, b) how the school system works (budgeting, staffing), c) the difference between being assertive and aggressive, and d) how to speak up if they do not understand or if professionals are overwhelming them.
10. Invite local school Parent-Teacher Organization members to meet with the school board on occasion.

11. Form a standing Parent-Advisory Committee which sets the agendas for their own meetings.

To support the school in this study the Superintendent should meet with the school administration and school improvement committee to discuss the action plan. Many of the actions are workable within the school, but others require central office assistance. Some, such as the proposed sessions for parents on helping students adjust to the elementary and intermediate grades, should be taken on as district plans, which could be shared with all schools. The school should be not only provided with as much financial and human resource support as possible, but encouraged to make the action plan become reality.

In an ideal situation a District Policy would be in place and the school could launch its action plan under its umbrella. However, due to the unavailability of such a policy, the school should be encouraged to begin forming their own policy, perhaps working alongside the district committee, and preparing an action plan for board approval.

Over the past several years the District School Board has recognized, and acted on, a need to put more emphasis on student achievement. With this realization, the school board developed a long-term strategic action plan for the improvement of student achievement. I believe that this is a tremendous step towards realizing their goal, but there is one fundamental element missing - the role of parents in this process. Throughout the action plan there is mention of

parental involvement in different areas and to different degrees, but there is no defined policy on the board's position of parental involvement in their schools.

The Royal Commission on Education in Newfoundland and Labrador has recommended the restructuring of schools with the establishment of school councils and the formation of site-based management, where local councils will manage schools. I believe that the District School Board is in a position to plan ahead for this by supporting this school's action plan , by providing financial and human resources, and by beginning the development of a School Community Relations Policy. With the development of this policy, the board and its schools will be in a pro-active position rather than a reactive position to establish school councils and initiate site-based management when the time arrives.

School boards do not have the power to solve all the problems experienced by today's students. Through collaborative efforts with educators, parents, and community members, however, they will experience more success, because parents and community members are part of the rich resources that each school district has.

School Action Plan

The results of this study indicate that the parent-school involvement of both this school and the district reflects the characteristics identified in the literature review. More specifically, it is evident that a) the school and district school board are committed to parental involvement in education, b) the school and district

believe that they are doing a good job in home-school relations, c) there is a need for school and district policy development in the area of school-community relations, and d) teachers should be in-serviced on the school community relations topic. Many indicate a desire to involve parents, but they aren't sure how to do it.

The strengths of this school rest with its communication with parents, and the opportunities it provides for parents to support the school. The weakness that is evident is in the advisory/decision making component. The fact that there are very few connections between the home and school in this capacity is supported by the study. The school has demonstrated a commitment to helping parents become learners through several projects during the past year, and this type of initiative should be expanded.

Home and School as Co-Communicators

Communication has been identified as the first and most crucial component to the home and school relationship. Without it other components of the parent - school relationship cannot succeed. The results suggest that this school places a lot of emphasis on communicating with parents - through regular memos and news items as well as through scheduled parent visitations. However, the type of communication that exists here illustrates the findings of previous studies - it is mainly one way - from the school to the home.

The importance of this component to any school-parent relationship is

unquestionable. Thus, the challenge for this school is to develop a plan that will not only see its current communication initiatives continue but also expand to include more two-way communication.

Several activities that would improve the communication component for this school include the following:

1. The school should develop a school newsletter with parent/community representatives on its editorial committee. A feedback section should be included in each issue to provide an opportunity for parents and the community to react to any items of interest or concern to them.

2. Expand the school opening information package by developing a comprehensive school handbook which will include school policies, procedures, and any other information relating to the operation of the school. This could be done through a committee involving parents and students - they are the ones for whom the handbook is intended.

3. Classroom teachers should develop a welcome package/newsletter for parents of their students containing class-specific information. The development of this package should involve parents of current students - those who have experienced working with the teacher and the grade and can make concrete suggestions from a parent perspective, that will benefit future parents and students entering this grade.

