Perceptions of Parental Involvement at School: Examination of a Primary-Middle School Parent Volunteer Program

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to better understand parents’ perceptions on volunteering within the school and to identify the major barriers that prevent parents from volunteering their time. Despite the amount of literature that indicates a connection between parent involvement and student achievement, teachers and school leaders continue to struggle with how to improve parent involvement. The goal of this study was to share the voices and perceptions of parents that indicate why there is a concern with too few involved through parental participation at an independent school in a mid sized town on Vancouver Island.

This thesis utilizes questionnaire and focus group data from parents of K-9 students at an independent school on Vancouver Island to examine parents’ perceptions on volunteering, and the barriers that prevent parents from assisting within the school community. The results of this study indicate that parents’ work schedules and time were the major barriers. Communication and being unaware of the possible opportunities to volunteer were also highly noted by parents as major barriers to getting involved. The research and results of this study are intended to educate teachers, administration, support staff, and parents to promote parent involvement and in turn benefit the students and the greater school community.
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Chapter 1: Problem to be Investigated

Purpose of the Study

A growing body of research shows that parental involvement (PI) at school has a positive influence on student behavior, attendance and achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Despite this, many schools struggle to get parents involved in the school community in a meaningful way.

The purpose of this study was to examine a mandatory parent volunteer program that focused on increasing parental involvement in a primary/middle school in British Columbia. In an effort to address low rates of parental involvement, the school council implemented a requirement for each family to volunteer 15 hours within the school or pay an exemption fee of $150. The present study will examine parents’ perceptions of this mandatory volunteer program, the beliefs of those who volunteer at the school, and the beliefs of those who pay the exemption fee. Knowledge of these beliefs will assist in making recommendations on how to change and/or improve the parent volunteer program and foster further parental participation.

The researcher has been a teacher at the school for the past ten years and his interest in this area has grown as he has witnessed a decline in the number of parents who are volunteering their time at the school over the years. What sparked further curiosity in finding out what is preventing parents from volunteering their time at the school was the implementation of the school wide parent participation program in 2012 and the limited results it received.

Justification of the Study

The literature has shown that PI can play a key role in the learning process and can provide a wide range of benefits to a child’s education and the school community. Dodd and Konzal (2002) found that PI is a better predictor of student success over other indicators such as
a family’s gross income or a parent’s educational level. One reason that PI often leads to student success, is that when parents volunteer at the school they are sending a message to their children that school is important. Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) and researchers have found that when parents are involved with their child’s education a student has higher grades and better test scores. As well, higher rates of graduation, better school attendance, increased motivation towards school work and activities, better self-esteem, lower rates of suspension, decreased use of drugs and alcohol and fewer instances of violent behavior were all documented.

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) found that the benefits of PI included improved parent–teacher relationships, teacher morale and school climate, school attendance, attitudes, behaviour and mental health of children, and parental confidence, satisfaction and interest in their own education. El Nokali, Bachman, and Votruba-Drzal (2010) revealed that increases in parents’ involvement over time were related to increases in children’s social skills and declines in problem behaviours. Dodd and Konzal (2002) further state that involved parents help model positive views of schooling and help to develop a greater sense of ownership.

As the literature has shown, PI can be an excellent contributor to the educational process for children, although the strategies to improve PI are lesser known. By understanding the benefits and educating parents on these benefits, there is a greater likelihood that parents will want to volunteer and find ways to become more involved in the school community.

Also, enhancing communication is also a strategy that schools are using to involve parents in the education process. Williams and Sánchez (2013) found that effective communication between the home and school and vice-versa was a key factor for increasing PI. The evolution of the Internet has allowed schools, teachers and parents to communicate instantly by the touch of a button. Communication by means of email, online newsletters and websites,
has allowed teachers, parents and schools another avenue to communicate. Parents reported that
the following assisted in their child’s education: more frequent notes or phone calls from
teachers, increased opportunities for one-one interaction between the teacher and parent(s) and
more precise instruction/suggestions on how parents can assist in their child’s education
(Loucks, 1992). It was also reported that parents would like to see more opportunities for
learning how to help their children with their schoolwork at home and to be more involved in the
learning experiences at school. Other techniques such as parent/student switch day, fundraising,
newsletters, alumni events, parent classes and invitational events have been implemented with
varying degrees of success (Loucks, 1992).

Creating a welcoming environment is another strategy that schools and classrooms have
implemented to increase PI. Baker (1997) conducted a qualitative study of parent perceptions of
PI and found that parents were more inclined to volunteer when they felt welcomed by the
school. Baker’s research also found that when parents felt that their input and abilities were
valued and appreciated, their level of volunteerism increased. Baker’s study also agreed with
Williams and Sánchez’s (2013) study in that communication was a key strategy used by schools
and teachers to increase parental involvement. Baker found that communication from the school,
for the most part, was related to a problem or complaint regarding the child, and not related to
communication that expressed good news or appreciation.

In 2001, President George W. Bush approved the No Child Left Behind Act, which,
among other things, mandated parental involvement in school decision-making and other
volunteer activities. As many states have used different methods to keep track of volunteers, it is
questionable whether the policy has been effective in promoting parental volunteerism since its
implementation (Wang & Fahey, 2011). Wang and Fahey’s study also indicated that instead of a
growing percentage of parents becoming involved in educational volunteering after the passage of NCLB legislation, the rate of parents volunteering decreased from 14% in 2001 to 12.8% in 2008. Wang and Fahey (2011) concluded that mandating parent volunteerism may result in more opportunities for parents to get involved, but it will not necessarily result in more volunteerism.

Although education, communication and a welcoming environment have all been documented in the literature as strategies to get parents to become more involved, no research to date has examined the effects of using a monetary fee to increase parental involvement in schools.

**Research Question and Hypothesis**

This study will examine parents’ perceptions of Parent Involvement (PI) by investigating a mandatory volunteer program implemented in 2012 at a primary/middle school in British Columbia. It will look at what factors led parents to participate in the school versus those that led parents not to volunteer and to pay the annual $150 exemption fee. The current study hopes to answer the question: What are parents’ perceptions regarding volunteering in the school system and the barriers that prevent a parent from choosing to volunteer?

The study will also examine ways the school can improve and/or change their parent participation program by trying to uncover the barriers that parents perceive as being the toughest hurdles in becoming a volunteer. The results will aid in understanding whether those parents who volunteer at the school already place greater value on parental involvement and are more educated about its benefits compared to those parents that choose not to volunteer and who pay the exemption fee.
**Definition of Terms**

Key terms from the research question that needed to be defined include: parental involvement, parental perceptions, barriers and school community.

“Parental Involvement” refers to a parents’ participation in their children’s education that promotes positive experiences through academic and social success (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005; Jeynes, 2005; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). For the purpose of the current study, the operational definition of Parental Involvement will focus on volunteering that takes place within school and benefit the student and/or the whole school community.

The operational definition of “Parental Perceptions” is how a parent perceives invitations from the school, communication between the home/school and the barriers that prevent parent involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

“Barriers” in this research study, refers to any circumstances or obstacles that prevents parents from volunteering their time at school.

The operational definition of “School Community” is any activity that requires volunteers that occurs on/off schools grounds, which represents the school and the individuals that belong to it (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). The definition of “Parental Presence” is any activities that parents engage in at school that promote the educational experience for students and staff at school (Jeynes, 2005).

**Brief Overview of the Study**

The participants of this study included all parents of Kindergarten to Grade 9 students at an Independent Catholic School on Vancouver Island. Participants were parents that chose to volunteer the required 15 hours, as well as parents that chose not to volunteer and to pay the exemption fee. A parent involvement questionnaire was advertised and given out to all families
in the school. Focus Groups were also used to triangulate the data. Volunteers were recruited using flyers, school newsletters, and word of mouth. The goal of the questionnaire and focus groups was to gain a better understanding of what parents believed school involvement resembled, its importance to student learning and the development of school community, and barriers that prevent them from becoming involved. The parents that participated in the questionnaire were asked a series of likert and open-ended questions about their beliefs about parent involvement within the school community. Likert questions were analyzed by finding the mean or standard deviation. The questionnaires, open-ended questions were analyzed by tallying frequent responses and coding for emergent themes. The data collected from the focus groups were analyzed by tallying frequent responses and coding for emergent themes.
Chapter 2: Background and Review of Related Literature

The premise behind this chapter is to enlighten and inform the reader on literature that has accumulated over the years on parent involvement. This chapter will also situate the current study in the literature and further explain how the design of the study was informed. Furthermore, this chapter will describe the ways that the research has defined parent involvement, the benefits that may arise from increased parental involvement and the barriers that parents may face in preventing them from getting more involved. The goal of this chapter is to create a foundation for better understanding of what it means to be an involved parent, why it is important, and what exactly is preventing some parents from becoming more involved in their child’s education and within the school community. It has also assisted in the design of this study and with the interpretation of the results.

Parent Involvement “PI” has been defined in multitude of different ways and there is no concrete definition that all researchers have consistently followed. The difficulty in agreeing to a single definition of parent involvement may be due to the differing views from outside the academic research arena by parents, students, and educators resulting in multiple perspectives on the definition and even further convoluting its meaning. So what exactly is parent involvement? Throughout the following few paragraphs, a number of frameworks and research perspectives will be described aimed at isolating a more concrete definition of what exactly parent involvement is.