4. Develop a parent/community information bulletin board near the main

as many students do not take home the information they are given, leaving their parents uninformed. A board with similar information could be placed in a location in the community frequented by a large number of community members, such as the drug store.

5. Use the local tv community channel weekly for school announcements. A parent/teacher/student committee could be formed to help the school prepare its weekly items. A partnership may be formed with the local cable company which will realize benefits for both the school and the company.

6. Conduct a mini-survey twice annually (January, May) to seek parental input on problems/issues that need addressing by the school. Parents feel good when their advice is sought, and they provide a different perspective on school policies and procedures.

7. A hot issues response team, consisting of parents, administrators, teachers, and students who will respond quickly (within twenty-four hours) to issues occurring within the school or community.

8. Develop an educational phone-in program with a teacher, student, and parent fielding calls. This would provide the opportunity for students and community members to communicate with the school and each other on a regular basis.

Home and School as Co-Supporters

The results of this study indicate strong parental support for the school.

Through concerts, open houses, parent nights, volunteering, and other types of activities, the school provides a variety of opportunities for parents to become involved with, and show their support for, the school and its programs. The school must realize, however, that it cannot satisfy all the needs of students alone. To improve in this area the school must endeavour to provide support to parents. One of the factors that often prohibits parents from becoming more involved with the school is a fear of school and what it stands for. By reciprocating the support provided by parents, schools can develop a collegial atmosphere in which the parents become partners and gain the school's support and understanding.

Suggested actions in this area include the following:

1. The Parent-Teacher Association should be re-established, under a new title, the School Community Association (SCA). The school must work to involve parents and community members in this association and make it active, especially in planning for the future and in the formation of school councils. This may be accomplished through a media blitz and a series of public meetings, perhaps held at locations other than the school, promoting the importance of parental and community involvement in education. An active SCA will strengthen all components of the home-school relations program.

2. Develop a SCA training seminar. The school should lobby the district office to offer parents the opportunity to learn about the role of a SCA, and how it can work effectively with schools. Many parents become involved but do

not understand their role in working with and supporting the school. A training session would alleviate this problem, and lead to a more productive relationship between the SCA and the school.

3. The volunteer recruitment campaign should be expanded to recruit larger numbers of volunteers. Some methods might include advertising on the local radio and tv channels, community-wide advertising, and sending home literature about volunteering, its value and purpose at the school. Students may also be asked to visit the parents of some friends and speak with them about becoming involved with the school. This type of campaign may spark an interest in parents and community members to volunteer.

4. An SCA information session could be organized to provide the community with information about the role and importance of an SCA. If people are provided with more information about the SCA, they may decide to become involved. The school must ensure that a) the SCA is not seen as an elitist group, and b) all people feel welcome. It may be held at a location outside the school to ease the strain felt by some parents when they visit the school..

5. A volunteer orientation session should be developed, including an introduction to the policies and procedures of the school, the expectations of volunteers, and any other pertinent information. To ensure the safety of all students, this group of volunteers could help organize a screening process. This would improve the working relations between parents and the school, and help

volunteers to be more informed about what they should be doing while at school.

6. Information sessions should be developed on a) Helping students with homework, b) Helping students make the transition from primary to elementary, and c) Helping students make the transition from elementary to intermediate. Parents often undergo a lot of stress when they feel that they cannot help their child with school work, or when they face an unknown, such as moving from one level of schooling to the next. By providing sessions to help alleviate this, the schools are supporting the parents and letting them know that they care and want to help. These sessions will also support the other components of the home-school relations program. The school board should be lobbied to participate in the organization and development of these sessions. The planning should also involve teachers and parents who have previous experience with these issues.

Home and School as Co-Learners

One of the areas in which teachers experience their greatest frustrations is with their knowledge of the students. They seldom know students personally, and are often unfamiliar with their families; thus, they have difficulty relating to them. Parents are often frustrated by their lack knowledge about what their children are doing at school and about the school's expectations of the parents and students. Their uncertainty causes frustration when trying to deal with their child at home. Parents are recognized as being the child's first and foremost teacher. Therefore, providing them with knowledge and skills about school,

students, and learning will help them maximize this role.

To allow parents the opportunity to interact with the school in a learning role, the following are recommended:

1. **Parent computer-awareness session.** This would be a time to ease parents' fears of computers, to introduce them to the general uses of the computer as a learning tool, and to show them some of the ways it could be used in the home to support the school curriculum.

2. **Parent computer training session.** This could be open initially to those interested in working with students using computers. It could later be expanded to include others. School district support, in terms of finances and curriculum would be required.

This school has demonstrated a commitment to the use of computers in instruction over the past several years through product purchase and in-servicing. This commitment could be expanded by involving parents with the program. The results may include more volunteer expertise at the school, personal knowledge developed by the parents, and thus increased student knowledge about computers.

3. **A parent information session on how to approach parent-teacher interviews should be developed.** Many parents do not attend these interviews because they feel that they get nothing from them. A training session would provide them with some tips on how to approach, and get the most out of, the interviews. Teachers should also be involved in this process - being trained on how

to impart information to parents in a way that they can feel comfortable and understand the information being shared. School district support, in terms of finances and curriculum, should be requested.

4. Information Session - School Discipline, Attendance, and Homework policies. Present policies to parents and allow time for feedback. Welcome comments and suggestions. Parents should also serve on some of these committees, to ensure that their needs and concerns are addressed.

5. Information Session - How to help students with homework.

6. Volunteer Training Session

7. Information Session - Helping students make the transition from primary to elementary.

8. Information Session - Helping students make the transition from elementary to Intermediate.

9. Expand the STEP and Parents are Teachers Too programs, making them available to greater numbers of parents.

Home and School as Co-Teachers

This category will develop as an extension of the previous three components. By communicating with and supporting parents, and by involving them as learners within the school, teachers and staff will help parents feel more at ease. Gradually, parents will be able to apply their newly acquired knowledge in a teaching role. This may occur at home with their own children, or at the

school through volunteer activities with teachers and students. This category must be maximized to ensure that the students at home as well as the school are the benefactors of the parents' knowledge. Studies have proven the desire of parents to become involved with schools. It is the duty of schools to let them know how they can do this.

Some strategies to improve this component of parent-school relations include the following:

1. Seek parent/community involvement in school extra-curricular activities.
2. Compile a list of community resource people and distribute it to staff.
3. Organize a tutorial program for math, science, language arts, and possibly computers, involving parents and community members.
4. Explore home-learning activities, where parents can work with their children to support and enrich the school programs.

Home and School as Co-Advisors/Decision Makers

As the literature has suggested and this research verified, this component of school-home relations has less involvement of parents and teachers than the previous four components. There is a Parent-Teacher Association in place, comprised only of the school principal and the executive. There are no parent or teacher members in the association. A membership meeting was held early in the school year, at which time the executive was put in place for the coming year.

There were no teachers at the meeting and less than ten parents. Since that time the executive has met on an irregular basis, but there have been no open meetings.

With the inevitable introduction of site-based management to the Newfoundland School system, it is imperative that the Parent - Teacher Association be resuscitated. Parents, community members, and teachers must become involved and open the communication lines. By getting parents on side prior to the introduction of site-based management, it will allow its introduction to go more smoothly. Parents and community members need to feel valued, that their opinions are worth something to the school. Although much effort is required, the benefits of an active parent association are worth fighting for it. To improve this component of parent-school relations, the following are recommended:

1. Distribute to parents a copy of the school goals, as discussed through the school improvement process. Parental input and suggestions should be welcomed.
2. Share current policy development processes with parents, and ask for their input. Parents should be included on policy development committees.
3. Send home a questionnaire asking parents to comment on how they feel things are going at school.
4. Develop a school-community relations policy. Involve parents and the public. This policy may include topics such as parental involvement in the

school, community involvement in the school, school-business partnerships, use of school facilities, volunteers, and public relations.