Definitions of Parent Involvement

Sheldon (2002) defines parent involvement at home as parent-child interactions on school-related or other learning activities and represents the direct investment of a parent’s resources in her or his child’s education. This type of parent involvement, is referred to by
Walberg (1984) as the curriculum of the home, and has been shown to be an important contributor to a child’s education and overall development. Therefore it is important for parents to interact with their children at home on school related topics. It is also believed that involvement at home is vital, especially when parents discuss school activities and help their children plan their programs, which positively impacts overall academic achievement (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Van Voorhis, 2003).

Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, and Apostoleris (1997) defined parent involvement as an investment of parental resources into children. This term refers to a range of behaviours including ensuring that children have breakfast before school, volunteering in school events/activities, helping children with homework, and holding a position on the local school board (Epstein, 1995). Fishel and Ramirez's (2005) definition of parent involvement was a parent’s participation in their child’s education with the purpose of promoting their academic and social success.

In another conceptualization, Jeynes (2005) defines parent involvement as parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children. This includes support at home through listening to their child read and supervision of homework. It also includes parent involvement at school such as participating in parent educational workshops, chaperoning field trips, helping in the class and attending parent/teacher meetings.

Another conceptualization of parent involvement describes it as: (i) parental beliefs and expectations in academic achievement and (ii) parental multifaceted behavior at home and in school in order to improve their children’s educational performance (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hill & Taylor, 2004). Parent involvement, therefore, refers to parents’
participation throughout the entire educational process (Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000; Stevenson & Baker, 1987).

The current study will focus on parent involvement that solely occurs in the school. Epstein and Dauber's (1991) research focused on five types of parent involvement. One of the types focused specifically on involvement at school. Epstein and Dauber’s (1991) definition of parent involvement at school is when parents assist teachers, administrators, and children in classrooms or in other areas of the school. It also refers to family members who come to school to support student performances, sports, or other events.

**Frameworks for Parent Involvement**

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) developed a model to help identify the range of parent involvement activities and to help explain why parents become involved in their child’s education at school in the first place. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s research has focused on the influence of parental involvement activities on students’ educational and developmental outcomes. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s model defined three motivators of parent involvement. The first motivator deals with a parent’s perception “role construction”. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) define “role construction” as a parent’s belief in what it means to be involved in relation to their child’s education and the patterns of involvement regarding behavior that follow these beliefs. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) argue that a parent’s “role construction” is molded by a parent’s personal experiences with their own schooling, prior experiences with involvement, and ongoing experiences with their child’s educators (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

A parent’s sense of efficacy for helping their child succeed in school is the second motivator in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s model. This motivator postulates that parents base
their involvement decisions on appraisals of their own capabilities as well as predictions of outcomes that will likely follow their actions (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). This motivator indicates that parents with higher self-efficacy are more likely to participate in parent involvement opportunities and are more likely to overcome challenges. On the other side, parents that possess lower self-efficacy are more likely to have lower expectations that their involvement will have an impact and are less likely to want to overcome any challenges that they may face. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) also suggest that self-efficacy is socially constructed, and that a parent’s sense of self-efficacy can be influenced or determined by the school or social groups that exist within it.

The final motivator of parent involvement that Dempsey-Hoover and Sandler suggest is based on invitations to be involved from others. This can include invitations from either members of the school community or the parent’s own child. The invitations from the school can relay a message or feeling of being welcomed into the school, a sense that the parent’s involvement is needed, valued and expected. The invitation from the parent’s own child can be explicit or implicit, and may possibly activate a parental desire to be responsive to their child’s education and developmental needs (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Joyce Epstein has been a researcher for close to forty years. She has published over 100 journal articles and books on the effects of family, school, and community on student learning and development and is considered one of leading researchers in the area. Epstein has developed a model that links the responsibilities of home, community, and schools in the education of children (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). This model resembles a triad with the student represented in the center and each point of the triad represents the context in which the students learn and develop. The authors believe it is the school that sets policies that can either bring together the
other points or push them away. They explain that when all contexts overlap, both educators and parents will be more likely to see each other as partners in education and it creates an environment in which students are more likely to achieve better results. Epstein and Sanders (2002) further state that if there is shared interest and investment of schools, families, and communities, there is a greater likelihood of student success.

Furthermore, Epstein (1995) developed a useful framework for school-initiated parent involvement that conceptualized the different types of parental involvement. The framework for school-initiated parent involvement consists of six types of involvement including: Parenting, Volunteering, Communicating, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with Community. Epstein defined “Parenting” as helping families establish positive home environments to support children as students. An example of this type of involvement was for schools to develop parent education courses to help train parents. Epstein described “Volunteering” as recruiting and organizing parent help and support in the school. An example of this type of involvement was parents volunteering in the classroom. Epstein’s third type of involvement was “Communicating” which consisted of designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children’s progress. An example of this would be regular scheduled school notices, memos, phone calls and newsletters. Epstein’s fourth type of involvement “Learning at Home” occurs when information and ideas are provided to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. An example of this type of involvement is when information on homework policies are sent home and parents are given strategies on how to monitor and discuss schoolwork. Epstein’s fifth type of involvement “Decision Making” includes parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives. An example
of this would be a School Parent Association (SPA) or Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) where parents can take leadership roles to help strengthen programs in the school. Epstein’s final type of involvement “Collaborating with Communities” is when the schools integrate resources and services from the community to help strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning development. An example of this type is when schools provide information on community events, attend field trips or invite community leaders in to speak at school assemblies. Epstein believes that parents do not have to be experts in any subject area, but parents do need to provide their children with a place and time to study/learn. This place should be a place in the home where the parents can oversee their child’s homework and monitor their progress. Parents should also be able to understand where their child should be at each grade level.

Epstein looks at taking a team approach with parents and the school by creating partnerships in education between the two in order to improve the educational journey of the student. Epstein opposes and tries to break down the idea that parent involvement activities should be seen as separate from that of educators and believes that there should be more focus on schools and parents coming together as partners in education. Finally, Epstein believes that if partnerships can be created and allowed to flourish the possibility of parent involvement will increase and improve.

The idea of developing partnerships between the home and the school that Epstein raises is an area that schools have begun to work on, but there still seems to be a divide between families and the school in the education process. The idea of creating a welcoming and inviting environment for parents has been a focus for many schools, but even though schools may think that they have created a welcoming and inviting environment, there are parents that may perceive
otherwise. The parent volunteer program at the school examined in the current study’s main focus was to correct the decreasing level of parental presence in the school that was becoming a trend. Furthermore, the parents’ level of self-efficacy that Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler mention in their research can also be linked to the parents of the current study. Those parents with a higher level of self-efficacy are more likely to get involved over parents with a lower self-efficacy. In the results of the current study, the researcher will look for differences in the parents with high self-efficacy with those parents of low self-efficacy.

**Benefits of Parent Involvement**

The impact of parent involvement is quite extensive and has been shown through years of research. Parent involvement has shown that it can provide a wide range of benefits for a child’s education. Numerous studies have provided evidence that parental involvement has positive impacts on a child’s education especially in the early years. The research conducted by LaForett and Mendez (2010) found that early parental involvement was able to increase school readiness skills, which greatly influence the academic careers of children. Froiland, Peterson, and Davison (2013) also concluded that early parental involvement and expectations were key longitudinal predictors of academic achievement in later school years.

Miedel and Reynolds (2000) conducted a thirteen-year longitudinal study, which focused on the association between reports of parent involvement in early childhood and children’s reading achievement in kindergarten and eighth grade. It also included rates of grade retention and special education placement through age fourteen. The results showed that the frequency of parental involvement in kindergarten was positively associated with kindergarten and eighth-grade reading achievement and retention rate. Results also showed that parent involvement decreased a child’s years in special education.
A meta-analysis on parental involvement and students’ academic achievement by Fan and Chen (2001) found that there were moderate associations between parent involvement and a number of academic variables focused on learning including achievement, motivation, task persistence, receptive vocabulary demonstrated by children in preschool and kindergarten. They also found that parent involvement was associated with improved self-regulation, fewer discipline problems, stronger homework and study habits, improved work orientation, more positive attitudes towards school, and higher educational aspirations. Similar findings were also illustrated in a study by Domina (2005), which took into account the students’ abilities and socioeconomic status of the family. Her findings suggested that parent involvement was beneficial despite the student’s ability or the family’s social or economic status.

It has also been documented that parent involvement has a positive impact on students’ math proficiency and achievement Sheldon and Epstein (2005) and gains in reading performance (Powell-Smith, Shinn, Stoner, & Good III, 2000). Parent Involvement is also related to fewer behavior problems in school (Domina, 2005). In another study, Simon (2001) found that parent involvement was a factor in better attendance and class preparation. Rumberger (1995) revealed that parent involvement also lowered the dropout rates in middle school. Other research has found that parent involvement has had a significant effect on students’ performance on standardized tests and academic assessments (Desimone, 1999; Domina, 2005; Jeynes, 2005).

Domina (2005) found that attending parent/teacher conferences and various other organizational meetings, volunteering and checking homework were positively related to students’ academic achievement. Domina’s findings further suggested that over time, as students age and enter middle and high school they wish to be more independent and socially accepted.
amongst their peers. Therefore parent involvement at school in the later years drops off and when it is occurring, has a negative effect (Domina, 2005).

Research has shown that parent involvement is much higher in the lower grades and tends to decrease as the child enters high school especially in school based parent involvement such as chaperoning school field trips. Eccles and Harold (1993) found that this is partly due to adolescents wanting to become independent of their parents. On the contrary, adolescents still considered and desired their parent’s support by helping with homework and making subject choices. Deslandes and Cloutier's (2002) study of 872 14-year old children in the United States found that over three quarters of these adolescents were willing to show their parents what they had learned or things that they had done successfully, ask for help on projects, assignments, and take home notes, notices and newsletters. These students would also have discussions with their parents about the schooling experiences that they had encountered when they were young. Based on this study, parent involvement may not necessarily decrease, but where it is occurring, may not always be seen by educators.