5. Lobby the school board to publish a Parental Involvement Handbook, which would summarize how parents can become involved in the schools, the types of duties they may be asked to carry out, and the benefits of parental involvement in schools.

6. Re - establish the Parent-Teacher Association (SCA). A representative of the district office, the school administration, teacher representatives, and the current PTA executive should meet to determine the problems with the existing association, and develop an action plan to overcome these barriers. With an active Community Association supporting the school, parents and community members can be encouraged to become involved, and the whole parent-school relationship should improve. A successful PTA (SCA) will create a foundation on which the school and community can build a solid school council.

One of the most important stages in improving the home and school relations program at this school is to ensure that it is carefully planned. A suggested strategic action plan has been developed, which clearly outlines all actions to be completed, who is responsible for their completion, the time frame, and how their success will be measured. A plan of this nature will ensure accountability and increase the probability of success. This action plan is enclosed

in APPENDIX C.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Research correlating parental and community involvement in schooling and student achievement is endless. The time has never been more right to initiate an action plan allowing schools under the jurisdiction of this School Board to capitalize on the creativity, insight, and talents of teachers, students, parents, and members of the general public to enhance the quality of education in their schools and ultimately increase student achievement. The provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador has indicated that site-based managed schools is the direction they will be pursuing, and this school board has the opportunity to lead the way.

The school in this study clearly recognizes the importance of involving parents in the educational process. The strengths of its school-community relationship identified in this study include:

1. school-to-home communication.
2. parental and community support of the school.
3. the increasing frequency of parent-education programs offered by the school.
4. volunteer involvement.
5. school and district commitment to parental involvement in education.

The study has indicated, however, that school-community relationship will

not reach its maximum potential unless several concerns are addressed. These include:

1. the Parent-Teacher Association.
2. the involvement of parents in an advisory/decision making capacity with the school.
3. lack of existing policy on School-Community relations.
4. teacher knowledge of school-community relationships.
5. parental understanding of school operating policies and procedures.

The school and district together, must act to build on the strengths and to improve in the areas of identified weakness by developing and implementing a strategic action, such as the one proposed in Appendix C. This will lead to:

1. increased parental and community involvement with the school.
2. greater support for school personnel and programs.
3. a more efficient and effective school, and
4. increased student achievement.

A number of directions for further research are evident. A similar study, using a likert scale questionnaire, could be carried out to assess the perceptions of parents and students on parental involvement in schools, so that an assessment can be made about the differing views of the various stakeholders.

A study designed to more accurately reflect teachers' opinions on parental involvement in several rural Kindergarten - Grade Eight schools would allow for

the identification of commonalities and differences between them, with the aim of designing an action plan building upon the positive characteristics identified.

In addition, a study comparing rural and urban schools, as well as study comparing parental involvement across the various levels of schooling (primary, elementary, intermediate, and high school) would allow for the identification of factors causing differences in parental involvement at the different levels.

The demands of society are changing, and the education system must also change to ensure that students are adequately prepared to meet these demands. By strengthening the partnership with parents and the community, this district and school will be in a position to impact on educational achievement and to introduce site-based management. The actions discussed in this report represent a challenge to this district and school to become leaders in the area of school and community relations. By extending the commitment to involving parents in the education process and welcoming members of the community, the course will be set to take this district and school to previously uncharted areas allowing them to strengthen their commitment to providing the best quality of education possible to their students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
HOME SCHOOL RELATIONS
PLANNER

Home-School Relations Analysis**Area of Focus: Home and School as Co-Communicators**

ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	FREQUENCY

Home-School Relations Analysis**Area of Focus: Home and School as Co-Learners**

ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	FREQUENCY

Home-School Relations Analysis**Area of Focus: Home and School as Co-Teachers**

ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	FREQUENCY

Home-School Relations Analysis**Area of Focus: Home and School as Co-Supporters**

ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	FREQUENCY

Home-School Relations Analysis**Area of Focus: Home and School as Co-Advisors/Decision Makers**

ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	FREQUENCY

APPENDIX B
COVERING LETTER

COVERING LETTER

P.O.Box 852
Grand Bank, Newfoundland
A0E 1W0

June 6, 1995

Dear Teachers:

I am presently completing a study on Home and School relationships in education. Home and School relationships have five components: communication, support, learning, teaching, and advising/decision making.

I would appreciate your participation in an interview on this topic. If you do not wish to participate please let me know.

Be assured that confidentiality will be maintained and information will only be reported as a group, not on an individual basis.

Thank you for your time and co-operation.

Sincerely yours,

Darin King

APPENDIX C
STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN
FOR IMPROVING
HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONS

Strategic Action Plan for Improving Home - School Relations

The strategic action plan contains the information discussed earlier in this report, but has been completed in more detail as would be required for implementation at the school level.

a) **Area** indicates the components of the home-school relationship that will benefit from the proposed action. The legend used is:

C	Communication
S	Support
L	Learning
T	Teaching
A/DM	Advisory/Decision Making

b) **Activity** characterizes the action/activity to be carried out.

c) **Purpose** describes the intent of the activity.

d) **By Whom** indicates who is responsible for the completion of the activity.

e) **When** displays the time frame in which the activity should be implemented.

f) **Evidence of success** signifies how the activity will be measured in terms of success or failure.

Area	Activity	Purpose	By Whom	When	Evidence of Success
C L	Develop a School Newsletter	Disseminate parent education information Provide a regular communication link between the school and the community Increase parental/community understanding of school operations, programs, and activities	Learning Resources Teacher, Principal, Parent/Staff Representatives	September, 1995	Parental/Community feedback - on response portion of newsletter. Level of parental involvement in school Level of business support for schools
C L	Develop and distribute a school handbook	Share school policies and procedures information with students/parents	School Administration	September, 1995	Parent/Student Feedback Observation of student understanding of expectations
C L	Classroom teachers will develop a welcome package newsletter for their homeroom students	Share class-specific information/expectations with parents/students Invite parents to participate in class activities	Homeroom Teachers School Administration	September, 1995	Parental Feedback Parental Involvement
C L	Develop a Parent Information Bulletin Board near main entrance of school	To share, on a regular basis, school events/activities, achievements, and other information of interest to parents and visitors.	School Administration Public Relations Committee Learning Resources Teacher	September, 1995	Parental/Community feedback Observable use of Bulletin Board by parents
C L	The local community channel will be used for weekly school announcement	To share, on a regular basis, school events/activities, achievements, and other information of interest to parents and the community. To promote the school and the students To publicize school student accomplishments To promote parental/community involvement in school life	School Administration Public Relations Committee Learning Resources Teacher Students	September, 1995	Parent/Community/Student Feedback

A C L DM	Distribute to parents a copy of the school goals	Inform parents on the direction the school is taking, ask for their input on how we can accomplish it	School Administration	September October, 1995	Parental Feedback
S T	Parents/Community members will be asked to participate in school/extra-curricular activities	To involve parents in the school programs, and allow the school to avail of the community expertise available, thus improving the school offerings	Administration Learning Resources Teacher Physical Education Teacher Sports Committee (Other committee representatives wishing to use volunteers)	September October, 1995	Number of Parent/Community volunteers The number of extra-curricular curriculum support activities offered, as opposed to the past years
S L	Volunteer Orientation Session	To familiarize volunteers with the policies and procedures of the school, as well as the duties they will perform while volunteering. To hear concerns/answer questions that the volunteers may have. To match volunteers to the activities they wish to become involved in.	School Administration Guidance Counsellor Public Relations Committee Learning Resources Teacher	September-October 1995 January-February, 1996	Participation
S A/D M	School-Community Association Membership Drive via home correspondence, personal telephone calls, local tv channel, and local radio station	To enlist greater parent membership in the School-Community Association	School Administration Current Parent-teacher Association Executive Teachers	September, 1995 January, 1996	Parental Involvement in the Association
S T	Volunteer Recruitment	To involve as many volunteers as possible in the school	School Administration Guidance Counsellor Staff PTA Learning Resources Teacher Students	September, 1995 January, 1996	Feedback
C L A DM	Share current policies being developed with parents. (Drafts)	Welcome them as part of our team, ask for their input/advice	School Administration	October, 1995	Parental presence/feedback