As the research has stated, there are many benefits to parent involvement in school. The school where the current study was conducted has seen a number of benefits from parental involvement from building and grounds enhancements right down to the individual students and their satisfaction with their learning. The researcher hopes to gain a better understanding of what parents in the school feel are the overall benefits are from being involved with the school and how parent involvement can affect the learners, teachers and parents. Furthermore, the current research is necessary, as the level of parent involvement at the school has slowly decreased over the past decade. The current study will attempt to shed light on the major issues affecting parent involvement, as well as give insight and direction on how the school can make changes to its
parent involvement program. The results from the questionnaire and focus groups will help determine if participants of the study perceive some of the same benefits that have shown up in the reviewed literature.

**Barriers to Parent Involvement**

Research has shown that there are numerous barriers to parent involvement in a child’s education. Padgett (2006) suggests reasons such as scheduling conflicts, lack of transportation, language barriers, and cultural differences as reasons many parents are hesitant to get involved with their child’s school. Parents’ beliefs can also act as a major barrier to effective parent involvement (Padgett, 2006). The way a parent views their role in their child’s education can play as a major factor. For example, there are parents who believe that it is the school’s sole responsibility to facilitate learning and that their role as parent is to just get their child to school. This type of parent is less likely to get involved with home based or school based parent involvement (Padgett, 2006).

Another belief that is important to parent involvement is a parent’s belief in their own ability to assist their child with their schoolwork. Parents, who may have a lower level of belief in their own ability, tend to avoid contact with schools, as they believe that their involvement will not have any positive effect on their child’s education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1995). Included in this is the concern that parents may lack confidence to understand the material due to a language barrier, their own level of education or can possibly stem from the parents’ own difficulties during their schooling years (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

Finally, another belief that plays a role in parent involvement is the parents’ view on their own child’s intelligence and how their child learns and develops their abilities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Parents who believe that their child’s intelligence is fixed and achievement in
school is based on a child’s luck to possess high ability will feel no need to get involved in their child’s education. These parents have the view that their child’s ability in regards to achievement has a limit and that their intelligence depends on the intelligence of their parents. These parents may view things such as parent/teacher meetings, encouraging homework or discussing furthering education as simply a waste of time since intelligence cannot be nurtured. On the other side of the spectrum, parents who have stronger beliefs that the way they bring up their children will have an impact on their intellectual development will have a stronger, more positive outlook on parent involvement over those parents that feel they have little impact on their child’s development and education. Fan and Chen (2001) noted that parental expectations and aspirations were also related to student achievement.

Another possible barrier to parent involvement is a parent’s belief/perception about being invited to school to participate in activities that involve parental involvement. If parent involvement is not being encouraged by the teacher/school, the parent may feel that parent involvement is not important. Epstein (2001) found that parents are most effectively involved when teachers actively encourage parent involvement.

The structure of the home may also be a barrier for many parents in getting involved in their child’s education. Parents’ busy work schedules and hours of work may play a factor in the extent to which they can be involved in school and home based parental involvement activities. A parent may work long hours and be too tired to assist in homework support or attend school meetings. Income of the parents may also be a barrier, as it may become a financial burden for parents to hire babysitters so that they can attend various school meetings. Cooper and Crosnoe (2007) argued that the lack of money, time and energy limit parent involvement in their children’s education. Koutrouba, Antonopoulou, Tsitsas, and Zenakou (2009) showed that
teachers in Greece believed that the main issue was the parent’s working schedule and the resulting lack of available time.

The Hamilton Wentworth District School Board is one of largest boards in Ontario with over 50,000 students enrolled (Hamilton-Wentworth district school board parent involvement survey, 2014). The school board has published results from a parent involvement survey conducted in 2013. The results show that respondents found that the major barriers for getting involved at the school were: conflicts with their work schedule (56%), lack of time (48%), childcare responsibilities (43%), unaware of the various opportunities (30%), feeling already involved sufficiently (17%), feeling unwelcomed (4%), not interested in the opportunities offered (4%) and lack of transportation (4%).

The school board has also published online their definition of parent involvement, benefits to parent involvement, the school board and parent involvement committee’s core beliefs on involvement and levels of involvement for any parents to read. The researcher chose to use and adapt the Hamilton-Wentworth questionnaire to see if similar results would occur in an independent Catholic school system in British Columbia where parents have to pay for their children to attend.

Other researchers have found that difficulties with basic literacy and numeracy skills can also be a barrier to parents being involved in their child’s education. Bynner et al. (2006) focused on how parents’ literacy and numeracy levels can affect children. Their study indicated that children of parents with the poorest grasp of literacy and numeracy are at a substantial disadvantage in relation to their own reading and math development compared to children who have parents with good literacy/numeracy (Bynner et al., 2006). Another barrier to parent involvement at school is the education level of the parent. Stevenson and Baker (1987) found that parents with more education are more active in school activities, such as Parent-Teacher
Association meetings, parent-teacher conferences and with helping their child with homework. Stevenson and Baker (1987) further mentioned that less educated parents might shift their attention away from school due to feeling inadequate when helping their children with homework. This feeling of being inadequate may accompany Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1995) assumptions on fixed intelligence stated previously in this chapter. It is anticipated that many of the barriers found in the literature will also emerge in the results of the current study. It is expected that a parent’s work schedule, lack of time, lack of awareness of opportunities and communication will emerge out of the results as major barriers for parents in the current study. A number of the barrier questions that were developed for the questionnaire and focus groups were designed based on the barriers found in the literature.

As the research has proven, there has been a great deal of studies and literature published on frameworks, benefits and barriers to parent involvement in school. Although there has been a great deal of research that has focused on parent involvement, there has been limited research that has focused on schools in Canada and more specifically, private schools in the province of British Columbia. This has led the researcher to believe that the current study and its results will not only benefit the current school and its parent volunteer program, but also add its own perspective to the growing body of literature that has been published in the area of parental involvement.
Chapter 3: Procedures and Methods

Description of the Research Design

The goal of this research was to investigate parents’ perceptions on a mandatory volunteer program that was initiated at the school in 2012 and to gain a better understanding on what parents believe parent involvement is all about, its benefits and most importantly, the barriers that prevent parents from choosing to volunteer. A mixed method approach was used to examine parents’ perceptions of parent involvement.

First, a recruitment poster (Appendix A) was handed out at the family BBQ in September that was meant to briefly inform parents that a parent involvement study was going to be conducted. Weeks later, a newsletter recruitment announcement (Appendix B) was sent to all parents through the weekly school newsletter. One week after the recruitment announcement, a quantitative questionnaire (Appendix C) and letter of consent (Appendix D) of parents’ perceptions about their involvement was given to the school wide population, which also included three comment boxes for parents to leave additional comments. The questionnaire (Appendix C) was broken down into four main parts. Part A contained eight questions that focused on demographics. Part B investigated parents’ perceptions of the effectiveness of home and school communication. Part B included two separate Likert scales and a comment box for parents to provide any additional information on communication. Part C focused on gaining a better understanding of parents’ perceptions on volunteering in the school. Part C also included a comment box for parents to list other volunteer activities that they engaged in at the school. Part D investigated the barriers to parent involvement, which included a list of common barriers. Part D also included a comment box, which allowed parents to list any other reasons that made it difficult for them to volunteer their time at the school.
Secondly, qualitative data was collected by running two separate focus groups comparing the beliefs of those who volunteer at the school and those who do not. All participation was voluntary and anonymous.

**Description of the Sample**

The current study took place in a K-9 Independent Catholic School on Vancouver Island. The population at the time of the study was approximately 215 families of the 400 students enrolled in the school. The five-part questionnaire was offered to families of all students, and 215 questionnaires were handed out (one to each family in the school). Questionnaires were handed out to the youngest and only students so that families could only receive and fill out one questionnaire. Out of the 215 questionnaires, 74 of them were returned fully completed. The sample included parents from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, education, race/ethnicity, ages of the parents and the amount of children that they have enrolled in the school. The school’s population is approximately 59% Caucasian, 36% First Nation and 5% of other ethnic backgrounds. The socio-economic background ranges from a combined family income of under $20 000 to over $150 000. School tuition for practicing Catholics is approximately $4 272 for one child, $7 728 for two and $8 436 for three or more children. For non-practicing families the costs are $4 776 for one child, $8,436 for two and $9 420 for three or more children. Parents with lower family incomes can apply for tuition assistance and families that belong to Cowichan First Nation and live on the reserve are fully subsidized by the band. It is beneficial to note that the sample was a convenience sample as the researcher is a teacher in the school. Furthermore, findings were only generalizable to this specific school population and not to other populations within the same school district or neighboring public school district.

The final part of the questionnaire was an invitation for parents to continue in the study.
through two different focus groups. Focus Group A consisted of those parents who regularly volunteer at the school \((n=6)\) and Focus Group B consisted of parents that chose to pay the monetary fee \((n=3)\). Focus Group A consisted of four women and two men, while Focus Group B consisted of two women and one man. For Focus Group A, the researcher used convenience sampling to narrow the number of volunteers down as over twenty parents volunteered for this group. As for Focus Group B, the researcher chose every volunteer that chose to participate. Convenience sampling was chosen as the method of nonprobability sampling for this study. This method of sampling allowed the researcher to select individuals because they were willing to participate in the study, convenient to the researcher and representative of the characteristics being investigated in this study (Creswell, 2004).

**Description of the Instruments Used**

For the first part of the study, an anonymous paper-based questionnaire (Appendix C) was offered to all parents in the school. This questionnaire was adapted and based upon a previous questionnaire on parental involvement that was used by the Hamilton-Wentworth School Board (Hamilton-Wentworth district school board parent involvement survey, 2014). The Hamilton-Wentworth School Board has approximately 50,000 students and is one of the largest school boards in Ontario. It includes families from various ethnic groups, socio-economic backgrounds and educational levels. The researcher chose to use this questionnaire, as the family demographics are similar to the researcher’s current school. The researcher chose three main areas of the Hamilton-Wentworth survey to base the current questionnaire upon as it was created and based upon the works of Joyce Epstein and her research on the six types of parent involvement. The questionnaire included three scales: The School Communication Scale; the Parent Volunteer Scale; and the Barriers to Parent Involvement Scale. The reliability and validity
of these scales is relatively low as they are relatively new and only one set of results has been reported. The scales were chosen due to their simplicity of use and the nature of the questions relating specifically to parental involvement occurring within school.

Part A of the questionnaire (Appendix C) consisted of eight demographic questions: age, gender, ethnicity, education, language spoken at home, family income, number of children at the school and their role in the school. The literature has shown that educational level of the parent and family income can be major predictors of parent involvement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) and Stevenson and Baker (1987) both agreed that parents that have lower education and income are less likely to volunteer due to work schedules and the fear of being seen as inadequate. Padgett (2006) mentioned that cultural differences play a factor in the degree that parents become involved in their child’s education outside of the home. Part A of questionnaire will help validate both, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), Stevenson and Baker (1987) and Padgett’s (2006) research on parent involvement.

Part B of the questionnaire (Appendix C) consisted of a School Communication Scale (SCS), which focused on how parents perceived the communication that was delivered by the school. This scale was comprised of twenty closed questions, which asked participants to respond using a 5-point scale. The first twelve questions used 1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = great, and 5 = excellent. The final eight questions used 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = frequently, and 5 = always. Part B also included one open ended question which allowed participants to comment on any other communication tools that were used in the school community.

Part C of the questionnaire (Appendix C) consisted of a Parent Volunteer Scale (PVS), which focused on invitations to volunteer, parents’ willingness to seek out opportunities to
volunteer and volunteer activities that they had been involved in at the school. This scale was comprised of twelve closed questions and one open ended question. All of the closed questions were answered with a “yes” or “no” answer. Part C, also included an open ended question allowing participants to list any other volunteer activities that they were involved in over the last two years. This scale was adapted from the Hamilton-Wentworth survey for the purpose of the current school due to its applicability to the study.

Part D of the questionnaire (Appendix C) consisted of a Barriers to Parent Involvement Scale (BPIS), which focused on the barriers that prevent parents from volunteering their time. This scale was comprised of thirteen closed questions, which participants responded by checking all that applied to them. If none of questions applied, participants checked the very last question (#43). Part D also included an open question allowing participants to list any other reasons why it might be difficult for them to volunteer their time at school. This scale was developed by the Hamilton-Wentworth School Board and adapted by the researcher for the purpose of this study. Barriers such as lack of time, conflict with work schedules, childcare responsibilities and unaware of the various opportunities were the major issues for participants in the Hamilton-Wentworth survey and have been mentioned in the previous literature as being factors in parent involvement. Although the survey has not been evaluated for its reliability or validity, the literature and the results from Hamilton-Wentworth give it credibility.

Part E of the questionnaire (Appendix C) was an invitation for participants to continue in the study and to be a part of one of two different focus groups. Those participants who were interested in participating in focus group discussions about their involvement in the school were asked to include their name and phone number on the space provided on the final page of the questionnaire. Interested parents were contacted two weeks prior to the focus groups, giving
ample amount of time for family scheduling. The researcher’s goal was to have a maximum number of six parents in each focus group. Thirty-one parents returned their questionnaires indicating their interest in continuing in the study. Twenty-six parents checked the box for Focus Group A, which was for parents that already volunteer and five parents checked off the box for Focus Group B, which was for parents that choose not to volunteer. Six parents out of twenty-six from Group A were chosen by the researcher in order to include a range of the grade attended by their children, years belonging to the school (0-12 years), male to female, and young to old ratios. Through his ten years of teaching, being involved in extra-curricular activities and using the school database, the researcher was able to narrow the sample to include a wide range of parents for the focus group. Five parents that checked Group B were invited to participate, but only three parents were able to participate.

The second part of the study involved conducting two different focus groups: one for parents who regularly volunteer at the school and the other for those parents who paid the exemption fee. All participants of the focus groups were given a focus group consent form (Appendix E) prior to the focus groups commencing. Six open-ended questions (Appendix F) were developed by the researcher to help enhance the data that was collected in the quantitative part of the study. Questions were developed to gain a better understanding of parents’ perceptions on volunteering within the school being studied and to compare to previous research results. Questions included: How has the mandatory volunteer program that was instated in 2012 helped to increase the amount of time you volunteer at the school? What are the benefits to parental involvement at school on a child’s education? Where in the school do you feel parental involvement needs to improve? How would you define parental involvement? What are the most difficult barriers to parental involvement that you feel prevent parents from volunteering their
time? What recommendations would you make to the volunteer program to increase parental involvement?

**Explanation of the Procedures Followed**

Prior to beginning the study, Ethics approval for this project was granted through the VIU Research Ethics Board in August of 2014. Approval from the school board superintendent and the school principal was received by providing an electronic copy of the Master’s thesis proposal.

Parents at the school were first introduced to the study at “Meet the Teacher Night/Family BBQ” hosted by the school in late September. During the evening, the researcher handed out flyers (Appendix A) to parents, which informed them about the study, its procedures and possible benefits for their children and the school. Following this, the school newsletter and word of mouth was used to promote the study.

The information letter (Appendix D) and recruitment message (Appendix B) were distributed through the school newsletter and a hard copy was sent home with all the students. The hard copy was distributed at the same time as the First Term report cards as the researcher believed it would help with the return rate. Interested participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire (Appendix C) to the best of their ability and to return it to the school the same night as Parent/Teacher interviews or returned no later than November 30th. Participants were asked to return their completed questionnaires to the sealed drop box located at the front office of the school in a sealed envelope that was provided, thus protecting their anonymity. The questionnaire took approximately five to ten minutes to complete.

The completed questionnaires were kept in a sealed box at the office. At the end of each day, the researcher collected the completed questionnaires. All questionnaires were kept in a
locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s house and will be kept for a two-year period after the study is completed, where they then will be destroyed.

Parents that chose to take part in the second part of the study were asked to include their contact information on the last page of the questionnaire. A separate collection box was used to protect the anonymity of the people who volunteered to take part in the focus group interviews. Participants were informed on the questionnaire (Appendix C) to separate the last page from the questionnaire and place it in the proper box marked specifically “Focus Groups” if they were interested in taking part further in the study. The researcher wanted to gather data from a wide range of the school population in regards to parents with children of different grades, cultures, parental education, language and family income. Those participants that indicated that they were interested in participating in the focus groups were contacted by phone. The purpose of the study, and the date and time of the focus group were discussed with each potential participant.

On the evening of the focus group participants were asked to sign the consent form (Appendix E) prior to the start of the focus group. The participants of both focus groups were asked the same six questions (Appendix F) during each interview. The focus groups were recorded using individual iPads and a voice to text program was used to capture each participant’s comments. An additional iPad was used to record the entire group’s conversation so that the researcher could cross-reference the recordings. Each focus group lasted between one and a half to two hours. The two focus groups were conducted on different nights from each so that participants would not know who from the opposite group was participating.

**Discussion of Validity**

Threats to external validity include the fact that those who chose to participate in the study are likely to be different than those who did not choose to participate, therefore, creating a
volunteer bias. This is particularly relevant in a study about volunteering. It is likely that those who chose to participate in this study were already motivated to be involved in the school or had an interest in becoming involved. Research also suggests that those who participate in research are more likely to be more educated and from a higher socio-economic class than those who do not participate in research (Warriner et al., 2002). Although the school population’s income information was not fully available, compared to the school population as a whole, the study’s sample had fewer aboriginals, therefore, limiting the generalizability of the study to that population. In general, Caucasians are more likely to fill out questionnaires or surveys over non-Caucasians (Voigt, Koepsell, & Daling, 2003). Attempts were made to collect a representative sample of the school population by advertising the study via different modes of communication (flyers, newsletters and word of mouth), however, since communication/awareness is a common barrier to parent involvement cited in the literature (Hamilton-Wentworth district school board parent involvement survey, 2014) it may be those who are not involved in the school, do not read the newsletters and/or are not in the school regularly etc., and therefore, were possibly not aware that the current study was taking place.

A power over relationship must also be acknowledged as the researcher is also a teacher in the school and this position may have led participants to be more or less likely to participate in the study and/or may have influenced or biased their responses (particularly during the focus group discussion).

Data triangulation was used to enhance the validity of the data, using multiple sources of data (quantitative and qualitative data) to corroborate the results. The results of this study are limited to the school where the study was conducted, and cannot be generalized to other schools.
Analysis Techniques

The quantitative data from the questionnaire (Appendix C) was analyzed using Microsoft Excel to determine the relationship between various demographic characteristics, home/school communication, perceived volunteer opportunities and barriers to parent involvement. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the distribution and frequency of the nominal and ordinal data collected from the survey. Means and standard deviations were calculated to determine the average scores and dispersion of the ordinal and interval/ratio data.

The focus group recordings were analyzed by tallying common responses, revealing themes in the parents’ perceptions of parental participation and differences in beliefs between the two groups.
Chapter 4: Findings and Results

The purpose of this study was to better understand parents’ perceptions on volunteering within the school and to identify the major barriers that prevent parents from volunteering their time. The research took place over a six-week period in Fall of 2014. In a letter (Appendix D), participants were invited to take part in a 5-10 minute anonymous questionnaire (Appendix C). Out of approximately 215 families in the school 74 families participated and completed a questionnaire. Therefore, approximately 35% of the families in the school were represented in the findings. The participants were also invited on the last page of the questionnaire (Appendix C) to take part in one of two Focus Groups. The mixed method research design for the current study included two quantitative five-point Likert Scales and qualitative open-ended questions in Parts B, C and D of the questionnaire. Further qualitative data was collected through the use of six scripted questions (Appendix F) that were asked of each participant of the two focus groups.

Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire (Appendix C) was broken down into four parts, which included demographics, school/home communication, parent volunteer experiences, and barriers to parent involvement. The first section of the questionnaire (Appendix C) collected data on demographics including socio-economic status, race, and language. Respondents’ demographics are illustrated in Figures 4.1 through Figures 4.8.
Figure 4.1. Gender break down of participants (N=74)

Figure 4.1 explains the breakdown between females and males that participated in the questionnaire (Appendix C). The graph indicates that 86% of the questionnaires were filled out and completed by females.

Figure 4.2. Age of participants (N=74)

Figure 4.2 indicates the ages of parents in the school that filled out the questionnaire (Appendix C). The highest percentage of parents was between the ages of 35-45 years of age (46%). The 7% of parents that were over the age of 55 were grandparents that were the primary caregivers in the home.
Figure 4.3. Education level of attainment of participants (N=74)

Figure 4.3 indicates the level of education of parents that took part in the questionnaire (Appendix C). The graph implies that 87% of the parents that took part in the survey had a college degree or greater.

Figure 4.4. Primary language spoken by participants (N=74)

Figure 4.4 indicates the primary language spoken in the homes of parents who responded to the questionnaire. The majority of the families that took part in the questionnaire (Appendix
C) spoke English as their primary language in the home (95%). The category titled “Other” was represented by First Nation and Punjabi languages and represented 5% of respondents.

**Figure 4.5. Race/ethnicity of participants (N=74)**

Figure 4.5 represents race/ethnicity of the parents that took part in the questionnaire (Appendix C). The graph indicates that 85% of the parents that took part in the survey were of White/Caucasian descent. First Nation and Asian descent made up 15% of the population.

**Figure 4.6. Gross annual income of participants (N=74)**
Figure 4.6 represents the gross annual income of parents that filled out the questionnaire (Appendix C). The graph indicates that a majority of the parents that filled out the questionnaire (Appendix C) make $50,000 or more in a year (87%). A very small percentage (13%) of parents that took part in the questionnaire (Appendix C) make under the $50,000 mark.

**Figure 4.6**

![Bar chart showing the distribution of annual income among parents.]

**Figure 4.7**. Number of children in the school (N=74)

Figure 4.7 represents the breakdown of children that parents have within the school based on grade divisions and kids who have attended the school in the past.
Figure 4.8. Participants’ total amount of years connected to the school (N=21)

Figure 4.8 represents the years that parents who responded to the questionnaire have been connected to the school. The graph indicates that parents have been invested and have stayed invested in the school for multiple years. Only 30% of the parents indicated the amount of years that they were connected to the school. Parents that did not check one of the options on the questionnaire (Appendix C) were either new to the school, were not sure on how many years they were connected or did not fully understand the question.

Part B of the questionnaire (Appendix C) asked parents to rate the effectiveness of communication between the school and home. A five-point Likert Scale was used to determine which forms of communication parents felt were the most effective. The Likert Scale consisted of 1 being poor, 2-fair, 3-good, 4-great, and 5-excellent.
Table 4.1

Parents’ Perceptions of the Effectiveness of School Communication (N=74)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/ teacher/ interviews</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Newsletter</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Cards</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet the Teacher/Open House</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Webpage</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Conversations</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Agendas</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School sign</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home &amp; School assoc. meetings</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School council meetings</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 indicates that participants perceive that the most effective form of communication between the school and the home is through email. Parent Auxiliary Committee led communication is ranked as the least effective and possesses the greatest standard deviation (1.67) and answers ranged from poor (1) to excellent (5). In open-ended comments, parents listed other forms of communication that they felt were helpful tools in communicating back and forth with the school. The use of technology emerged as a key theme in improving communication between both the home and school. More than one parent commented that texting was a tool that they found effective in communicating with the school. Another parent mentioned that the school Facebook page was a good tool to use to communicate. Brief after school conversations were also listed as an effective way of communicating with the teacher or administration. One parent mentioned that they had signed up to volunteer at the school, but did receive any follow up back from the school.
Table 4.2

*Forms of communication that parents most frequently use in the school (N=74)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attend Parent/ Teacher interviews</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend special events</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read the school newsletter</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond to the report card</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit the school website</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact the school</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend home/ school meetings</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend school council meetings</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 represents the form of communication that parents use most often in their child’s education. In the questionnaire a five point Likert scale was used with 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Frequently, and 5=Always to measure the forms of communication perceived by parents. Table 4.2 indicates that the most common form of communication that is used by the parent is through parent/teacher interviews with a mean of 4.8 and a standard deviation of 0.55.

Results also showed that 85% of parents feel invited by the school to come and volunteer, while 81% seek out opportunities to volunteer at the school on their own.
Figure 4.9. Volunteer opportunities offered at the school (N=74)

Figure 4.9 represents the different volunteer activities that parents participate in within the school. A majority of parents have assisted with an event, (76%) been on a school field trip (74%) and over half of the parents that participated in the questionnaire (Appendix C) volunteered in the classroom (54%). The graph also implies that parents are more likely to assist with an activity rather than lead one. Hot lunch/Breakfast program scored relatively low (7%). In open-ended comments parents listed other activities that they were involved in at the school such as bake sales, grade nine graduation activities, reading groups, turkey dinner and the school Halloween party. One parent reported:

I have offered to help organize two fundraising events and have essentially been told “the calendar is already full so that window is closed”. I have found that I have had to be very persistent and ask a lot of questions to remain a parent volunteer. Some teachers and admin or support staff have been very inviting, some have said, “might be too much trouble or
have said they do not want help. Parents are not always welcomed”.

Figure 4.10. Perceived barriers to parent involvement at the school (N=74)

Figure 4.10 indicates that the two dominant barriers to parent involvement were parents’ work schedules (70%) and lack of time (53%). The third major barrier was parents being unaware at (18%). Lack of communication, which could be a cause of parents not being aware came in sixth with 9% of parents checking that option.

In open-ended comments, parents listed a number of other reasons that made it difficult for them to volunteer their time at the school. For example here is one parent’s comments related to the major barriers of work schedules, lack of time, being unaware and lack of communication:

The biggest barrier for me is time. For parents who work five days and have other kids, I have to take vacation dates off work to volunteer-doesn't make sense. I wish there were options for me to volunteer at home in other ways (i.e., Paperwork, putting things together, etc…) in the evenings or weekends. I have never heard of such opportunities. I want to volunteer, but don't know what is possible given restrictions. So I usually end up paying (cheque).
More than one parent commented on that fact that they feel that there is a feeling of exclusion that is generated by parents that have been at the school for years volunteering their time. One parent mentions:

There seems to be the same group of people always volunteering and it feels cliquey. I volunteered a few times for hot lunch and I felt I was almost in the way as the regulars had their way of doing things, it wasn’t overly welcoming. I noticed there are either little groups or people on the outside by themselves, feels like high school all over again. The teachers are amazing however and go out of their way. Its more the other regular parent volunteers who almost act (entitled), it would be nice to actually be invited/approached, especially parents who work and aren’t always there in the AM or PM to be visible.

Another parent also felt that there was a cliquey feeling amongst the parents that already volunteer:

Sometimes it feels as though the people that have been volunteering in certain things for a long time are very hesitant to allow new people to participate. Makes it tough to keep trying when not made to feel welcome.

Finally, lack of communication and feeling unaware of what was required by parents were also mentioned in the open-ended comments. The following comments help clarify the areas where there is a lack of communication leading to unawareness. One parent in particular voiced their concerns of the parent volunteer program in their response:

There have been more systemic reasons that are not identified
above [in the questionnaire], which have arisen from lack of
follow up for concerns that were voiced regarding the initiation
of the parent participation program; lack of communication
within school council regarding issues, concern around
lack of parent input into planning of program
and lack of information regarding evaluation of program.

Focus Group Results

The focus groups took place on two separate nights in December of 2014. Focus Group A, which included parents that choose to volunteer, was conducted on Thursday December 11th from 6:30 to 8:30 pm and took place at the school. This group consisted of six parents, two male and four female. The group included two parents that were new to the school and four parents that have been part of the system for three to eighteen years. One of the parents that were included was a grandmother that is raising her grandson. There was also a significant range of the grades in the school represented by the parents in Focus Group A from Kindergarten to Grade 8. Also, three of the six parents had children that had previously attended and graduated from the school. Focus Group B included parents that choose not to volunteer or are unable to volunteer their time at the school. Focus Group B was conducted on Tuesday December 16th from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm and took place at the school. This group consisted of three parents, one male and two female. Two of the three parents have been with school for eight plus years. The third parent has been with the school on and off for the past six years. The range of grades that were represented ranged between grades 5 to 8.

Prior to the beginning of the focus group parents were given the six interview questions and fifteen minutes to formulate and write down their answers prior to the interview beginning.
Each parent was also given an iPad that recorded what he or she said using a voice to text program. An additional iPad was used to audio record both interviews. The following is an account of the major themes that were divulged from each focus group including the similarities and differences between each group.

The first question that was asked to each group was what they believed is the definition of volunteering. Focus Group A (parents who volunteer) responses were collectively around developing a stronger community environment and building relationships. One parent responded:

“It is by giving ones’ time, talent, and contributions to the school community.”

Another parent from Focus Group A responded with:

“I believe parent involvement happens by developing positive relationships within the school community.”

Focus Group B responses did not illuminate the same responses and were more focused on the individual family. One parent responded with:

“My definition of volunteering is knowing what my child is up to.”

Another parent responded with:

“Caring about what your child is doing/learning.”

The second question that was asked to each group was: How has the mandatory volunteer program that was instated in 2012 helped to increase the amount of time you volunteer at the school? The theme that sprouted from Group A was around “awareness” and that it is an important component of the school community. One parent response was:

“It hasn’t increased our volunteer hours, but it does send a reminder at the beginning of the year that it needs to be done.”
Another parent mentioned:

“It creates a perception of fairness for all families as it sets a bar that all families need to do their part, and not just rely on the small group of parent volunteers to do everything.”

Focus Group B’s responses were not the same; their volunteering did not change or increase and for one parent it actually decreased.

Question three asked the parents: Where in the school do you feel parental involvement needs to improve? Focus Group A had many ideas about areas where school parent involvement needs to be improved. The number one place suggested by parents in Focus Group A was the school’s hot lunch program, followed by in the classroom, field trips and fundraising. One parent mentioned two key points that they felt would help improve parent involvement: “Advanced notice when volunteers are required… encouraging people of the benefits and the need of volunteers.” Focus Group B’s answers ranged from not being sure and no informed answer to openness and being educated on what is exactly needed and how to get involved. One parent responded by saying: “As an informed parent, I don’t feel, “informed” enough about how one goes about to be more involved.”

The fourth question asked parents: What are the most difficult barriers to parental involvement that may hinder you from volunteering? What do you believe are the most difficult barriers for other parents from volunteering their time? Both focus groups responded that time was a major barrier for getting involved at the school. Parents from both groups also mentioned the time commitments to other organizations outside of the school as another barrier. Another common theme between both groups was the feeling of exclusion or presence of established parent cliques or strong personalities. One parent commented: “I feel a sense of exclusion sometimes in that suggestions of new ideas are sometimes squashed or do not seem to be
received. Then it becomes difficult to get past the Gate Keepers.” Both focus groups also mentioned “communication” as being a major barrier to getting involved. Some parents felt that better communication from the school to the parents on what exactly is needed from the volunteer, and how to do the job is required. Parents in both focus groups also mentioned that they felt that they didn’t always possess the abilities or skill required to perform the requested volunteer activities.

Question five asked: What recommendations would you make to the volunteer program to increase parental involvement? Once again, communication was the major theme that emerged from both focus groups. In particularly, communication around the different opportunities, options, and more information on what exactly the school needs. It was also mentioned that more awareness and notice of when the school needs volunteers was needed. Parents felt that if more awareness was given they could schedule volunteering much more easily into their busy schedules. In regards to communicating, parents recommended a number of ideas that they felt would be helpful for the school to promote more parents to get involved within the school community. Parents in Group A mentioned having a central bulletin board of opportunities at the office for parents to see. Parents also listed mentor and incentive programs, sign-up sheets, newsletters, booster clubs and a parent opportunity fair as possible ways to better communicate and inform parents. One parent mentioned: “The school needs to create a more welcoming feel for parents, especially new parents.” Adding to this response another parent mentioned: “The school needs to be more open to trying new ideas and to not get stuck on what they have always done. Take the time to listen.”

The final question that was asked of the focus groups was: What do you believe are the overall benefits of parent involvement? How does it affect your child’s education and how does
it benefit the school community? The theme of community and relationships emerged from both focus groups as being the key benefits of parent involvement. One parent mentioned: “It increases a feeling of acceptance and belonging for students and parents.” Another parent stated: “Takes a community to raise a child.” Parents from both focus groups also mentioned that it creates a more comfortable environment for learning to take place. As well, it builds confidence, self-esteem, friendships, and community networks. Finally, it was mentioned that it not only helps the students in the building, but it benefits everyone as it enhances education by creating an opportunity for field trips, creates more time for educators to educate, and it demonstrates through role modeling to students the importance of giving back and helping others.

**Summary**

Chapter 4 uncovered a number underlying themes and trends amongst parents in the school in regards to parents’ perceptions of volunteering. This included parents’ definition of volunteering, benefits, and the major barriers that prevent parents from becoming more involved. Both the quantitative and qualitative data that was collected by the means of the questionnaire and two independent focus groups provided some interesting findings that will be further discussed in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

Research Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine a parent volunteer program and to gain a better understanding of parents’ perceptions on volunteering within the school and to identify the major barriers that prevent parents from volunteering their time. In an effort to better understand parents’ perceptions and barriers, a greater understanding of the benefits was unveiled in the literature and the current study. From the current researcher’s experience as a teacher and as a parent of two children, a better understanding of the benefits and barriers of parent involvement was an intriguing area of study. The goal of the study was to better understand parents’ perceptions, investigate strategies to improve/change the parental volunteer program at the school, educate parents on the benefits of parental involvement and overall improve the school culture.

To answer the research question, a questionnaire with close-ended and open-ended questions, as well as two focus groups, were used to generate data on parents’ perceptions of involvement within the school. The goal of the questionnaire and focus groups questions was to gain a better understanding of what parents believed parent involvement was all about, benefits to being involved and the major barriers preventing them from volunteering. Two hundred and fifteen questionnaires were distributed amongst all the families of a Kindergarten to Grade Nine students at an independent school in a town on Vancouver Island in the fall of 2014. Seventy-four questionnaires were returned indicating a 35% return rate.

Discussion

A number of common themes and trends were detected throughout the questionnaire, open-ended comments and the two different focus groups. It was found in both the questionnaire
and the focus groups that “Time” and “Work Schedules” were major barriers for parents that prevented them from getting involved. Unfortunately, these fixed barriers are difficult for the school to control or change unless options or opportunities can be created outside of the regular school hours. Furthermore, the third major barrier that parents listed as preventing them from becoming more involved was around “Communication” and being unaware of what the school needs were, when/where volunteers were needed, time frames on volunteer activities, and how to do the job. The Hamilton-Wentworth survey found similar results with communication emerging as an issue between the home and school with 30% of parents stating that they were unaware of the various opportunities to volunteer. Williams and Sánchez's (2013) study also found that communication was a major barrier for parents and that being unaware of volunteer opportunities was due to students as messengers and inaccurate contact information. This was also found in the Hamilton-Wentworth (2011) survey. Williams and Sanchez (2013) also found that parent involvement would improve through effective communication. Parents felt that email and even exchanging of cell numbers would be effective methods in improving communication between the home and school as it eliminated the need for the student to be the sole messenger of information. Parents in the current study also rated email as the number one choice for communication between the home and school in the questionnaire results and in both focus groups. Surprisingly, parent/teacher interviews was ranked second in the questionnaire as the most effective means of communication even though it only occurs twice a year. It is important to understand that although parents checked “always” for parent/teacher interviews as an effective form of communication it does not occur very often. Therefore, “always” does not mean “often” in some cases. Finally, it was brought to the attention of the researcher through the open-ended questions on the questionnaire and focus group interviews that Facebook and texting
were also very effective ways for parents to communicate with the school.

The findings of the current study also found that a feeling of exclusion and a division of cliques existed which was expressed by a number of parents in the questionnaire comments and focus groups. To be more specific, parents that commented on this issue felt that this feeling stemmed from the existing core of parent volunteers. A lack of openness and acceptance of new ideas also emerged from this major barrier and was perceived by parents. Baker's (1997) study confirmed that parent’s felt more inclined to volunteer their time when a welcoming and open environment existed. Parents in the current study confirmed that they base their own involvement decisions on appraisals of their own capabilities, as well as predictions of outcomes that will likely follow their actions. This is consistent with Hoover- Dempsey et al.'s (2005) research that a parent’s sense of self-efficacy leads to being more or less involved.

On a positive note, all of these reasons can be considered variable reasons/issues that can be more easily altered or changed now that they have been uncovered. The evidence provided in the results by parents has indicated that parent involvement has the possibility to changed and be improved at the school by focusing on the major communication barriers that parents have listed.

The results of the study also indicated that parents that volunteer have a different sense of what the definition of parent involvement is actually all about. Parents that choose to volunteer felt that volunteering helps enhance the entire school community and is beneficial to all educators and learners in the building. Parents that choose not to volunteer perceived volunteering more as means to see how their child is doing at school and a way of keeping an eye on them. The study also focused on parents’ perceptions of what they feel are the benefits of parental involvement. The findings suggested that all parents, whether they choose to volunteer or not, both agree that parent involvement can create a more comfortable environment, builds
self-esteem, friendships and community networks. It was mentioned that parent involvement also benefits the educators in the building by creating more time, increasing field trip opportunities and role modeling to the students the importance of giving back to the school system. Although there were many benefits listed and agreed upon by both types of parents, not one parent made reference to the fact that parent involvement has the potential to improve academic achievement as the literature in chapter two has suggested. It is believed that parents that participated in this study have a good understanding of the indirect benefits that parent involvement may have on the education system, but parents may not fully understand the direct benefits that parent involvement may have on student achievement.

It must be noted that the results of this study favor those who are more likely to volunteer, whereby, those that chose to complete the questionnaire were volunteering their time in a sense. The demographics of the sample indicated that 87% of the parents who participated in the study had a college degree or higher, and 87% made more than $50,000 a year. After sharing these details with the administration of the school, it was noted that the demographics of the study do not accurately reflect the true demographics of the school. Furthermore, those parents that participated in Focus Group B, who chose not to volunteer, were parents that possessed a higher level education and recorded over $50,000 income levels. Their choices for not volunteering focused on lack of time, work schedules and outside school commitments. The results of the study may have been differed, had parents with less education and lower levels of income chosen to participate in the study.

**Implications and Recommendations**

Dodd and Konzal (2002) found that parent involvement is a better predictor of student success over other indicators such as a family’s gross income or a parent’s educational level.
Understanding the importance of parental involvement and its benefits are a key ingredient to getting more parents involved. The school’s goal when they first initiated the mandatory volunteer program was not meant to soak additional funds from the parents of the school, but to build a stronger school community, build morale and strengthen relationships. Unfortunately when it was initiated it was not communicated in a way that outlined the benefits of increased parental involvement. If the benefits were communicated to the parents prior to initiating the program, a greater possibility of a positive outcome would have come to fruition.

In relation to parental involvement at school certain leadership styles are more effective in building relationships, engaging the parents and involving them in the decision making process. Transformational leaders involve themselves in the culture of the organization and work towards building a collective vision based on the interests of all involved (Northouse, 2012). When teachers and parents see that their leader is engaged and involved there is a greater chance that they too will feel energized to become more involved. Transformational leaders manage to motivate others to achieve more than originally planned or intended and they create a supportive organizational climate where individual needs and differences are acknowledged and respected (Leadership, 1998). This helps define where the organization is going, which helps create a sense of meaning and identity. They also encourage others in their endeavors and celebrate accomplishments when they occur (Bass, 1998).

By creating relationships, encouraging others, and building trust among staff, parents and students, a transformational leader can create a more positive and collaborative environment for all. Therefore, the school becomes a community where everyone feels involved and a sense of attachment. As well, the school becomes a more welcoming place that people want to attend, feel connected with, and part of. Team leadership focuses more on the collaboration of the group
rather than a single leader. Team leadership focuses on interdependence and common goals that help to define a team. Team leadership research has changed from focusing on the leader and problem solving to the entire team (Northouse, 2012). Team leaders see the value of engaging everyone in the team to solve the problem. The team approach to fostering greater parental involvement may be enticing to parents as it gets them directly involved in the decision making process.

A third type of leadership style may also benefit a school in increasing parent involvement and that style is one represented by an authentic leader. Parental involvement can become a possibility with authentic leadership as this type of leader focuses on the problem and then collaborates with the team on ways to possibly fix the problem. If parents feel that they are part of the process, in developing strategies to increase parent involvement, they may be more inclined to get involved. The literature shows that authentic leaders can have a positive effect on increasing parent involvement as they create an environment that is conducive to building relationships where members are valued, trust is established and collaboration occurs (Northouse, 2012).

It is evident through the research, that parent involvement with leadership styles that focus on collaborating, building trusting relationships and being engaged in the school community can have many positive effects on a child’s education, and are key ingredients to a school’s success.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were a few limitations to the current research. One of the potential limitations was that the study was conducted at an independent school in BC where parents have to pay tuition to attend. As parents are required to pay additionally for education, there may be a greater sense of
investment towards their child’s education. Additionally, a greater knowledge of the benefits that accompany parental involvement may already exist, and therefore a greater desire to be present and willingness to be involved. Results from this study have shown to be slightly higher than results found by the Hamilton-Wentworth School Board. The researcher suspects that if the study were conducted within one of local public schools the results would be much lower.

Another limitation to the study was an oversight on the researcher’s part in not including the school’s Facebook page as an option on the communication part of the questionnaire. The researcher could have also included a family dynamics question on the demographic portion of the questionnaire showing marital status, single divorced, remarried, common law, guardianship and other as options for parenting.

Threats to internal validity include the fact that all participants in the study volunteered to participate. It is likely that those individuals who are more interested in parental involvement at school are more likely to have volunteered for this research study. Attempts were made to collect a representative sample of the school population by advertising the study via different modes of communication (flyers, newsletters and word of mouth). A power over relationship must also be acknowledged as the researcher is also a teacher and coach in the school, and this position may have led participants to be more or less likely to participate in the study and/or may have influenced or biased their responses (particularly during the focus group discussion).

Data triangulation was used to enhance the validity of the data, using multiple sources of data (quantitative and qualitative data) to corroborate the results. Furthermore, the results of this study are limited to the school where the study was conducted, and cannot be generalized to other schools either private or public.
Further Research Directions

This knowledge has led to further questions and possible future inquiry. One possible question for future research is: Would parents be more likely volunteer their time if they were given hard evidence of the benefits of parent involvement from the research? For possible future study, it would be interesting to have pre and post measurements taken of student satisfaction and achievement. It would also be interesting to see where students are measured before parents are educated on the benefits of parental involvement and then given the opportunity/options to be more involved. Finally, after an extended period where parents have increased their involvement, measurements of the students’ satisfaction and achievement are then taken to see if there are any changes or improvements. Future studies could also examine the relationship of parent involvement between forms of parenting. Are there significant differences between parents that are married, single parents and blended families?

Conclusion

The findings of the present study, and past literature have demonstrated how important communication and developing relationships are between the home and the school - between staff, parents and students, but also between parents and other parents. Numerous studies have indicated the importance of parental involvement on a child’s education and the benefits it has to offer. All agree that there are numerous benefits documented as an outcome of increased parental involvement.

It is believed through the current research findings, that if parents are more informed of the benefits of parental involvement and that these benefits are communicated as part of any parental participation program, the likelihood of the program succeeding will increase and flourish, along with parental involvement. Furthermore, by identifying the major barriers to
parent involvement, the school can make alterations and accommodations to its parent volunteer program to better serve the needs of parents, which in turn will then benefit the entire school community, especially the students. In addition, the creation of “Partnerships” among the school and home that was mentioned by Epstein (1995) can be an effective component in strengthening relationships, which will lead to increased parent involvement. It is strongly believed by the researcher that by educating parents on the benefits, identifying, reducing barriers, improving communication and constructing partnerships between the home and school, a stronger school community can be fostered and developed. The researcher plans to host an open house for parents, teachers and administrators to showcase the results of this study, but also to share the list of benefits of parent involvement that have been documented over the years by other researchers. The researcher also believes that by sharing the literature on parent involvement with parents through newsletters, emails, posters, Facebook pages and school websites, it will help educate parents on the importance of being involved which will hopefully then lead to increased rates of parent involvement.


References


Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

Looking for parents to participate in a research study!!!

Perceptions of Parental Involvement at School

An information letter and questionnaire will be going home with your child in the next few weeks!
Perceptions of parental involvement at school

Attention all Queen of Angels parents. In this week’s newsletter, you will find an invitation to participate in a Vancouver Island University research study. This study will examine parents’ perceptions of volunteering and will look at which factors encourage parents to participate in the school versus those that deter or prevent parents from participating. The goal of the study is to gain a better understanding of parents’ perceptions and to make recommendations to the school council on how to change and/or improve the parental volunteer program and foster further parental participation. The questionnaire will take approximately 5-10 minutes of your time to complete. Please read the attached consent letter and fill out the questionnaire in order to voice your opinions. Whether you are already volunteering, thinking of volunteering or unable to volunteer at the school, your information is extremely valuable!

Sincerely,

Thomas Nicholas Zuback
Master’s of Education Student
Vancouver Island University

nzuback@cisv.bc.ca
Appendix C: Parent Involvement Questionnaire

Parent Involvement Questionnaire

Part A: Getting To Know You (Demographics)
The Researcher understands that the following information may be sensitive or considered private. The researcher is asking these questions because it helps to describe the range of families in our total group. Please type an “x” next to the response for each item that best describes you and your family. Please choose one person in your household to complete this questionnaire. You can choose not to respond to any of these items.

Gender of person completing this survey:
___ female  ___ male

What age category do you fall into?
___ Under 25  ___ 25-35  ___ 35-45  ___ 45-55  ___ Above 55

What is your level of education? (Please choose highest level completed):
___ Less than high school  ___ College  ___ Graduate degree
___ High school or Dogwood  ___ Bachelor’s degree  ___ Trade School

What is the first language spoken in your home?
___ English  ___ French  ___ Other: (please specify _________________________)

Your Race/Ethnicity: (please choose all that apply)
___ White/Caucasian  ___ First Nations  ___ Asian  ___ Other
What is your combine family income?

___ Under $25,000
___ $25,000 – $50,000
___ $50,000 – $75,000
___ $75,000 - $100,000
___ $100,000 - $125,000
___ Over $125,000

Please identify the number of children that you have in each division at this school.

___ Junior/Senior Kindergarten
___ Primary (grades 1-3)
___ Intermediate (grades 4-6)
___ Middle School (grades 7-9)

___ How many of your children attended this school in the past?
___ How many years total have you been connected to this school?

What is your role in this school?
(Check all that apply)

___ Parent    ___ School Council    ___ Classroom Teacher
___ Other: ________________ (E.g. foster parent/grandparent/aunt/uncle)

Part B: School/Home Communication Scale

This part of the questionnaire deals with the effectiveness of communication between the school and home and the school.

1) The table below lists some of the ways the school and home communicate. Please rate the effectiveness of these forms of communication in Queen of Angels’ school community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Communication</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Great</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.   School newsletter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.   Meet the teacher/open house</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.   Student agendas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.   Report cards</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.   Parent/teacher interviews</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. School Council meetings  
7. Home and School Association meetings 
8. School webpage 
9. Telephone conversations 
10. School sign 
11. Email 
12. Word of mouth 

Please comment on any other communication tools used in your school community:

2) How often do you…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Communication</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. Contact the school about your child(ren)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Attend parent/teacher interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Attend School Council meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Attend Home and School meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Respond to report card</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Read the school newsletter</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Attend special events (open house, concerts, performances)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Visit the school website</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part C: Parent Volunteer Scale

Many schools rely on parent volunteers to assist with student learning, school events, and in making decisions. The Researcher would like to know about your volunteer experiences within the school.

1. Were you invited to volunteer at school in the last two years?   Yes ____   No ____

2. Did you seek the opportunity to volunteer at the school in the past two years?   Yes ____   No ____
3. From the list of volunteer activities, which ones did you participate in during the past two years?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. Helped with an event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Coached a team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Led a club or activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Organized or acted as a guest speaker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Volunteered on school trip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Served on School Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Helped organize a Home and School event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Participated as a classroom volunteer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Helped to run a fund raising event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Assisted with the breakfast club program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please list any other volunteer activities that you were involved in over the last two years.

**Part D: Barriers to Parent Involvement Scale**

What makes it difficult for you to volunteer at the school? (Please check all that apply. If you feel there are no barriers, check the last box #43):

___ 31. Unaware of the various volunteer opportunities
___ 32. Conflict with my work schedule
___ 33. Childcare responsibilities
___ 34. Feeling unwelcome at the school
___ 35. Feeling shy / nervous about volunteering
___ 36. No interest in volunteering
___ 37. Not interested in the volunteering opportunities offered
___ 38. Language barriers
___ 39. Lack of time
___ 40. Lack of transportation to the school
___ 41. Volunteer screening process (police check)
___ 42. Information about volunteer opportunities not received on time
___ 43. There are no barriers to my involvement at school as a volunteer

Please list any other reasons why it might be difficult for you to volunteer at the school.
Part E: Focus Group Invitation

The researcher would like to invite interested participants to examine the school parental involvement program further by the means of two different focus groups. One focus group will represent the parents that choose to volunteer and the other focus group will represent the parents that pay the exemption fee. The focus groups will be conducted at the school and will take approximately one hour of your time, during a weekday evening. Each focus group will take place on different evenings from each other. The researcher will provide refreshments and snacks for all those that participate in the focus groups. With your permission, all information will be digitally audio recorded throughout the interview and then transcribed by the researcher and coded to protect participants’ names in published results. Unfortunately, the researcher can not guarantee confidentiality as there will be a maximum of 6 participants in each focus group and the researcher has no control on what is said by individual participants outside after the focus group has been conducted. All information conducted from the focus groups will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the researchers home. All recorded information will be destroyed within a two-year period of the conducted focus group. If participants are interested in the results of the study, the researcher will be glad to share them once the study has been completed and Vancouver Island University has accepted the thesis project.

Please indicate if you would be interested in participating in one of the following focus groups. Signing below only indicates that you are interested in participating in one of the focus groups and does not indicate consent to participate. If more than six parents volunteer to take part in the focus groups, the researcher will choose volunteers, which cover a greater range of grades in the school. Those parents that are chosen to participate in the one of the focus groups will receive a consent letter with more information on the focus groups at the start of the focus group sessions.

I ________________________________ would be interested in participating in one of the following focus groups.

_____ Focus Group 1 – Parents that choose to volunteer

_____ Focus Group 2 – Parents that choose to not volunteer/pay the exemption fee

Contact number:________________________________

Please detach this section from the questionnaire and place it in the drop box
marked “Focus Groups” at the front office of the school. Please place your questionnaire in the drop box marked “Questionnaires” at the front office of the school.

Appendix D: Letter of Consent

VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY

PARTICIPANT RESEARCH LETTER OF CONSENT
Perceptions of parental involvement at school

September 2014

Thomas Nicholas Zuback
Master’s of Education Student
Vancouver Island University

Rachel Moll, Ph. D., Supervisor
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University
(250) – 753-3245 (ext: 2161)

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Thomas Nicholas Zuback and I have been teaching Grade 7 for the past ten years at Queen of Angel’s School. I am also a student in a university-level Masters course that requires me to gain applied experience in designing and conducting research. As such, I have designed a research project that focuses on parental involvement at school.

This study will examine parents' perceptions of volunteering at Queen of Angel’s Catholic School. It will look at what factors lead parents to participate in the school versus those that lead parents to choose not to volunteer. The goal of the study is to gain a better understanding of parents’ perceptions and to make recommendations to the school council on how to change and/or improve the parental volunteer program and foster further parental participation.

During the study, you will be asked to complete a 5-part questionnaire. The final part of the questionnaire is an invitation to continue as a participant in the study through a focus group, which will help strengthen the results of the study. The questionnaire will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete and if you choose to continue in the study the focus group will take approximately one hour of your time. The questionnaire part of the study is anonymous.
However, if you choose to participate in one of the two focus groups the researcher cannot guarantee full confidentiality, as other participants will be present during data collection.

All records of your participation will be kept strictly confidential, such that only I, and a school administrator, will have access to the information. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home. Data will be destroyed two years after the end of the project, approximately June 2017. Electronic files will also be deleted at that time. The results from this study will be reported in a written research report. Information that you may provide will not be made public in any way that identifies you as an individual participant.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time for any reason without explanation and without penalty. You may choose not to answer any question for any reason. Although, if you choose to withdraw after the questionnaire has been submitted your results can’t be removed from the data set since they can’t be distinguished from other participants’. Questionnaires can be filled at home and then returned in the provided sealed envelope to the marked drop box at the front office of the school. The return of your completed questionnaire is your consent to participate in this research and for the information you provide to be used in study results.

If you have any concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in the study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer, by telephone at 250-753-3245 (ext. 2665) or by e-mail at reb@viu.ca.

If you have any questions about the research project, or would like more information, please feel free to contact me at the email address below:

Thomas Nicholas Zuback  
Master’s of Education Student  
Vancouver Island University  
nzuback@cisdv.bc.ca
Appendix E: Focus Group Consent Form

PARTICIPANT RESEARCH FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM
Perceptions of parental involvement at school

September 2014

Thomas Nicholas Zuback  Rachel Moll, Ph. D., Supervisor
Master’s of Education Student  Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University  Vancouver Island University
(250) – 753-3245 (ext: 2161)

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Thomas Nicholas Zuback and I have been teaching Grade 7 for the past ten years at Queen of Angel’s School. I am also a student in a university-level Masters course that requires me to gain applied experience in designing and conducting research. As such, I have designed a research project that focuses on parental involvement at school.

The goal of the focus groups is to gain a better understanding of parents’ perceptions regarding parent involvement in the school community. The focus groups will consist of a maximum of six participants. The duration of the focus groups will be approximately 1-1.5 hours. Participants will be asked seven scripted questions pertaining to parental involvement in the school. With your permission the focus group will be digitally audio recorded.

Records of your participation and the data will be kept confidential. However, I cannot guarantee full confidentiality as there will be a maximum of 6 participants in each focus group and I have no control on what is said by individual participants outside after the focus group has been conducted. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and on my password-protected computer at my house. Data will be destroyed two years after the end of the project, approximately June 2017. Electronic files will also be deleted at that time. The results from this study will be
reported in a written research report. Information that you may provide will not be made public in any way that identifies you as an individual participant. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time for any reason without explanation and without penalty. You may choose not to answer any question for any reason.

If you have any concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in the study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer, by telephone at 250-753-3245 (ext. 2665) or by e-mail at reb@viu.ca.

If you have any questions about the research project, or would like more information, please feel free to contact me at the email address below:

Thomas Nicholas Zuback  
Master’s of Education Student  
Vancouver Island University  
nzuback@cisdv.bc.ca

I have read the above form, understand the information read, and understand that I can ask questions or withdraw at any time. I consent to being digitally audio recorded during the focus group session.

_______________________________________  __________________
Participant Signature  Date
Appendix F: Parent Focus Group Protocol

Parent Focus Group Questions

The following questions are designed to guide a parent focus group. The focus group will help examine parents’ perceptions on the importance of volunteering at their child’s school. It will also look at the barriers parents face in volunteering, areas on how the program can improve and generate ideas how the school can increase the number of parents that volunteer. The researcher identified the following areas of questioning as most likely to provide useful information for informing an overall evaluation of parent involvement at a K-9 Independent School.

1. How would you define parental involvement?

2. How has the mandatory volunteer program that was instated in 2012 helped to increase the amount of time you volunteer at the school?

3. Where in the school do you feel parental involvement needs to improve?

4. What are the most difficult barriers to parental involvement that may hinder you from volunteering? What do you believe are the most difficult barriers for other parents from volunteering their time?

5. What recommendations would you make to the volunteer program to increase parental involvement?

6. What do you believe are the overall benefits of parental involvement? How does it affect your child’s education and how does it benefit the school community?