L T	Parent Computer Training Session - at night	To help parents become familiar with computers and thus increase their ability to work with students in the school and their children at home.	School Administration Learning Resources Teacher School Board Officials Students	October, 1995	Parental Enrollment in the Course. Course participants who volunteer at the school to work with students at the computers. The school might offer a bulk-buying computer package, promoting parental purchase of these.
C L	Information Sessions - School Discipline Policy School Attendance Policy	To inform parents and students of the school discipline policy, and answer any questions/address any concerns they may have.	School Administration Guidance Counsellor Discipline Committee	October, 1995	Participation
C L S	Information Session - How to help children with homework	To provide parents with help and guidance on the types of things they should be doing to help their children succeed with homework.	School Administration Guidance Counsellor Grade Level Reps (P-E-I)	October, 1995	Parental Participation Feedback (Personal discussions and questionnaires). Feedback from students - are they receiving more help from parents?
S T	Organize a parent tutorial program -for mathematics, language arts, and computers.	To allow students to get extra help from those parents with the skills to do so, during and outside of the regular school day.	School Administration Guidance Counsellor Subject Level Teachers	October, 1995	Volunteer Participation Student Participation in program.
C L S A D M	Develop a school-community relations policy, which will include (but is not limited to) the following topics: Parental Involvement, Community Involvement, Use of Facilities, Volunteers, and Public Relations.	To involve all parties in the development process, and to avail of as much diversified expertise as possible	School Administration	November, 1995	Committee Formation, attendance of parents/community members Final Policy Developed
L T S	Parent Information Session - How to Approach Parent-Teacher Interviews	To present parents with techniques and skills that will allow them to come better prepared to parent-teacher interviews and get the most out of the session. A session should be developed for teachers as well.	Guidance Counsellor School Administration Teacher representatives (P, E, I) School Board Representatives	November, 1995 March, 1996 Prior to each scheduled parent-teacher interview session	Teacher Feedback on sessions with parents (specifically - those parents that had attended the training session)

S T	Compile a list of community resources/people	Allow the school to use all available resources to supplement and enrich the curriculum	Learning Resources Teacher School Administration Teachers Community Members	December, 1995	Final List
S T	Circulate a list of community resources/people to all teachers	o inform staff of the availability of community resources	Learning Resources Teacher	January, 1995	Staff usage of these people should be monitored. If people allow their names to be placed on a list and they are not used, they may feel as if they are not good enough.
C L A/DM	Conduct a mini-survey, asking for parental input on problems/issues relating to our school	To improve our school through the involvement of parents as well as staff	School Administration School Improvement Team	January, 1996 May, 1996	Feedback
C L A/DM	Send home a school questionnaire to parents.	To as parental input on how they feel our policies are working as well as any suggestions for improvement	School Administration Homeroom Teachers	February, 1996	Feedback
C S L	Information Session - making the transition from primary to elementary.	To provide parents and students with information that will help them better prepare their child to enter the elementary grades.	School Administration Guidance Counsellor Grade Four Teachers School Board Representation	May, 1996	Participation Feedback Observation of students during Fall of next school year.
C S L	Information Session - making the transition from Elementary to Intermediate.	To provide parents and students with information that will help them better prepare their child to enter the Intermediate grades.	School Administration Guidance Counsellor Grade Seven Teachers School Board Representation	May, 1996	Participation Feedback Observation of students during Fall of next school year.

Appendix D
STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN GUIDE
FOR IMPROVING
HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONS

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN GUIDE

AREA	ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	BY WHOM	WHEN	EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS