Families and Schools Working Together: A Study of Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of Parental Involvement in Education in Two Fredericton, New Brunswick, Middle Schools

by

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In memory of a great friend,

Dr. Brian Taylor

Abstract

Newspapers, magazines, and governments continually describe and demand increased family participation in the education of their children as a universal remedy for many educational dilemmas. In fact, much research has established a clear link between family involvement in education and student achievement. Despite this recognized value, we seldom hear about the daily problems associated with involving parents in the educational process. The purpose of this study was to explore how parents are currently involved in their children's education and elicit the attitudes and perceptions of both parents and teachers concerning what constitutes parental involvement in education.1219 parents and 68 teachers were surveyed at two middle schools in Fredericton, New Brunswick, about parental involvement in education. Data were gathered using parent and teacher questionnaires adapted from the work of Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University. In addition, focus group interviews were used to confirm and extend the quantitative findings.

The results indicate that parents are generally happy with the ways that both schools involve them in the education of their children. For example, many parents feel welcome at the schools, assert that the teachers care about their children, and involve them appropriately in a variety of roles. As well, teachers overwhelmingly recognize the importance of parental involvement in education. At both schools, 100% of the teacher respondents consider parental involvement important for a good school.

This research also serves as an effective guide for targeting specific areas where intervention is needed to improve parental involvement in their children's education. One key finding suggests that parents are satisfied with the way the schools involve them in decision making. This is important because recent reform initiatives of the New Brunswick Department of Education places increased emphasis on improving parental involvement in education through school governance. However, much research suggests that the most successful parent participation efforts are those which offer parents a variety of different roles.

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Chapter One : Introduction

Involving parents in education is now widely accepted as a method of enhancing the educational process. Research has established a clear link between family involvement in education and student achievement. Despite this recognized value, we seldom hear about the daily realities and problems associated with involving parents in the educational process. The purpose of this study is to explore how parents are currently involved in their children's education at two middle schools in Fredericton, New Brunswick, and elicit the attitudes and perceptions of both parents and teachers concerning what constitutes appropriate parental involvement in education. This research sheds light on the different types of parental involvement that currently exist, and the level of involvement that both parents and teachers perceive to be legitimate.

No discussion of school reform or educational policy issues in New Brunswick today seems complete without references to "parental involvement." The *Education Act*, which came into effect on December 29, 1997 defines the mission of public education in New Brunswick as, "having each pupil develop the attributes needed to be a lifelong learner, to achieve personal fulfilment and to contribute to a productive, just and democratic society; and in order to fulfill this mission, partnerships are required, not only between teachers and pupils, but also among schools, families, and communities." (New Brunswick Education Act, 1997, p.3).

If the thought expressed in this statement is to be brought to fruition there must be avenues opened whereby both parents and teachers can agree upon including families in the educational process. In 1996, as part of a renewed education system for New Brunswick, school boards were abolished and replaced with a three-tier parental governance structure, consisting of School Parent Advisory Committees, District Parent Advisory Councils and Anglophone and Francophone Provincial Boards of Education. While the idea was to increase parental involvement in their children's education, this new structure was criticized by many. According to a discussion paper released by the New Brunswick Department of Education (2000), *The Green Paper* , these criticisms centered around the following areas: decision-making being too far removed from the local level and concentrated in the hands of the minister; an exclusionary election process; an increased administrative burden on school staff; a lack of clarity surrounding roles and responsibilities; and difficulties with communication.

In February 1998, Minister Bernard Richard established the Parental Governance Structure Review Committee to seek ways and means of creating and strengthening productive linkages between education at all levels and its principal stakeholders. The findings, reported by Hansen and Landry (1998), in *Towards Effective Parental Governance in Education*, indicated that there is a need for more effective partnerships between parents of pupils, the Minister of Education, school personnel, pupils, and the community.

After speaking informally with various personnel from the Department of Education, members of the New Brunswick Teachers Association, teachers, parents, and prominent researchers in the field of parental involvement in schools, it has become evident to me that including families in the everyday affairs of educational institutions raises many questions. There is a debate regarding the level to which parents should become involved in the education of their children. Parental involvement is seen as having both advantages and disadvantages in schools. Some believe that parents should assume the conventional role of merely dropping the children off in the morning and picking them up in the afternoon. In this view, parents may interfere and create needless conflicts that disrupt the learning environment. Others believe that parents should be seen as a potential solution in education, rather than part of the problem. After all, parents know their sons or daughters best and can be an invaluable resource in the school. There is also a middle ground. For example, parental involvement in education can be expressed in terms of both schools and families having responsibilities. Both groups can work together for the betterment of all students.

This has led me to believe that we should focus on identifying the ways that parents are currently involved in their children's education to keep better informed on what types of involvement parents want more information on. As well, we should assess the perceptions of both parents and educators before jumping feet first into a "pro-parent involvement" campaign. By doing so, we will be able to determine the views of both parents and teachers about parental involvement and identify areas of disagreement and help in identifying possible solutions that will ensure successful implementation. If the

Department of Education hopes to facilitate more involvement in education by parents, it is imperative that they know more about the current perceptions and practices of both parents and teachers. This information will be helpful in developing future plans and programming efforts.

This study thus seeks to answer two key questions formulated with the intention of enabling us to improve our understanding of parental involvement in education, namely:

1. In what ways are parents currently involved in their children's education? and

2. What are parents and teachers perceptions of parental involvement in education?

Significance of the study:

There are several reasons why such an investigation may be of some value. First, this study sheds light on the different types of parental involvement that currently exist, the level of involvement that parents and teachers perceive to be legitimate, and it identifies differences in perceptions and possible areas of conflict between parents and teachers that may inhibit family engagement in education. This research raises awareness regarding the components of effective parental involvement programs and provides recommendations for schools that wish to improve their current programs. Furthermore, if school authorities are aware of the nature of such attitudes and perceptions, they may be able at least in some instances to effect changes in the way parents are involved. Therefore, the intended audience for this report includes administrators, principals, teachers, and parents who are in the position to influence and improve parent involvement programs.

Second, this is a comprehensive study of New Brunswick classroom teachers' and parents' perceptions of parental involvement in two middle schools. The data collected in this thesis will expand what is already known about parental involvement in education in New Brunswick. This is important because parental involvement in education is mulitfaceted. Currently, the New Brunswick Department of Education is placing increased emphasis on issues surrounding school governance. However, the research on parental involvement in education is overwhelmingly clear: Parents should be given a variety of different roles to play in their children's education.

Definition of Parental Involvement/Family Involvement:

Throughout the literature the terms parental involvement and family involvement are used interchangeably. This is to accommodate the modern diversity of families. Some children may live with one or both parents. For others, however, the parental role may be carried out by relatives, siblings, or other caring adults. Davies (1991) has defined parental involvement from a shifting perspective. As society restructures itself, as communities restructure themselves and as schools restructure, parental involvement also is being transformed. Davies contends that the new definition of parental involvement must go beyond the term *parent*, which is too narrow to describe today's reality. *Family* is a more encompassing term. The most significant adults in the lives of many children may be grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters, or even neighbours who can provide child care. Here, Davies illustrates the changing nature of families. Nontraditional family units are much more common than they were in the early 1900s, but today's alternative family structures are effective and should be recognized.

I believe that children need lots of people to be concerned about their future and to be active in their lives. The use of the word "parent" in this document is not intended to exclude other adults from participation in the education of children. All such references may be interpreted broadly to include the adults who play an important role in a child's family. life.

The term parental involvement can have multiple meanings and take a variety of forms both in and out of school. Teachers may want parental involvement in the form of helping children with homework. Parents may see parental involvement as making major decisions in the school. Moles (cited in Chavkin, 1993, p.22) defines parental involvement to include two components:

Inside school:

Parents may serve as volunteers in the classroom, on student parent advisory committees, or on governing councils. Perhaps most often, parents attend parent-teacher meetings, sports events, concerts, or other student performances. But parents may also come to the school to learn how to become better parents and help their children learn more. In doing so, they may exchange information with teachers about their child's problems and progress. This may be done in person, by note, or over the telephone.

Outside school:

At home, parents may involve themselves in their children's education in various forms. According to Joyce Epstein (1987), the most basic level includes family obligations to assure preparation for school, sufficient sleep, punctual attendance, and attention to homework . However, parents may also transmit their knowledge and skills through modelling appropriate behaviour and giving direct instruction.

Encouraging parent involvement in education has been embraced by every province in Canada and the general trend across the country has been to reduce the number of school boards and enhance school-based governance. At the same time, however, it is imperative to note that in this ever changing environment, the term "parent involvement" encompasses the many different ways that the family can be involved in their children's learning. In the broadest terms, this could range from parents baking cookies to their taking an active role in curriculum decision making and reform efforts at school. In my opinion, any kind of parental involvement in education is important. Whether it be chaperoning a school function or reading and reviewing homework, when parents are involved in their children's education, they are sending a clear message that school is a worthwhile and valuable institution. The next chapter presents a synthesis of some of the research on parental involvement in education.

Chapter Two : Literature Review

Introduction:

In the present study I am interested essentially (1) in investigating the current status of how parents are involved in their children's education and (2) in ascertaining the perceptions of both parents and teachers towards the various types of involvement. A review of literature indicates that there is a considerable amount of evidence which establishes the importance of parental involvement. I have reviewed the literature under four themes which provide a critical look at the existing research of significance to my study. These are:

- The benefits of involving parents in the schools.
- The different types of parental involvement that exist.
- The barriers which exist towards parental involvement.
- The factors that contribute to successful parental involvement.

The Benefits of Parental Involvement:

As mentioned previously, an extensive and diverse literature indicates there is a need and a demand for increased parental involvement in education. One major message from this research suggests simply and clearly that families are important for children's learning and school success. Research also demonstrates that parent involvement in education can be an important contributor to student achievement. Overwhelmingly, research indicates that when parents are involved in their children's education, a variety of benefits are likely for all involved school staff, students, and parents. Figure 1.0 summarizes these benefits.

Figure 1.0 : The benefits of parental involvement in education for students, teachers, and parents

Students	Teachers	Parents
• Achievement (higher grades and test scores)	• Improved Morale and Self-Esteem	• Become more confident about the ways they can help their children learn
• Improved self-esteem	• Teaching Effectiveness improves	• Become more supportive of their children
• Motivation and Positive Attitudes toward school	• Communication and Relationship with students, parents, family, and communities improve	• Attitude toward the school and school personnel improves
• Attendance at school improves		• Learn more about educational programs
• Communication and Relationship with teachers and families improve		• Communication and Relationship with children and teachers improve

As indicated above, a significant body of research demonstrates that when parents are involved in their children's education, the results are numerous. Becher (1986) points out that the involvement of parents in the development and education of their children has become a topic of intense interest to educators, researchers, politicians. and parents. Becher gives recognition to the crucial role parents play in their children's education, and emphasizes the rights and responsibilities of parents to influence educational programs.

Ho and Willms (1996) studied eighth-grade students and their parents using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study to measure aspects of parental involvement in their children's education. Their results indicate that children whose parents regularly discuss their schoolwork and school experiences perform better academically than children who rarely discuss school with their parents. Similarly, Keith, Bickley, Keith, Singh, Trivette and Troutman (1993) examined the influence of parental involvement on the academic learning of eighth-grade students. Using a large, nationally representative sample, both parents' and students' responses were studied under four categories: educational aspirations, parent-child communication, amount of home structure, and participation in school activities. The results suggest that parental involvement in students' academic lives has a powerful influence on students' achievement across all academic areas. As well, Reynolds' (1993) study of children to better understand the factors that influence a wide range of early school outcomes indicates that parental involvement in the school was a strong predictor of student achievement. Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, and Dornbusch (1990), further suggest

that there is a relationship between parental involvement and high school dropout rates. Their findings indicate that students who dropped out of school reported that their parents rarely attended school events or helped them with homework. These parents were more likely to respond to poor grades with punishment, and students rarely consulted their parents when making educational decisions.

Research also suggests that teachers, when involved with parent involvement efforts, experience benefits. Benyon (1968), contends that teachers, when associated with parents, become more proficient in their instructional and professional activities, become more involved with the curriculum, and tend to experiment more. Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987) support this notion by suggesting that teachers report more positive feelings about teaching and about their school when there is more parental involvement. As well, Epstein (1985), claims that parents and principals rate teachers higher in overall teaching ability and interpersonal skills if the teachers frequently involve parents.

Another goal of school and family partnerships is to increase the number of families actively involved in their children's education. Research indicates that parental involvement in education has numerous benefits for parents. Epstein (1986) reports that when teachers were committed to increasing parental involvement, the parents felt that they should help their children at home, understood more about what their child was being taught in school, were more positive about the teacher's interpersonal skills, and rated the teacher higher in overall teaching ability. In a separate study, Epstein (1995) also determined that when parents are involved with the school, they understand more of

the instructional program that their children are learning in each subject, and that their interactions with teachers improved.

Although the findings of the research are generally positive regarding parental involvement, not all research points clearly to the direct relationship which exists between parental involvement and student achievement. In fact, a careful reading of some research evidence is less definitive about the benefits of parental involvement. Some researchers claim that they have found little or no effect of parental involvement on student achievement. Ho and Willms (1996) contend that parental involvement associated with participation as volunteers or attendance at parent-teacher organization (PTO) meetings had only a modest effect on students' reading achievement and a negligible effect on students' mathematic achievement.

In another study, Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) identify three ways parents can manifest involvement in their children's schooling; through their behaviour with regard to the school (by going to school and participating in activities such as open houses), through the child's perception of their affective and personal availability (experiences which convey a positive feeling showing that parents enjoy interactions with them around school), and by exposing the child to cognitive and intellectual activities (books and materials that bring home and school closer together and help children practice skills useful for school). The findings suggest that there are indirect associations between parent involvement and student motivation. Children's attitudes and beliefs about themselves, rather than parental involvement, were seen as powerful determinants of school success. Natriello and McDill (1986) used a sample of 12,146

students from 20 American public high schools to estimate the effects of teachers', parents', and peers' standards on student effort and achievement. The study examined the determinants of student effort on homework, and, in turn, the contribution of this effort to achievement. The results indicate that teachers', parents', and peers', standards all have a positive and significant effects on the time students spend doing homework. However, in relation to student achievement, teachers' and peers' standards have small positive effects, and parents' standards have larger negative effects. According to the authors, this suggests that parental rules for homework do not necessarily result in higher achievement. A similar study by Keith, Reimers, Fehrmann, Pottebaum, and Aubey (1986) was conducted to determine the effects of parental involvement, homework, and TV time on academic achievement. Data from a large, contemporary sample of high school seniors were analysed, and the results suggest that time spent doing homework and time spent watching TV had important effects on student achievement. For example, TV viewing had a small, negative effect on student viewing indicating that the more TV students watched, the worse their academic achievement. Homework, on the other hand, had a positive effect on student achievement. Parental involvement, however, had no meaningful direct effect on student achievement.

Despite this anomaly in the research, parental involvement in education is acknowledged by most researchers as being an important positive determinant in the achievement of students. Although the value of specific types of involvement are not yet clear, the next section will highlight the consistency of evidence that supports a variety of parental activities in the school.

Types of parental involvement:

As indicated by the preceding review, a substantial body of research exists about the benefits of parental involvement. This research provides excellent support for the different types of parental involvement which exist and a sound basis for the selection and implementation of different programs. What emerges from the literature is that successful parental involvement programs have clear task expectations as well as articulated roles and responsibilities, all of which are communicated to parents.

In the past, parent involvement in education meant baking cookies and organizing fundraising activities. Now, parental involvement has expanded to include home-based activities (such as helping with homework, encouraging children to read, and promoting school attendance) and school-based activities (such as attending PTA meetings, helping in the classroom, parent-teacher conferences, concerts, participating in other school events, assisting with new forms of school governance, and helping to raise money for various school projects).

Several models of classification of parental involvement have been developed. Epstein (1995) expands upon the traditional types of involvement by categorizing six important types of cooperation between families, schools, and other community organizations. These include : parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Hester (1989) believes that there is no blueprint for parental involvement that can be commonly applied in every school setting. However, school administrators can involve parents in a variety of ways. He cites several categories that can be included in an effort to increase parental

involvement in their children's education. These include: good home-school communication, developing tests that parents can administer to students at home to check their progress, continuing the traditional activities that involve all parents such as open houses and back-to-school night, organizing field trips with parents and students together, and encouraging parents to participate in leadership roles on school-related political issues that include lobbying in person, organizing letter-writing campaigns, or speaking at various forums. In addition, Moore (1991) has identified three approaches to parental involvement in their children's education. These are: parents as policymakers, parents as volunteers, and parents as facilitators of children's development. The literature – summarized in Figure 1.1 – delineates these different types of parental involvement.

Figure 1.1: The Types of Parental Involvement (Continued on next page)

Epstein (1995)

Type 1 **Parenting**

Families must provide for the health and safety of children, and maintain a home environment that encourages learning and good behaviour in school. Schools assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level.

Type 2 **Communicating**

Schools must reach out to families with information about school programs and student progress. This includes the traditional phone calls, report cards, and parent conferences, as well as new information on topics such as school choice and making the transition from elementary school to higher grades. Communication must be in forms that families find understandable and useful for example, schools may use language translators to assist families as needed and communication must be two-way, with educators paying attention to the concerns and needs of families.

Type 3 **Volunteering**

Parents can make significant contributions to the environment and functions of a school. Schools can get the most out of this process by creating flexible schedules, assemblies, and events so more parents can participate. Schools can also organize volunteer work, provide training, and match the talents and interests of parents to the needs of students and teachers.

Type 4 **Learning at Home**

With the support of teachers, family members can supervise and assist their children at home with homework assignments and other school-related activities.

Type 5 **Decision Making**

Schools can include families as participants in school decisions, governance and advocacy through SPACs and DPACs, school councils, committees and other parent organizations. Training and information should be provided to the parents so they can make the most of those opportunities. This opportunity should be open to all segments of the community, not just people who have the most time and energy to spend on school affairs.

Type 6 **Collaborating with the Community**

Schools can provide families with information on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services offered by other agencies. They can also help families and community groups provide services to the community, such as recycling, art, music, drama and other activities for seniors, etc.

Hester (1989)

Parents as Teachers

Parents are truly the first teachers of their children. Hester suggests that teachers can develop tests that parents can administer to their children at home to check their progress. Teachers can also provide suggestions to parents on techniques to create a good study environment at home.

Parents as Supporters of Activities

Parent participation in activities can enhance communication. By providing opportunities for parents and other members of the community to participate in the education of children, we will create a sense of mutuality and foster positive growth in students.

Parents as Learners

To help parents reach their potential of becoming effective communicators, teachers, and advocates, there is a great deal that parents must learn. One way to accomplish this is to provide workshops for parents on how to help their children with homework, college admission, teenage suicide, dropout prevention, etc.

Parents as Advocates

Hester believes that one outcome of an effective parent involvement plan is the emergence of a group of parents who are educational advocates. When parents are advocates, they are working at the local, state and national levels to impact legislation and policies that directly impact children.

Moore (1991)

Parents as Policymakers

This approach involves the empowerment of parents as decision makers in the structure and implementation of school policies.

Parents as Volunteers

This approach emphasizes the use of parents as "people power" for accomplishing program objectives. Here, parents are seen as assisting teachers as classroom helpers, field trip chaperones, project fund-raisers, and other activities.

Parents as Facilitators of Children's Development

This approach emphasizes developing parents' capabilities to contribute to the educational success of their children. Parents are counselled on how to enrich their children's lives- through education in effective parenting, appropriate outside enrichment activities, and utilizing community health and social service agencies.

Indeed, common threads of parental involvement have been articulated in different ways by various researchers. For example, Epstein, Hester, and Moore believe that parents should be involved in school decision making, volunteering, and helping their children at home with homework. They also suggest that parental involvement works better when parents are given a *variety* of roles to play. This demonstrates that there is no one "perfect" parental involvement program. However, wider opportunities will exist to support student learning both at home and at the school if parents assume various roles, which include: making school decisions, helping children acquire new skills at home that motivate them to perform better in school, and in supporting school activities by volunteering. Weisz (1990) has outlined some suggestions for volunteer activities for parents, which include the following:

- telephone other parents and begin a parent network.
- serve as a resource person, sharing a special collection, occupation, skill, etc.
- help with tutoring and remedial work.
- work with small groups or individual students in a particular class.
- explain school programs and needs to the larger community.
- locate, investigate field trip possibilities and attend one.
- assist with extracurricular activities.
- raise money and support for school projects.
- help make arrangements for open houses or meetings.

From this literature, a number of strategies emerge as effective ways to promote strong parental partnerships in the schools. The degree to which these strategies are related to the needs and interests of parents and to the unique situations of schools and teachers influences the level of success. The research on the different types of parental involvement indicates that parents and teachers can create viable partnerships; however, given that each school is different, particular barriers, may need to be overcome.

Barriers to parental involvement:

Research to determine some of the specific factors that impede the initiation and establishment of parental involvement in the school have indicated a number of important concerns. Throughout the literature, various themes emerge which indicate that numerous barriers to effective parental involvement exist. Figure 1.2 outlines some of these barriers:

Figure 1.2 : Barriers impeding parental involvement in education

- the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of principals and teachers on what constitutes parental involvement
- insufficient training for teachers on how to reach out to parents
- a less than welcoming atmosphere toward parents in schools
- socioeconomic status and education of the parents
- language and cultural barriers
- time pressures

According to Moore (1991), any number of barriers to effective parental involvement can be identified easily by educators as well as parents. Such general barriers may include distance between teachers and parents, lack of teacher training, race and class barriers, limited views of parental involvement, and the public's perception of the school. However, research also indicates that barriers can originate from the capability and overall disposition of principals and teachers to assure and facilitate parental involvement.

Williams and Chavkin (1986) assert that the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of principals may be a potential barrier to parental involvement. They contend that many principals favor increased parental involvement only in traditional ways such as attending class plays or holding bake sales. Foster (1984) extends this notion that the principal's attitude is a major barrier to parental involvement. In her study, for example, she describes the role of parents as partners in school governance and claims that many factors determine how effective a school council will be. However, in her opinion, the most critical factor is the principal's attitude towards the group. She also demonstrates that the attitude of most principals, more often than not, is negative. In her words, "principals with school councils would like nothing better than to send the parents home and keep the decision-making among professionals. They find it enough to deal with disgruntled and angry parents every day without having them become a formal presence in school affairs"(p.27). Davies (1991) similarly contends that in any school, leadership is essential to help create partnerships with parents. This leadership to reach out to the community has to come from the principal, with the involvement of at least some of the

teaching staff.

According to the literature on parental involvement , the attitudes of teachers play an important role in promoting parental participation in their children's education. Becher (1986) claims that teachers may have various grounds for opposition toward parental involvement in education. These include: feeling uncertain about how to involve parents and still maintain their role as specialized experts; uncertainty about how to balance concern for the group of children against a more personalized concern for each individual child, which they believe would be expected if parents were involved; the belief that planning for parental involvement activities takes too much time; the concern that parents will try to take over teaching responsibilities and that they won't follow the teacher's instructions and school regulations; the concern that parents will cause confusion and disrupt the classroom because they don't know how to work productively with children; the belief that parents may use nonstandard English or demonstrate other characteristics teachers do not want introduced into the classroom; and the contention that parents would not keep their commitments, would discuss confidential information with their friends, and would be too critical and therefore make teachers feel uncomfortable.

Mager (1980) studied the conditions which influence teachers in initiating contact with parents. Among the conditions influencing parent-teacher relationships, he found that teachers of upper middle class backgrounds reported a higher frequency of contacts with parents than did teachers of middle or lower middle class backgrounds. Teachers with high contact saw themselves as more responsible for initiating contact with parents and reported greater comfort in meeting the expectations of parents.

Barriers to parental involvement in education can also be constructed by families. According to Baker and Stevenson (1986), mothers with more education are likely to have more knowledge of their child's schooling, are more likely to have met with their child's teachers, and are more likely to have attended parent-teacher conferences and school events. The findings of this study indicate that there is an association between a family's socioeconomic status and mother's academic strategies, which indicates one way in which family background translates into educational achievement. In another study (Stevenson and Baker 1987), the authors used a nationally representative sample of American households to examine whether the education of the mother relates to the degree of parental involvement in school activities. Based on a sample of 179 children, parents, and teachers, the results demonstrate that the educational status of the mother was relevant to the degree of parental involvement in schooling. Thus, parents with more education are more involved in their children's schooling.

A similar study by Lareau (1987) relied on participant-observation of two first-grade classrooms located in two different communities and in-depth interviews of parents, teachers, and principals to determine whether social class affected parental involvement in schools. She found that parental involvement varied between locations. The amount of parental involvement was much higher at the upper-middle class school than at the working-class school. Moreover, social class also provided parents with unequal resources to comply with the teachers' requests for parental participation. For example, when asked to read to their children and to help them at home with their school

work, parents from the working-class school were reluctant to comply because they felt that their educational skills were inadequate for these tasks. Aronson (1996) furthers this notion by claiming that a growing number of parents do not speak or read English well enough to communicate with teachers and administrators. Because of cultural differences, many parents are not familiar with the expectations of their children's schools and don't understand how to go about getting involved, even if they want to. Some parents lack the educational background or skills they feel they need to interact with teachers and staff. For others, their own negative experiences as students make them uncomfortable going to school. To make matters worse, many schools that claim to welcome parent participation do not provide a hospitable climate for parents.

Some research on parental involvement suggests that a less than welcoming atmosphere toward parents in the schools may serve as a barrier. Lindle (1989), in examining the relationships between schools and families, suggests that parents' dissatisfaction with school people who are too businesslike, patronizing, or who talk down to parents, prevents family engagement in education. Instead, parents reported a personal touch as the most enhancing factor in school relations. For example, parents spoke favorably of school personnel who gave them personal attention, which involved providing timely information with regard to student progress on an informal basis. Parents do not want a professional-client relationship with the schools in the education of their children. According to Davies (1991), schools can create a parent center to offer a place where they could drop in for coffee, a chat, or get information on school programs and activities. He claims that parents reported feeling more positive about the

school and about being involved in their children's education because they had a welcoming "place of their own" in the school.

Cultural barriers may also exist which prevent parents from being involved in their children's education. Chavkin (1989) asserts that, regardless of ethnicity, many minority parents believe their children will benefit from their involvement with their children's schools. However, minority parents may feel intimidated and awkward when approaching school staff. For example, in some schools, some Asian immigrants' great respect for, and confidence in, teachers often becomes a barrier to communication. Some Asian parents feel that communication with teachers is disrespectful because it gives them the impression that the parents are checking up on them. Tran (1982) interviewed English-speaking Indochinese parents in San Diego, California and identified several reasons why they tend to avoid participation in school activities and in the decision-making process of their children's education. The following factors contribute to this situation: the democratic process of sharing in decision making is contrary to parents' cultural expectations; they believe that schools have the expertise and the right to make decisions and it is not necessary for the parents to share the responsibility; the parents do not understand that their children have problems caused by language barriers and cultural differences; most parents do not understand their legal rights with regard to their children's education; parents do not understand the American educational system and simply do not realize "what is really going on" with their children's education; parents do not have the experience to take an active role in parent advisory councils; and parents lack time and means of transportation.

Indeed, lack of time has been addressed by the literature as being a significant barrier to parental involvement in education. Collins, Cooper, and Whitmore (1995) contend that lack of time on behalf of parents, teachers, and principals was an obstacle which reduced the likelihood of parental involvement. For example, some parents claim that work, family commitments and participation as volunteers in other community groups inhibited them from being involved in schools while others state that they would find the time if they felt that their contributions were valued. Teachers assert that preparing for parental involvement requires extra time and materials, especially for those that are not convinced of the benefits of parental involvement. Furthermore, principals believe that practising an "open office door" policy requires time which can be difficult to find.

The literature clearly indicates that much needs to be done to understand and tap into an important and under-utilized source of strength - parents. It points to the need for administrators, educators, and parents to look at the challenges that lie ahead and to locate key ingredients to help facilitate and encourage parental involvement in schools. It also indicates that major barriers to parental and community involvement currently exist. The challenge is to find ways for parents and schools to work together in a way that is not only mutually beneficial, but also improves the lives of children.

The factors which contribute to successful parental involvement:

Throughout the research on parental involvement, common themes emerge which provide suggestions that schools can use to increase communication and involvement. Figure 1.3 outlines some ideas that schools can use in an attempt to increase parental involvement in their children's education.

Figure 1.3 : What schools can do to increase parental involvement in their children's education:

- Schools can give parents a voice in decisions. Parents should be involved in school governance issues and in making decisions regarding their children's schooling.
- Schools can train school staff. Good schools value parental involvement and reach out to parents. Too often the school contacts parents only when there is a problem. In developing partnerships, training will be necessary for principals, teachers, and parents to help everyone acquire the skills needed.
- Schools can create parent resource centers. Set aside an area in the school that invites parents to share their parenting experiences with other parents and to work with teachers.
- Schools can provide flexible schedules to allow students and families to engage in recreational and learning activities.
- Schools can design homework that engages parents in the process. For example, assignments such as constructing family trees, recounting the family history, and describing their daily work involves parents in the learning process.
- Schools can establish a home/school coordinator to visit parents at home, develop programs, and act as a liaison between teachers and families.

Several studies have examined various factors which tend to be associated with positive parental involvement in their children's education. Goodson, Swartz, and Millsap (1991) argue that successful parental involvement programs focus on empowering parents. This means that they address those factors that alienate parents from schools, such as low levels of literacy. Other characteristics include: provision of multiple levels of parent participation – any contact is seen as positive; different modes of contact that respond to different parent skills, e.g., home visits are good for those who lack experience in working in groups; helping parents move from one type of involvement to another, e.g., from home visits to school settings; sensitivity to the literacy of parents; flexibility in scheduling and location; and use of ways to create closer bonds with families, such as support groups.

Jackson and Cooper (1992) identify ten factors that seem to be central to successful urban programs based on their analysis of New York City high school projects. These include the following: **leadership:** visible and active involvement of the principals with explicit support of the district administration; **accessibility:** open lines of communication between parents and schools with immediate access to the principal and staff members who are friendly and helpful; **time:** sufficient time to plan, recruit, and follow up with parents; **cultural awareness:** identify staff members with parents and provide them with an understanding of the culture of the parents and community so trust can develop; **active teacher roles:** involve the teachers so they can see parents in a different light, and vice versa; **continuity:** continuous and regular attendance in group meetings so a sense of community and ownership is built; **public recognition:**

recognition of parents and other participants in a visible way which is essential to build confidence; **broad-based support:** involvement of outside community groups to assist and help "sell" the school to the larger community; **adolescent focus:** all participants' attention should be focussed to the growth and development of adolescents; and **recognition of parents as people:** recognition of the needs and interests of parents as people preceding information about and involvement in school programs.

Similarly, Williams and Chavkin (1989) identify and describe the characteristics of promising parent involvement programs in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. They describe seven essential elements of strong parental involvement programs. These include: written policies which legitimized the importance of parental involvement and helped both staff and parents better understand how parents would take part in the program; administrative support which was provided in the way of funds for implementation programs, material/product resources, and extra people were designed to carry out program efforts. For example, administrative staff were allowed to serve as school volunteers one day per month in New Mexico, and training was made available for staff as well as parents. Many schools sponsored workshops that both parents and educators attended to improve their skills for working together as well as working with children; partnership approaches were reflected in such activities as joint planning, goal setting, and setting school standards which enabled both staff and parents to develop a sense of ownership and pride in the efforts of the school; two-way communication between home and school occurred frequently and on a regular basis. This allowed parents to feel comfortable to come to the school to share ideas and voice

concerns; promising programs networked with other programs to share information, resources, and technical expertise; and evaluation was also used regularly to enable parents and staff to make program revisions on a continuous basis to ensure that activities were strengthening the partnership.

The research presented above provides ample information about how to increase levels of parental involvement in their children's education. These lists of simple strategies suggest that a common-sense approach to getting parents involved often works best. Common key points from these lists include a cultural awareness and recognition of parents as people; the nature of communication and the climate of the building, particularly with regard to how parents are treated in the building; recognizing parent efforts, making parents feel welcome in the schools; communicating effectively with parents; and conducting special events to involve parents. Some literature offers additional advice on the components which characterize strong parental involvement programs.

Dauber and Epstein (1993) believe that one key to involving all parents is creating an atmosphere in which teachers, administrators, and families all are seen as valuing parental involvement. They contend that school attitudes and practices regarding parental involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools directly influence how much parents will support their children's learning at home. In this study, the researchers found that parents who feel that the school is actively trying to involve them have a more positive attitude about the school, and they give higher ratings to teachers who try to involve them. Indeed, collaborative efforts between parents and their

children's teachers is the hallmark of success. In another study, Epstein, Jackson, & Salinas (1992) developed a program that makes homework interactive with parents. The program has developed 160 prototype interactive homework assignments linked to the curriculum for Baltimore inner-city middle school teachers. Parents help children with such assignments as oral family histories, science experiments in the kitchen, or reports on health topics. Epstein (1992) reports that in Indianapolis, families interact with schools via a local cable channel that broadcasts a homework hotline where children and families can get visual answers to questions about homework assignments. To counteract low attendance at school meetings, some schools use tape recordings, videocassettes, or answering machines in schools or classrooms which can send and receive timely messages. Others even organize volunteer work for parents to do at home or on weekends.

From the literature, educators and researchers are discovering additional ways that parents can be involved in their children's education. Davies (1991) suggests three ways that schools can promote parent involvement and closer working partnerships between educators and families. These include the following: **creation of a parent center:** The parent center is a special room for parents at the school. It is staffed by paid coordinators as well as unpaid volunteers. It offers parents a welcoming atmosphere, conversation, and school information. Various activities can be offered through the center, such as recruitment of parent volunteers, clothing exchange, grade-level breakfasts, and English as a Second Language (ESL) and General Education Development (GED) classes for all parents. The room can also be equipped with various

materials to help parents such as adult-sized table and chairs, a telephone, coffee pot, hot plate, and occasional snacks; **a home visitor program:** The home visitor program consists of paid staff who visit homes to help families understand what they can do to encourage their children's success in school. The home visitors can provide information about reading programs, school activities, curriculum expectations, child rearing, and summer camps. They also serve as liaisons to convey parent concerns back to the school; **action research teams:** These teams consist of teachers who study ways to improve their own methods of involving parents. They meet at least monthly to do background reading in parent involvement, receive training, interview other faculty about attitudes toward parent involvement, discuss the success of past efforts to involve parents, and design projects to increase teacher-parent collaboration.

From the literature, educators and researchers are discovering many ways that parents can get involved in their children's education. However, I believe that many of these types of initiatives are dependent upon the school's desire to involve parents. To effect change, parents must find time to participate in their children's education while schools must provide the supports necessary for them to be involved. For example, some parents are ready and willing to volunteer their time for the schools. Other parents are reluctant or unable to participate. Although getting parents involved in their children's education is a great challenge for educators, research shows that eductors can do a great deal to promote greater parental involvement. The Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning (1994) indicates that parents who receive frequent and positive messages from teachers tend to become more involved in

their children's education than do other parents. Relying on a national sample of 2, 317 inner-elementary and middle school students, the researchers found that the best predictor of parental involvement was what the school did to promote it. School attitudes were more important than parents' income, educational level, race, or previous school volunteer experience in determining whether the parent would be involved in the school.

This review of the literature yields considerable information regarding the need for sustained commitment and effort to make parental involvement in the schools successful. The research indicates that it is important for schools to offer different forms of parental involvement as no one type of involvement is necessarily "right" for every family. Overcoming obstacles to home-school collaboration will require the efforts of administrators, educators, and families, for the impediments lie within the interactions of all parties. This review has identified the benefits of parental involvement in the schools, the types of involvement that currently exist, barriers that prevent involvement, and factors that contribute to successful parent-teacher involvement. My goal was to investigate how parents are currently involved in their children's schools in Fredericton and to ascertain the perceptions of both parents and teachers regarding this type of involvement.

Chapter 3 : Research Methods

Since my study is exploratory in nature and investigates the experiences and perceptions of participants, I used both questionnaires and focus-group interviews to obtain a richer and more accurate interpretation of the data. Some research suggests that combining both quantitative and qualitative methods helps to provide more valid, accurate answers to research questions. For example, Hahn (1998) conducted a study to examine civic education in England, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States. Her data collection techniques involved using questionnaires, observations, and interviews. The questionnaires and observations allowed Hahn to measure current political attitudes and get a sense of the context in which adolescent students develop political views in secondary schools. However, the interviews with teachers and students permitted a richer, and fuller insight into adolescent political attitudes and beliefs and into the process of citizenship education in each country.

Questionnaires

In an effort to understand better what parents and teachers think of the current practices of school, family, and community partnerships, I administered both teacher and parent questionnaires to a study population of two middle schools in the Fredericton area. McMillan and Schumacher (1997) suggest that the questionnaire is the most widely used technique for obtaining information. It is relatively economical, has the same questions for all subjects, can ensure anonymity, and contains questions written for specific purposes. Both questionnaires used in my study were developed and administered by researchers Joyce L. Epstein, Lori J. Connors, and Karen Clark Salinas

at Johns Hopkins University, in collaboration with Maryland teachers and administrators. The teacher questionnaires (Appendix 1) ask teachers to provide professional judgement about current parental involvement practices being employed in the school, what they are currently doing to involve parents in the educational process, and what programs they would like to see developed. Parent questionnaires (Appendix 2) ask parents to describe how they feel about the school, how they are currently participating, how well the school keeps them informed, and what practices they would like to see initiated.

Both questionnaires have been used in several studies in the United States including: Epstein (1986), Epstein and Dauber (1991), and Epstein and Dauber (1993). This research indicates that it is important to obtain information from both parents and teachers to clarify and extend different practices of parental involvement. In my research, questionnaires were administered to the entire parent and teacher population at Albert Street Middle School and George Street Middle School. These schools are located on Fredericton's south side and serve a relatively homogeneous student population. At Albert, 505 parents and 29 teachers obtained surveys, while 714 parents and 39 teachers received them at George.

To interpret the "raw" data obtained from the surveys, I followed a guideline established by the researchers at Johns Hopkins University that uses basic descriptive statistics for analysing and summarizing data gathered for each question asked of parents and teachers. In addition to this, I carried out a basic descriptive analysis of the data using the computer program SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). According to George and Mallery (1999), SPSS is a powerful tool that is capable of

conducting just about any type of data analysis used in the social sciences. In my opinion, SPSS was instrumental in making the fundamentals of the parent and teacher data analysis clear. For example, it produced a multitude of tabulated reports, charts, and descriptive statistical summaries. This provided me with a comprehensive system for analyzing data from the parent and teacher questionnaires.

Focus Groups

Since conversation is one of the basic modes of human interaction, I chose the focus group method to verify and extend the information obtained from the survey. While the quantitative data provides an interesting insight into the different ways that parents are involved in their children's education, it does not provide us with an understanding of why parents are involved in some ways more than others. The qualitative data enriched the quantitative findings by opening windows to illustrate the reasons behind the responses given. McMillan & Schumacher (1997) assert that focus groups provide a strategy for obtaining a better understanding of the problem by creating a social environment in which group members can build on the perceptions and ideas of each other, which can increase the quality and richness of data more than one-on-one interviewing. Anderson (1998) believes that a focus group has several distinct advantages over other data collection techniques such as the questionnaire or the interview. He contends that questionnaires only allow input from the individual respondent. There is no opportunity for the respondent to clarify questions or expand his/her own perceptions by sharing and comparing them to those of others. Interviews allow some opportunity for clarification and additional input; however, the focus group goes one step further by using a group setting to obtain a deeper, more insightful, discussion.

In my research, I included a section at the end of both parent and teacher questionnaires inviting participants to join a group discussion on the topic of "parental involvement in education." From the list of volunteer participants, I randomly selected names from each school and conducted a focus group. I asked respondents to share their perceptions freely about the following questions:

- Findings from the parent questionnaire suggest that parents are satisfied with the information they are currently receiving from the school to help their children with various subjects. Can you comment on this?
- Many parents claim that they are happy with the way the school communicates with them. How does the school communicate with you? Do you find some types of communication more effective?
- Many parents believe that the school could do a better job in contacting them when their child does something or improves. Have you ever been contacted when your child does something or improves? Can you comment on this?
- Can you tell me anything about the relationship you have with your child's teacher?
- Many parents claim that they are currently happy with the ways that the school involves them. Can you tell me more about this?
- Many parents assert that they have never volunteered at school or in their child's classroom. Are there any specific barriers that prevent you from becoming involved at school? Can you comment on this?
- Many parents claim that they would like more information from the school on community services they may want to use. Can you comment on this?

The focus group session was tape-recorded and data analysis followed the procedure outlined by Anderson (1998, pp. 207). This involves the following steps:

- Type up significant commentary from rough notes, record speaker's name if possible, and note the seating arrangement of participants.
- Content analysis: cut and paste comments into themes.
- Edit the themes to eliminate redundancy, to ensure comments are not one person's perspective only, and to create a balanced, accurate reflection of what was actually said in the group.
- Write a summary statement for each theme.
- Select and edit actual quotations to illustrate each theme. Avoid extreme views, select statements that are typical, correct grammar and language usage where required and ensure that participant's identities are concealed.

Chapter Four : Research Findings and Discussion

This section contains a synthesis of the information obtained from parents by means of the parent questionnaire, comments and suggestions presented in writing at the end of the parent questionnaire, and data obtained from parents by means of a focus group interview. Data were collected from both Albert Street Middle School and George Street Middle School in November, 1999. Appendix 2 contains a copy of the parent questionnaire. Data were analysed according to a model proposed by Joyce Epstein. Dr. Epstein, who currently works at Johns Hopkins University in the United States is considered to be one of the foremost researchers on family involvement in education. She identifies six distinct types of involvement which offer a framework in which to begin thinking more broadly, yet concretely, about school and family partnerships. These include: parenting, volunteering, learning at home, communicating, decision-making, and collaboration with the community.

This section also integrates data obtained from teachers by means of the teacher questionnaire, and their written comments and suggestions. Appendix 1 contains a copy of the teacher questionnaire.

Description of Albert and George Street Middle Schools

Albert Street Middle School and George Street Middle School are located in a predominantly White, urban area on Fredericton's South Side and serve a relatively homogeneous student population. According to data obtained from the teacher questionnaire, over 95 % of the students at both schools are White with about one third of the total student population being bussed in from surrounding areas. Approximately 40% of the students at both schools are enrolled in French Immersion and families

comprise varied backgrounds of educational and economic levels. Albert Street Middle School serves about 537 students in grades six through eight with 29 teachers. George Street Middle School is slightly larger and serves about 704 students in grades six through eight with 36 teachers. Both schools have a long-standing history in the Fredericton area as Albert Street Middle School was established in 1952 and George Street Middle School, originally the city's first high school, was built in 1924.

Characteristics of the Parent Study Population

At both Albert Street Middle School and George Street Middle School, the responses of parents brought to light how they are currently involved in their children's education. Over fifty percent of the parents in each school returned questionnaires (N = 1219). According to Epstein (1993), a response rate of over fifty percent for the parent questionnaires is very respectable and should provide useful information for understanding present programs and for planning policies. McMillan and Schumacher (1997) agree with this view and claim that a response rate of from forty to sixty percent should be expected from the initial distribution of a questionnaire. As well, it is interesting to note that 85% of the total parent respondents at both Albert and George Street Middle Schools were children's mothers. Other family members such as fathers, stepmothers, stepfathers, grandmothers, and guardians comprised much smaller percentages in regard to completion of the questionnaire. Figure 1.4 displays the characteristics of the parent population at both middle schools.

Figure 1.4 : Characteristics of the Parents (N = 1219)

Albert Street Middle School		George Street Middle School	
N = 505	50.8 %	N = 714	51.2 %
Did not complete highschool	5.6 %	Did not complete highschool	3.9 %
Completed highschool	13.2 %	Completed highschool	14.9 %
Some college or training	32.4 %	Some college or training	23.4 %
College degree	48.8 %	College degree	57.7 %
Employed full-time	64.0 %	Employed full-time	66.5 %
Employed part-time	20.0 %	Employed part-time	19.0 %
Not employed now	16.0 %	Not employed now	14.5 %

As can be seen in Figure 1.4, this study included a range of parents from different professional and educational backgrounds. Certainly, it is possible that the fifty percent of the school parent population that did not respond to the questionnaire may include parents that are the least involved in their children's education, parents that simply did not wish to respond to the questionnaire, parents that lack the educational skills to answer the questions, or children that did not bring the questionnaire home or return it to school. However, according to the principals at both schools, the characteristics of the parent population in this study are representative of the overall population. For example, attendance boundaries extend beyond the close proximity of the schools to include a broad range of socioeconomic levels. Many parents hold professional positions within the city; on the other end of the spectrum are unemployed parents. Educational levels of parents range from those who have not completed high school to those who hold a Ph.D. and advanced professional degrees.

According to a census of the Fredericton area conducted by Statistics Canada in 1996, 76.9% of the population twenty-five years of age and over have completed high school, while 30.3% have completed university. When comparing these statistics to the educational profiles of parents that returned the questionnaires, it is important to note that the education level of parent respondents are significantly above those of the general population. For example, 5.6% of the parents at Albert and 3.9% of those at George claim that they did not complete high school, while 23.1% of the general population do not have a high school diploma. As well, Statistics Canada figures show that roughly 30% of the population has a university education, while 48.8% of the parents at Albert and 57.7% of those at George reported they have a college degree, a significantly higher percentage.

One of the most striking aspects of my research findings is that a comparison of the results between both schools display remarkable similarities. For example, parents are generally in agreement on a wide range of issues that include: feelings about the school right now, the ways that they are involved in their children's education at school or at home, and the different methods used by the school to contact families. This is relevant because it adds to the reliability of the study.

A comparison of the percentages and mean score data for many questions on the parent questionnaire demonstrate considerable congruence between schools. For example, when parents at Albert and George were asked to comment on how they feel about the schools, the results from both sets of respondents were almost identical. Overwhelmingly, parents from both schools were in agreement on their perceptions of

teachers, school-parent organizations, homework issues, and the different types of involvement that currently exist. Even the response rates at both schools were quite similar with approximately fifty percent of the parent population returning questionnaires. Figure 1.5 outlines the areas that parent respondents at both schools are quite satisfied with and areas where improvements are needed. A discussion of these various components will be ongoing throughout the report.

Figure 1.5 : Areas that parents at both Albert Street School and George Street School claim they are very satisfied with and those that need improvement

Very Satisfied

- This is a very good school
- The teachers care about my child
- I feel welcome at the school
- The school has an active parent organization
- My child gets an adequate amount of homework
- The school and I have similar goals for my child
- My child is learning as much as he/she can at this school
- This school views parents as important partners
- The community supports the school
- This school is one of the best schools for students and for parents
- Tells me how my child is doing in school
- Have a parent-teacher conference with me
- Send home news about things happening at school
- Give me information about how report card grades are earned
- Send home notices that I can read easily
- Contact me if my child is having problems
- Invite me to programs at school
- Invite me to parent meetings
- Ask me to help with fund raising
- Include parents on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement

Improvement Needed

- Help me understand my child's stage of development
- Tell me what skills my child needs to learn each year
- Explain how to check my child's homework
- Assign homework that requires my child to talk with me about things learned in class
- Contact me if my child does something well or improves
- Ask me to volunteer at school
- Provide information on community services that I may want to use

Characteristics of the Teacher Study Population

At both Albert and George, the responses of teachers provide a framework to examine their professional judgements about parent involvement practices, what they are currently doing to involve parents, and what programs they would like to see developed. The response rate, however, was low. Forty-four percent of the total teacher population at both schools returned questionnaires (N = 68). According to Epstein (1993), a response rate of over 80% should be expected from teachers. Nonetheless, the responses obtained from teachers at both schools show remarkable similarities which adds to the reliability of the study. Figure 1.6 displays the educational characteristics of the teacher respondents at both middle schools.

Figure 1.6 : Educational Characteristics of the Teachers (N = 68)

Albert Street Middle School		**George Street Middle School**	
N = 29	62 %	N = 39	31 %
Completed Bachelor's Degree	100%	Completed Bachelor's Degree	100%
Completed Master's Degree	35 %	Completed Master's Degree	42 %

Figure 1.6 illustrates the percentage of teachers that returned questionnaires at Albert and George. At Albert, 18 of the 29 teachers returned questionnaires. At George, 12 of 39 teachers returned questionnaires. Several factors may account for this low return rate. For example, teachers simply did not wish to respond to the questionnaire, teachers may consider parental involvement in education to be unimportant, or teachers may have been too busy to complete the questionnaire. However, it is important to note

that the teacher questionnaires were administered before the Christmas vacation and once again in mid- January. According to Lockhart (1984), a follow-up contact is very important when response rate is low and serves as an effective way of increasing the response rate. This proved to be effective in my research as the response rate for the teacher questionnaire increased dramatically when it was administered a second time. For example, before Christmas, I had received only 14 teacher questionnaires from both schools. When they were sent out to teachers again in January, I received an additional 16 questionnaires. Despite this increased return rate, the total number of questionnaires received from teachers still accounts for less than half of the total teacher population at both schools. This is interesting because Lockhart (1984) contends that a higher response rate should be expected from respondents that are employees of the school as opposed to members of the general population. However, in my research, the opposite was true, parent response rates were higher than those of teachers.

Figure 1.6 also displays the educational backgrounds of teacher respondents. One hundred percent of the respondents at Albert and George have a Bachelor's Degree. Thirty-five percent of the respondents at Albert and forty-two percent of those at George have completed a Master's Degree.

Throughout this chapter, data from the teacher questionnaire will be integrated with that obtained from the parent questionnaire. The teacher questionnaire asked educators to provide their professional judgement about parental involvement in education. Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement by circling a number on a seven point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree Somewhat, 3=Disagree,

4=Not Sure, 5=Agree, 6=Agree Somewhat, 7=Strongly Agree). Figures 1.7 and 1.8 present the results pertaining to how teachers at Albert and George perceive family involvement in education, the percentage of respondents that strongly disagree, disagree somewhat, disagree, are not sure, agree, agree somewhat, or strongly agree; and the mean score for all respondents. The mean score indicates the point on the scale where the respondents are, on average, with regard to each statement. A discussion of this data will be ongoing throughout the chapter.

Figure 1.7 : How Teachers at Albert Street School Feel about Parental Involvement in Education

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	Mean*
a. Parent involvement is important for a good school	0%	0%	0%	0%	27.8%	27.8%	44.4%	6.16
b. Most parents know how to help their children on schoolwork at home	5.6%	0%	38.9%	11.1%	33.3%	11.1%	0%	4.00
c. This school has an active and effective parent organization	0%	0%	0%	5.9%	64.7%	29.4%	0%	5.24
d. Every family has some strengths that could be tapped to increase student success in school	0%	0%	5.6%	22.2%	38.9%	27.8%	5.6%	5.06
e. All parents could learn ways to assist their children on schoolwork at home, if shown how	0%	0%	0%	5.6%	44.4%	16.7%	33.3%	5.78
f. Parent involvement can help teachers be more effective with more students	0%	0%	0%	17.6%	35.3%	29.4%	17.6%	5.47
g. Teachers should receive recognition for time spent on parent involvement activities	0%	0%	22.2%	11.1%	22.2%	22.2%	22.2%	5.11
h. Parents of children at this school want to be involved more than they are now at most grade levels	0%	0%	11.1%	55.6%	22.2%	11.1%	0%	4.33
i. Teachers do not have the time to involve parents in very useful ways	0%	0%	22.2%	16.7%	27.8%	5.6%	27.8%	5.00
j. Teachers need in-service education to implement effective parent involvement practices	0%	0%	11.1%	11.1%	44.4%	11.1%	22.2%	5.22
k. Parent involvement is important for student success in school	0%	0%	0%	0%	58.8%	5.9%	35.3%	5.76
l. This school views parents as important partners	0%	0%	0%	5.6%	27.8%	50.0%	16.7%	5.78
m. The community values education for all students	0%	0%	5.6%	5.6%	38.9%	33.3%	16.7%	5.50
n. This school is known for trying new and unusual approaches to improve the school	0%	0%	5.6%	33.3%	27.8%	27.8%	5.6%	4.94
o. Mostly when I contact parents, it's about problems or trouble	0%	5.6%	22.2%	0%	55.6%	11.1%	5.6%	4.61
p. In this school, teachers play a large part in most school decisions	0%	0%	16.7%	11.1%	50.0%	22.2%	0%	4.78
q. The community supports the school	0%	0%	0%	5.6%	72.2%	16.7%	5.6%	5.22
r. Compared to other schools, this school has one of the best school climates for teachers, students, and parents	0%	0%	0%	17.6%	47.1%	17.6%	17.6%	5.35

* The mean score was calculated on a seven point Likert Scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree Somewhat, 3=Disagree, 4=Not Sure, 5=Agree, 6=Agree Somewhat, 7=Strongly Agree). All questions were answered by all teacher respondents.

Figure 1.8 : How Teachers at George Street School Feel about Parental Involvement in Education

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	Mean*
a. Parent involvement is important for a good school	0%	0%	0%	0%	33.3%	0%	66.7%	6.33
b. Most parents know how to help their children on schoolwork at home	0%	0%	33.3%	25.0%	33.3%	8.3%	0%	4.17
c. This school has an active and effective parent organization	0%	0%	8.3%	0%	50.0%	16.7%	25.0%	5.50
d. Every family has some strengths that could be tapped to increase student success in school	0%	0%	0%	0%	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%	6.00
e. All parents could learn ways to assist their children on schoolwork at home, if shown how	0%	0%	0%	8.3%	0%	66.7%	25.0%	6.08
f. Parent involvement can help teachers be more effective with more students	0%	0%	0%	0%	16.7%	25.0%	58.3%	6.42
g. Teachers should receive recognition for time spent on parent involvement activities	0%	0%	0%	8.3%	25.0%	33.3%	33.3%	5.92
h. Parents of children at this school want to be involved more than they are now at most grade levels	0%	0%	8.3%	83.3%	8.3%	0%	0%	4.00
i. Teachers do not have the time to involve parents in very useful ways	0%	8.3%	41.7%	8.3%	16.7%	25.0%	0%	4.08
j. Teachers need in-service education to implement effective parent involvement practices	0%	0%	16.7%	0%	33.3%	33.3%	16.7%	5.33
k. Parent involvement is important for student success in school	0%	0%	8.3%	0%	25.0%	16.7%	50.0%	6.00
l. This school views parents as important partners	0%	0%	0%	0%	16.7%	41.7%	41.7%	6.25
m. The community values education for all students	0%	0%	8.3%	16.7%	8.3%	41.7%	25.0%	5.58
n. This school is known for trying new and unusual approaches to improve the school	0%	0%	0%	16.7%	25.0%	8.3%	50.0%	5.92
o. Mostly when I contact parents, it's about problems or trouble	0%	16.7%	25.0%	8.3%	33.3%	16.7%	0%	4.08
p. In this school, teachers play a large part in most school decisions	0%	0%	16.7%	0%	50.0%	25.0%	8.3%	5.08
q. The community supports the school	0%	0%	0%	8.3%	25.0%	50.0%	16.7%	5.75
r. Compared to other schools, this school has one of the best school climates for teachers, students, and parents	0%	0%	8.3%	0%	33.3%	33.3%	25.0%	5.67

* The mean score was calculated on a seven point Likert Scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree Somewhat, 3=Disagree, 4=Not Sure, 5=Agree, 6=Agree Somewhat, 7=Strongly Agree). Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 5.6% for any question.

Parents' General Feelings About the Schools

Question One of the parent questionnaire addresses the extent of agreement or disagreement with the ways parents feel about the school right now. Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement by circling a word on a four point Likert scale (**YES** = strongly agree, **yes** = agree a little, **no** = disagree a little, **NO** = disagree strongly). Figures 1.9 and 2.0 present the results pertaining to how parents feel about the school right now, the percentage of respondents who strongly agree, agree a little, disagree a little, and who disagree strongly; and the mean score for all respondents. The mean score indicates the point on the scale where the respondents are, on average, with regard to each statement.

Figure 1.9 : How Parents Feel About Albert Street Middle School

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean *
a. This is a very good school.	57.0 %	39.8 %	2.4 %	0.8 %	1.4699
b. The teachers care about my child	59.4 %	37.8 %	2.4 %	0.4 %	1.4370
c. I feel welcome at the school	62.5 %	35.1 %	1.6 %	0.8 %	1.4064
d. This school has an active parent organization	45.4 %	49.2 %	5.5 %	0.0 %	1.6008
e. My child talks about school at home	57.6 %	32.2 %	9.0 %	1.2 %	1.5373
f. My child should get more homework	6.2 %	22.6 %	50.6 %	20.6 %	2.8560
g. Many parents I know help out at schools	17.0 %	41.5 %	34.0 %	7.5 %	2.3195
h. The school and I have different goals for my child	4.5 %	14.3 %	47.8 %	33.5 %	3.1020
i. I feel I can help my child in reading	53.9 %	32.7 %	10.2 %	3.1 %	1.6260
j. I feel I can help my child in math	38.5 %	44.0 %	13.5 %	4.0 %	1.8294
k. I could help my child more if the teacher gave me more ideas	17.8 %	35.1 %	36.4 %	10.7 %	2.4008
l. My child is learning as much as he/she can at this school	23.8 %	50.4 %	22.5 %	3.3%	2.0533
m. Parents at this school get involved more in the younger grades	9.0 %	39.0 %	43.0 %	9.0 %	2.5200
n. This school is known for trying new programs	18.5 %	54.5 %	26.5 %	0.5 %	2.0900
o. This school views parents as important partners	47.3 %	47.3 %	5.0 %	0.4 %	1.5851
p. The community supports this school	35.7 %	55.8 %	7.6 %	0.9 %	1.7366
q. This school is one of the best schools for students and for parents	35.6 %	55.9 %	6.8 %	1.8 %	1.7477

* The mean score was calculated on a four point Likert Scale (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Disagree, 4=Strongly Disagree) Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 12% for any question.

Figure 2.0 : How Parents Feel About George Street Middle School

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean *
a. This is a very good school.	60.2 %	37.6 %	1.9 %	0.3 %	1.4231
b. The teachers care about my child	59.8 %	37.7 %	2.5 %	0.0 %	1.4266
c. I feel welcome at the school	65.3 %	32.5 %	2.2 %	0.0 %	1.3691
d. This school has an active parent organization	56.6 %	40.9 %	2.3 %	0.3 %	1.4629
e. My child talks about school at home	51.1 %	40.4 %	7.7 %	0.8 %	1.5824
f. My child should get more homework	6.1 %	18.0 %	51.1 %	24.9 %	2.9475
g. Many parents I know help out at schools	19.7 %	50.3 %	25.8 %	4.2 %	2.1461
h. The school and I have different goals for my child	2.3 %	11.1 %	44.6 %	42.0 %	3.2642
i. I feel I can help my child in reading	46.4 %	41.7 %	9.4 %	2.5 %	1.6796
j. I feel I can help my child in math	33.7 %	44.5 %	16.0 %	5.8 %	1.9392
k. I could help my child more if the teacher gave me more ideas	12.7 %	40.0 %	34.9 %	12.4 %	2.4704
l. My child is learning as much as he/she can at this school	17.3 %	45.6 %	28.9 %	8.2 %	2.2805
m. Parents at this school get involved more in the younger grades	3.5 %	31.7 %	52.6 %	12.2 %	2.7352
n. This school is known for trying new programs	26.6 %	61.1 %	11.6 %	0.7 %	1.8635
o. This school views parents as important partners	61.2 %	36.8 %	1.7 %	0.3 %	1.4101
p. The community supports this school	34.5 %	59.4 %	5.8 %	0.3 %	1.7182
q. This school is one of the best schools for students and for parents	39.6 %	49.7 %	9.8 %	0.9 %	1.7209

* The mean score was calculated on a four point Likert Scale (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Disagree, 4=Strongly Disagree) Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 10% for any question.

Figures 1.9 and 2.0 reveal that parents strongly agree that both schools are meeting the present needs of their children. For example, 96.8 % of the parents surveyed at Albert and 97.8 % of those at George rate both schools as being very good. As well, teachers at both schools have received high ratings from parents. Over 97% of the parents surveyed at both schools believe that the teachers care about their children. Overwhelmingly, the results indicate that parents feel welcome at the school and feel the schools view them as important partners. According to Epstein (1991), this is significant because for partnerships to work, schools must become places where families feel wanted and recognized for their strengths and potential. Schools that help families feel welcome and show them how to improve learning at home are more likely to have support from parents.

Furthermore, many parents at Albert and George generally agree on the following points: that both schools have an active parent organization; their children talk about school at home; their children should not get more homework; the school and parents have similar goals for their children; their children are learning as much as they can at school; the schools view parents as important partners; the community supports the schools; and both institutions are two of the best schools for students and for parents. This indicates that parents have a great appreciation for the school's role in their children's education.

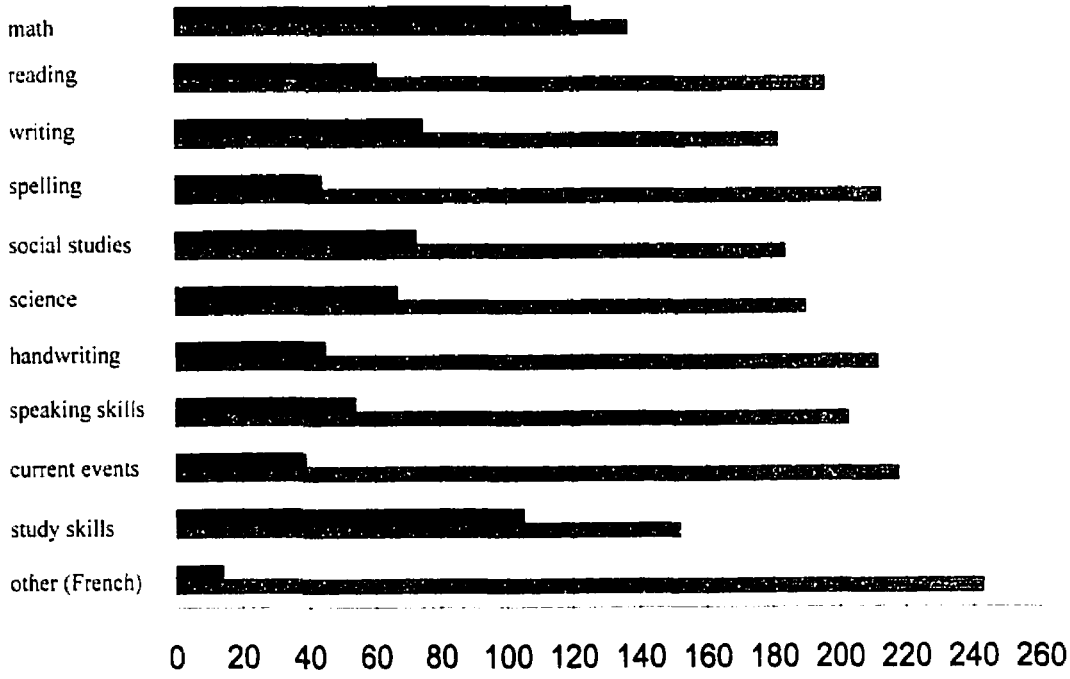
Teachers also have very good attitudes about the schools. For example, as indicated in Figures 1.7 and 1.8, 82.3% of the teacher respondents at Albert and 91.6% of those at George agree that, compared to other schools, their school has one of the best climates for teachers, students, and parents. As well, 94.5% of the teacher respondents at Albert and 100% of those at George believe their school views parents as important partners. It is interesting to note that 100% of the teachers at Albert and George agree that parental involvement in their children's education is important for a good school.

This is important because according to the literature on parental involvement in education, if families and schools are to work together in a partnership, schools must be welcome and open towards parents and provide them with the opportunities and support they need to become involved. For example, Dauber and Epstein (1989) contend that one key to involving all parents in their children's education is creating an atmosphere in which teachers, administrators, and families are all seen as valuing parental involvement. They assert that school attitudes and practices regarding parental involvement directly influence how much parents will support their children's education.

The Subjects Families Want to Know More About

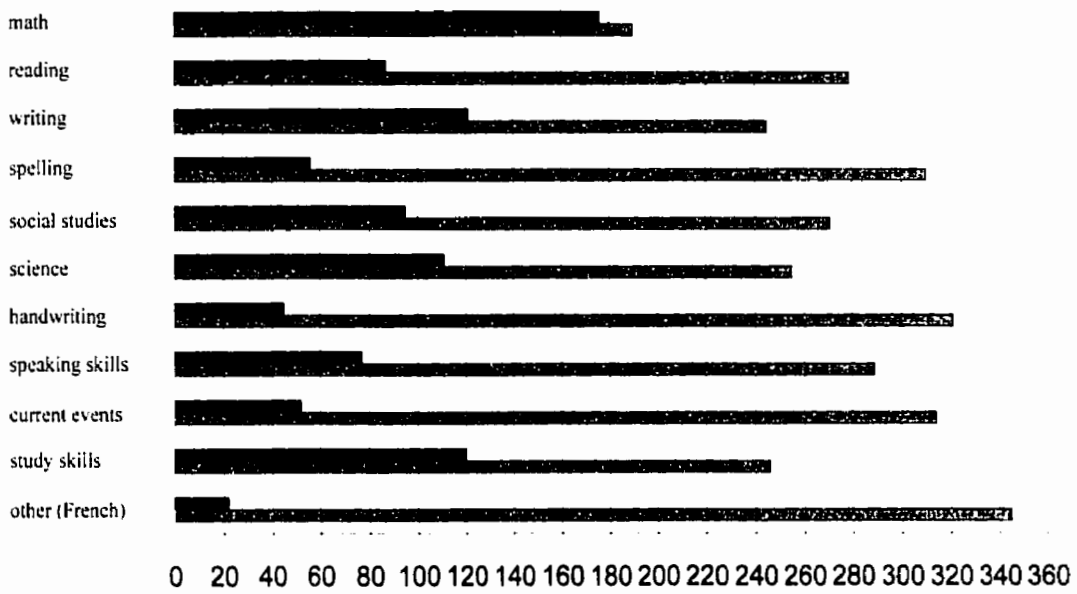
Question Two of the parent questionnaire asked parents to respond to what subjects they want more information about in order to understand what their children are learning in school. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 present the results using clustered bar charts. The darker shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that would like to receive additional information on various academic areas, while the lighter shaded bars represent the parent respondents that do not want additional information.

Figure 2.1 : Of the 257 parent respondents at Albert Street School, the following chart illustrates the number of parents that want and do not want additional information on various academic areas



(Darker shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that would like additional information on various academic areas. Lighter shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that do not want additional information on various academic areas. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 3.5% for any question)

Figure 2.2 : Of the 366 parent respondents at George Street Middle School, the following chart illustrates the number of parents that want and do not want additional information on various academic areas



(Darker shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that would like additional information on various academic areas. Lighter shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that do not want additional information on various academic areas. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 0.8% for any question)

The clustered bar charts indicate that parent respondents at both schools would like to obtain more information on math. Other academic areas such as writing, social studies, science, reading, study skills, and speaking skills received less attention, while a very small percentage requested additional information on handwriting, current events, spelling, and French.

A close look at the frequency data in these graphs, however, suggests that many parents do not want more information about what their children are learning in these areas. For example, in all academic areas at Albert and George, the number of parent respondents that do not want additional information outweighs those that requested extra help.

These findings suggest that parent respondents are generally satisfied with the information they are receiving from the school to help their children with various subject areas and information from the focus group interview with parents supports this view. Interviewees did not request additional information from the school on different subjects their children are taking. For example, one parent asserted that her child is independent and does not require extra help with their homework. She said,

> My child seems to get very little homework; however, what he does get, he seems to be able to do it just fine at home by himself. What information I get regarding his subjects is probably just what the parent-teacher interviews provide me with. I don't have many notes coming home regarding information as far as telling what they are doing at the moment in school. (focus group interview)

This is interesting because providing more opportunities for parents to participate in their child's learning experiences is reported in the literature as one of the most important factors to help strengthen involvement in their children's education. Epstein (1987) indicates that many parents say they would be willing to spend more time on homework or other learning activities with their children if teachers gave them more guidance. However, parent respondents at Albert and George claim that they are currently satisfied with the information they are receiving from the schools regarding

their children's subjects and do not want additional materials.

The Ways Parents are Most Involved with Their Children

Question Three of the parent questionnaire asked parents to respond to how often they conducted eighteen different practices of involvement and interaction with the oldest child they have at school. Parents responded to each statement by circling a category on a scale of four points (1 = **never did this or not yet this year**, 2 = **have done this one or two times this year**, 3 = **have done this a few times this year**, 4 = **have done this many times this year**) Figures 2.3 and 2.4 illustrate the percentage of parents that reported the extent to which they conducted the eighteen different practices of involvement and interacted with the oldest child at Albert and George Street Middle Schools; and the mean score for all respondents. The mean score on the level of involvement indicates where the respondents are, on average, with regard to each statement.

Figure 2.3 : The extent to which Parents are Involved with Their Children at Albert Street School

	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES	MEAN*
a. Talk to my child about school	0.4 %	1.6 %	6.7 %	91.3 %	3.8889
b. Visit my child's classroom	10.8 %	45.8 %	37.5 %	6.0 %	2.3865
c. Read to my child	29.9 %	17.9 %	31.1 %	21.1 %	2.4343
d. Listen to my child read	13.9 %	19.5 %	34.7 %	31.9 %	2.8446
e. Listen to a story my child wrote	6.1 %	20.4 %	34.7 %	38.8 %	3.0612
f. Help my child with homework	2.8 %	10.7 %	30.6 %	56.0 %	3.3968
g. Practice spelling or other skills before a test	9.2 %	12.7 %	25.1 %	53.0 %	3.2191
h. Talk with my child about a TV show	3.6 %	10.0 %	43.8 %	42.6 %	3.2550
i. Help my child plan time for homework and chores	4.4 %	7.6 %	25.1 %	62.9 %	3.4661
j. Talk with my child's teacher at school	10.4 %	46.2 %	34.7 %	8.8 %	2.4183
k. Talk with my child's teacher on the phone	49.0 %	36.5 %	9.6 %	4.8 %	1.7028
l. Go to parent meetings	20.6 %	43.5 %	24.2 %	11.7 %	2.2702
m. Check to see that my child has done his/her homework	3.2 %	6.3 %	19.0 %	71.4 %	3.5873
n. Volunteer at school or in my child's classroom	65.9 %	20.6 %	10.3 %	3.2 %	1.5079
o. Go to special events at school	23.4 %	43.1 %	24.2 %	9.3 %	2.1935
p. Take my child to a library	27.5 %	25.9 %	31.9 %	14.7 %	2.3386
q. Take my child to special places or events in the community	3.6 %	15.1 %	35.1 %	46.2 %	3.2390
r. Tell my child how important school is	1.2 %	3.2 %	11.1 %	84.5 %	3.7897

* The mean score was calculated on a four point Likert Scale (1 = **never did this or not yet this year**, 2 = **have done this one or two times this year**, 3 = **have done this a few times this year**, 4 = **have done this many times this year**) Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 3% for any question.

Figure 2.4 : The extent to which Parents are Involved with Their Children at George Street School

	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES	MEAN *
a. Talk to my child about school	0.0 %	1.4 %	4.7 %	93.9 %	3.9254
b. Visit my child's classroom	15.2 %	51.9 %	29.8 %	3.0 %	2.2072
c. Read to my child	30.2 %	22.6 %	29.3 %	17.9 %	2.3492
d. Listen to my child read	14.1 %	24.4 %	39.6 %	21.9 %	2.6925
e. Listen to a story my child wrote	1.9 %	15.6 %	33.1 %	49.4 %	3.3000
f. Help my child with homework	3.0 %	8.6 %	34.5 %	53.9 %	3.3923
g. Practice spelling or other skills before a test	12.5 %	13.1 %	29.0 %	45.4 %	3.0724
h. Talk with my child about a TV show	3.1 %	14.8 %	37.0 %	45.1 %	3.2423
i. Help my child plan time for homework and chores	3.1 %	8.3 %	27.2 %	61.4 %	3.4694
j. Talk with my child's teacher at school	13.7 %	50.3 %	28.8 %	7.3 %	2.2961
k. Talk with my child's teacher on the phone	45.4 %	41.0 %	11.1 %	2.5 %	1.7064
l. Go to parent meetings	24.4 %	49.3 %	15.4 %	10.9 %	2.1289
m. Check to see that my child has done his/her homework	4.4 %	4.4 %	18.8 %	72.4 %	3.5912
n. Volunteer at school or in my child's classroom	57.9 %	25.8 %	12.2 %	4.2 %	1.6260
o. Go to special events at school	18.4 %	42.7 %	25.1 %	13.7 %	2.3408
p. Take my child to a library	34.6 %	24.1 %	23.0 %	18.3 %	2.2493
q. Take my child to special places or events in the community	2.5 %	12.7 %	33.0 %	51.8 %	3.3407
r. Tell my child how important school is	0.8 %	1.9 %	8.3 %	88.9 %	3.8532

* The mean score was calculated on a four point Likert Scale (1 = **never did this or not yet this year**, 2 = **have done this one or two times this year**, 3 = **have done this a few times this year**, 4 = **have done this many times this year**) Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 6% for any question.

The data obtained from this part of the questionnaire continues the trend of remarkable similarities between both schools and illustrates the ways that parents claim they are most involved in their children's education. For example, parent respondents claim that they talk to their children about school and stress its importance many times at home. According to Henderson, Bela, and Kerewsky (1989), it is very important for parents to communicate with their children about school. They assert that daily conversations between parents and children about school has a strong association with good grades. However, the conversations with children must involve more than just talking about "yes" and "no" answers, the questions about homework, and the one-way lectures about the importance of school. Instead, parents should listen to their children carefully and with an open mind in order to learn about their behaviour.

The Ways Albert and George Currently Involve Parents

Question Four of the parent questionnaire asked parents to respond to how well the school is doing in its efforts to involve parents. Parents responded to each statement by circling a category on a scale of three points (1 = **the school does not do this**, 2 = **the school does this but could do better**, 3 = **the school does this very well now**) The results provide a "profile" of how well parents think this school involves them in practices of partnership according to Joyce Epstein's six major types of involvement. According to summarizing information provided with the questionnaires, Epstein and Salinas (1993) contend that items in question four cover only a few of the practices that may be used for each type of involvement. However, the pattens that emerge from the

data give some idea of where parents think school programs are already strong or need improvement.

Figures 2.5 and 2.6 present the results using percentages to illustrate these patterns, and the mean score for all respondents. The mean score on the various types of involvement was calculated on a scale of three points and indicates where the respondents are, on average, with regard to each statement. As well, the specific type of involvement has been included with each statement. For the purposes of this discussion, the following interpretation will represent Epstein's six types of family involvement in education.

Type One = **Parenting (question a)**

Type Two = **Communicating (questions b, c, d, e, f, g, h, and i)**

Type Three = **Volunteering (questions j and k)**

Type Four = **Learning at Home (questions l and m)**

Type Five = **Decision Making (questions n, o, and p)**

Type Six = **Collaboration with the Community (question q)**

Figure 2.5 : The extent to which Albert Street School Involves Parents

	Does Not Do	Could Do Better	Does Well	Mean *
a. Help me understand my child's stage of development (Type 1)	9.2 %	39.3 %	51.1 %	2.4226
b. Tell me how my child is doing in school (Type 2)	1.2 %	28.9 %	69.9 %	2.6867
c. Tell me what skills my child needs to learn each year (Type 2)	10.3 %	51.2 %	38.4 %	2.2810
d. Give me information about how report card grades are earned (Type 2)	5.7 %	33.3 %	61.0 %	2.5528
e. Contact me if my child is having problems (Type 2)	16.9 %	20.0 %	63.1 %	2.4622
f. Contact me if my child does something well or improves (Type 2)	39.5 %	27.6 %	32.9 %	1.9342
g. Send home clear notices that I can read easily (Type 2)	1.6 %	8.9 %	89.5 %	2.8790
h. Have a parent-teacher conference with me (Type 2)	4.1 %	22.0 %	73.9 %	2.6971
i. Send home news about things happening at school (Type 2)	1.6 %	15.5 %	82.9 %	2.8135
j. Ask me to volunteer at the school (Type 3)	23.1 %	17.6 %	59.2 %	2.3613
k. Invite me to programs at school (Type 3)	7.1 %	13.8 %	79.1 %	2.7197
l. Explain how to check my child's homework (Type 4)	32.4 %	31.1 %	36.6 %	2.0420
m. Assign homework that requires my child to talk with me about things learned in class (Type 4)	20.0 %	36.7 %	43.3 %	2.2333
n. Invite me to parent meetings (Type 5)	5.3 %	12.2 %	82.5 %	2.7724
o. Ask me to help with fund raising (Type 5)	21.3 %	16.7 %	62.1 %	2.4083
p. Include parents on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement (Type 5)	13.4 %	21.6%	65 %	2.5093
q. Provide information on community services that I may want to use (Type 6)	34.8 %	36.6 %	28.6 %	1.9375

* The mean score was calculated on a three point Likert Scale (1 = **the school does not do this**, 2 = **the school does this but could do better**, 3 = **the school does this very well now**) Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 6% for any question.

Figure 2.6 : The extent to which George Street School Involves Parents

	Does Not Do	Could Do Better	Does Well	Mean *
a. Help me understand my child's stage of development (Type 1)	**8.7 %**	**36.2 %**	**55.1 %**	**2.4638**
b. Tell me how my child is doing in school (Type 2)	**0.8 %**	**32.0 %**	**67.1 %**	**2.6630**
c. Tell me what skills my child needs to learn each year (Type 2)	**14.8 %**	**52.3 %**	**32.8 %**	**2.1802**
d. Give me information about how report card grades are earned (Type 2)	**4.7 %**	**37.5 %**	**57.8 %**	**2.5306**
e. Contact me if my child is having problems (Type 2)	**8.9 %**	**22.6 %**	**68.5 %**	**2.5967**
f. Contact me if my child does something well or improves (Type 2)	**37.5 %**	**30.5 %**	**32.0 %**	**1.9446**
g. Send home clear notices that I can read easily (Type 2)	**1.1 %**	**3.6 %**	**95.3 %**	**2.9413**
h. Have a parent-teacher conference with me (Type 2)	**3.4 %**	**20.9 %**	**75.6 %**	**2.7221**
i. Send home news about things happening at school (Type 2)	**0.3 %**	**3.3 %**	**96.4 %**	**2.9612**
j. Ask me to volunteer at the school (Type 3)	**7.2 %**	**10.6 %**	**82.2 %**	**2.7507**
k. Invite me to programs at school (Type 3)	**4.6 %**	**7.4 %**	**88.0 %**	**2.8343**
l. Explain how to check my child's homework (Type 4)	**27.1 %**	**37.6 %**	**35.3 %**	**2.0816**
m. Assign homework that requires my child to talk with me about things learned in class (Type 4)	**14.1 %**	**47.5 %**	**38.4 %**	**2.2429**
n. Invite me to parent meetings (Type 5)	**1.7 %**	**8.3 %**	**90.0 %**	**2.8832**
o. Ask me to help with fund raising (Type 5)	**5.7 %**	**7.2 %**	**87.1 %**	**2.8132**
p. Include parents on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement (Type 5)	**4.9 %**	**13.8 %**	**81.3 %**	**2.7638**
q. Provide information on community services that I may want to use (Type 6)	**19.4 %**	**41.7 %**	**38.9 %**	**2.1944**

* The mean score was calculated on a three point Likert Scale (1 = **the school does not do this**, 2 = **the school does this but could do better**, 3 = **the school does this very well now**) Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 6% for any question.

Epstein (1995) uses the six distinct types of involvement as a framework to evaluate present parent-school partnerships. As well, she has listed outcomes of these types of involvement that can be expected for students, parents, and teachers. A discussion of the six different types of family involvement, how well parents at both George and Albert feel their school is involving them in the education of their children, and the various outcomes associated with each type of partnership follows.

Type One : Parenting

Families must provide for the health and safety of their children, and maintain a home environment that encourages learning and good behaviour in school. Schools assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. According to Eccles and Harold (1993), many of the things parents worry about center on the developmental changes their children experience as they go through adolescence. For example, health issues such as AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, eating disorders, increased levels of depression, increased exposure to violence, nicotine, alcohol, and drugs are some of the main concerns raised by parents. Although parents may be unsure of how to deal with these issues, the authors assert that schools could play an important role in offering educational programs that help parents discuss these matters effectively with their children. The qualitative data obtained from the last section of the parent questionnaire suggest that parents are not currently satisfied with information on parenting topics they are receiving from the

school. In fact, many respondents claim they would like to obtain additional information.

One theme which emerged from this data was school violence. In light of recent school shootings in the United States and Canada, parent respondents are concerned about their children's safety and would like more information from the school on how to talk with their children at home about topics such as: bullying, teasing, peer pressure, alcohol, drugs, and smoking. According to respondents, this is one of their greatest concerns as a parent and they would like to help ensure that their children are well prepared to face the pressures of today's society that place many young adolescents under a great deal of stress.

The information obtained from the parent questionnaires verify these results. Figures 2.7 and 2.8 present the views of parent respondents regarding their satisfaction with the way both schools help them understand their child's stage of development.

Figure 2.7 : The extent to which parents feel Albert Street Middle School helps them understand their child's stage of development.

Figure 2.7

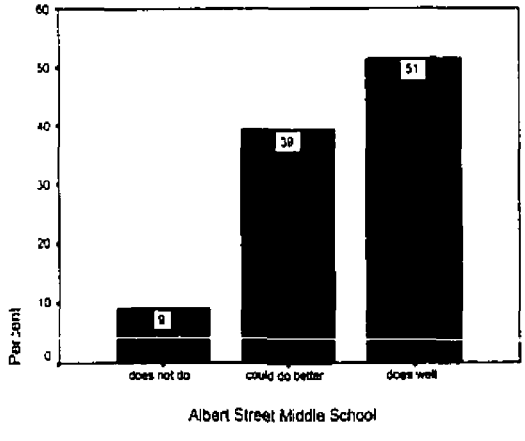
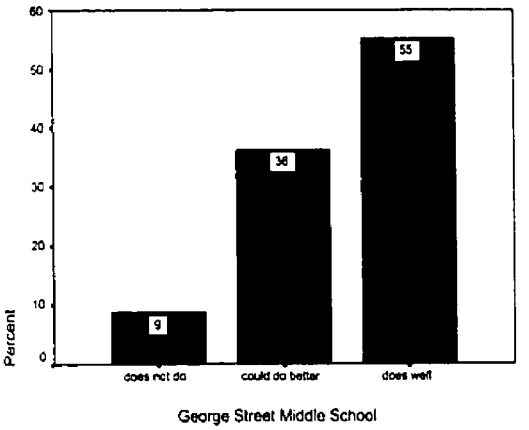


Figure 2.8 : The extent to which parents feel George Street Middle School helps them understand their child's stage of development.

Figure 2.8



At Albert and George, over fifty percent of the parent respondents believe that the schools do a good job in helping them understand their child's stage of development. Quite a few parents, however, feel that both schools could do better, while a small percentage assert that the schools do not do this at all.

The research on parental involvement in education offers suggestions which could help all families establish home environments to support children as students. Epstein (1995) provides us with some examples. These include:

- Workshops, videotapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child rearing at each age and grade level.
- Parent education programs and other courses or training for parents.
- Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition and other services.
- Home visits and meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.
- Suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level.

Together, these ideas communicate the importance of reaching out to all families, not just those who attend parent meetings and are actively involved in parent organizations at the school. Research on parental involvement in education provides specific examples of how schools can improve practices to help families carry out their parental responsibilities. For example, Saunders (1999) conducted a study of parental involvement at Southbend Middle School in the United States and claims that the use of attendance monitors (volunteers - consisting of a community member and a parent whose duties include: making home visits, calling parents to find out why their child is not in school, and providing positive support to parents by welcoming them to come to the school and volunteer) have been useful in promoting home-school partnerships. As well, Winebrenner (1996) asserts that schools can offer classes in effective parenting. She claims that it is important to explain to parents that just because the classes are being offered doesn't mean that they don't know "how to parent". However, it is important to emphasize that new learning is important to everyone. For example, teachers might mention training seminars that they have attended recently. In addition to this, she believes that it is important for schools to offer "information nights" on learning styles, cooperative learning, or other educational topics that parents are interested in knowing more about.

The research findings presented above indicate that it is important for parents to establish home environments that support children as students. At Albert and George, many parents say that they would like to receive more correspondence from the school on how to deal with school violence and safety issues. According to Epstein (1995),

there are a variety of benefits associated with this type of involvement. These include numerous advantages for students, parents, and teachers: For students, they gain respect for their parents; develop positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs, and values; improve their attendance; and they become increasingly aware of the importance of school. For parents, they understand more about parenting and child and adolescent development; become aware of their own and others' challenges in parenting; and recognize the home as an environment for learning. For teachers, they are more aware of families' strengths and efforts; understand families' backgrounds, cultures, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children; increase awareness of their own skills to share information on child development; and further their understanding of student diversity.

Type Two: Communicating

Schools must reach out to families with information about school programs and student progress. The research suggests that a wide variety of methods are useful in informing parents about what is happening in the schools and how they can help and participate in their children's education. For example, the traditional phone calls, report cards, and parent conferences, as well as new information on topics such as school choice and making the transition from elementary school to higher grades and the more recent use of technology, including voice mail, homework hotlines, email, and school web-sites, are being used to facilitate communication with parents. Communication must also be home-to-school, to encourage parents to communicate regularly with the

teachers about how the school can become more effective in educating their children.

Figures 2.9 and 3.0 illustrate the views of parents at Albert and George regarding their satisfaction with the ways both schools communicate with them. Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement by circling a category on a Likert scale of three points (**1** = The school Does Not Do this, **2** = The school Does this but Could Do Better, **3** = The school Does this Very Well now). The results are presented using bar graphs and indicate by way of mean scores how parents responded to different statements on the questionnaire.

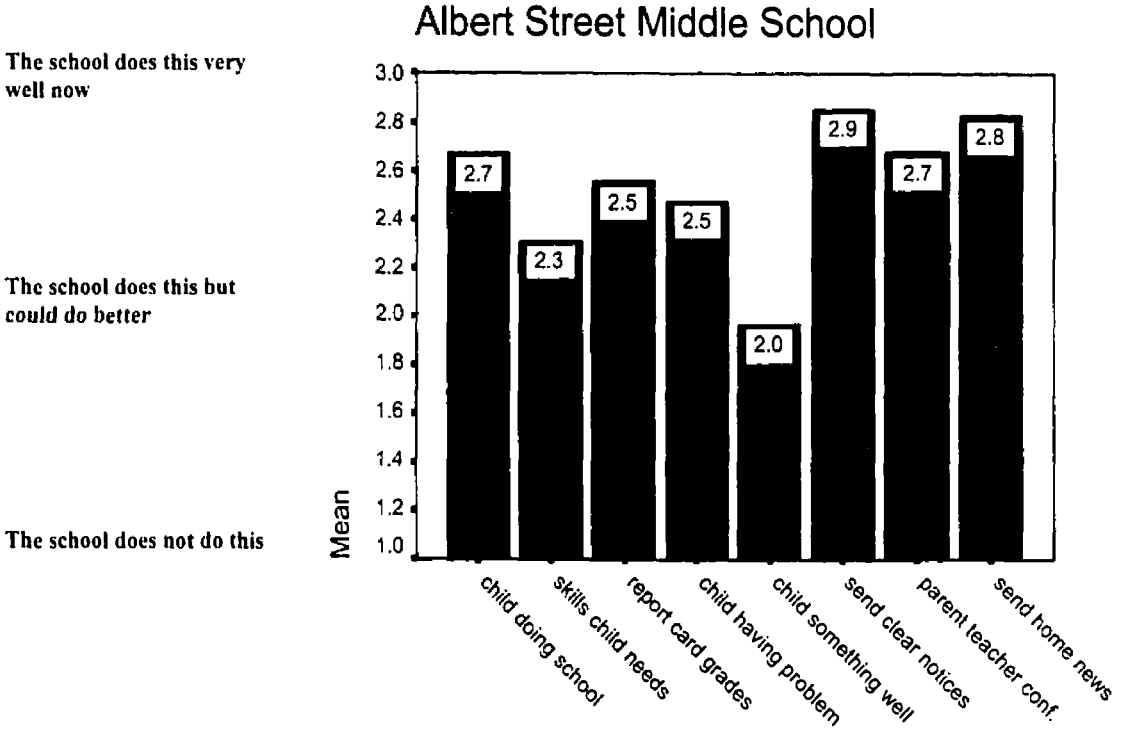
The following list contains statements for which parents were asked to give their opinions.

How well this school:

- **tells me how my child is doing in school (question 4.b)**
- **tells me what skills my child needs to learn each year (question 4.c)**
- **gives me information about how report card grades are earned (question 4.d)**
- **contacts me if my child is having problems (question 4.e)**
- **contacts me if my child does something well or improves (question 4.f)**
- **sends home clear notices that I can read easily (question 4.g)**
- **has a parent-teacher conference with me (question 4.h)**
- **sends home news about things happening at school (question 4.i)**

Figure 2.9 :The extent to which parents feel that Albert Street Middle School communicates with them.

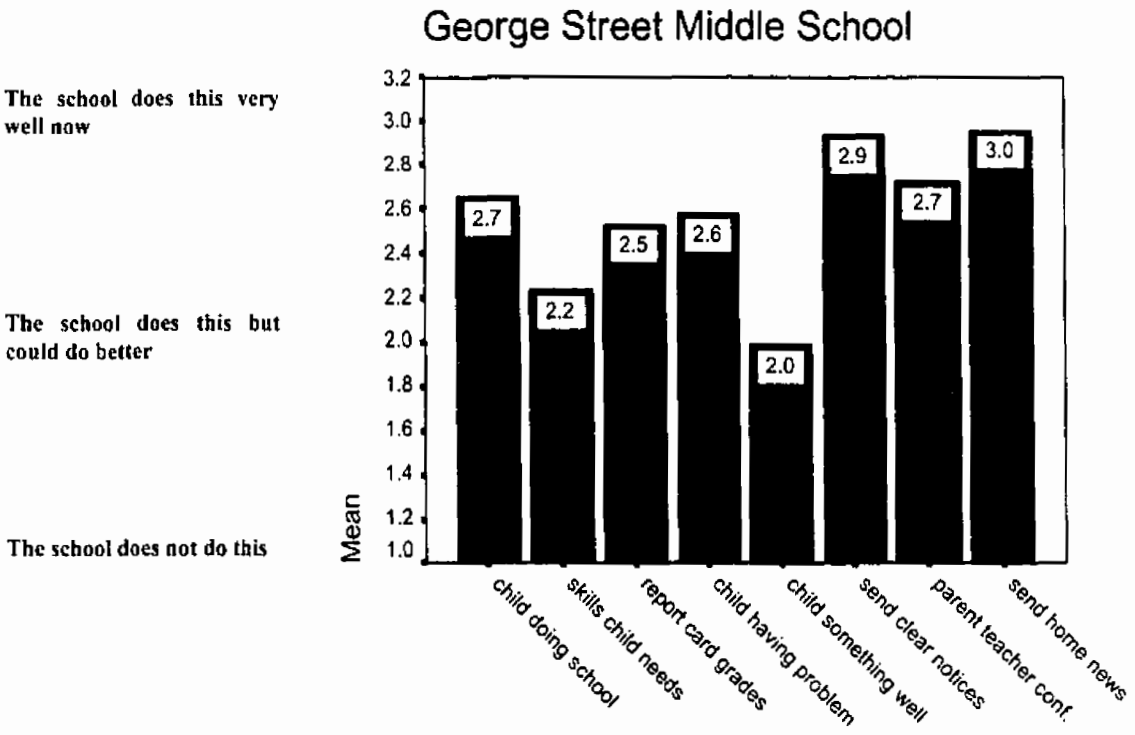
Figure 2.9



{The above diagram summarizes the parent respondent satisfaction with the way Albert Street School communicates with them. Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement by circling a category on a Likert scale of three points (1 = The school Does Not Do this, 2 = The school Does this but Could Do Better, 3 = The school Does this Very Well now). The mean score indicates where respondents are, on average, with regard to each statement. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 5.7% for any question.}

Figure 3.0 : The extent to which parents feel that George Street Middle School communicates with them.

Figure 3.0



(The above diagram summarizes the parent respondent satisfaction with the way George Street School communicates with them. Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement by circling a category on a Likert scale of three points (1 = The school Does Not Do this, 2 = The school Does this but Could Do Better, 3 = The school Does this Very Well now). The mean score indicates where respondents are, on average, with regard to each statement. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 6.3% for any question.)

At Albert and George, parents claim that both schools do a very good job in sending home news about things happening at school, sending home clear notices that can be easily read, having parent-teacher conferences, and keeping them informed on how their children are doing in school. As well, families appear pleased with the ways that both schools contact them if their children are having problems and give them information about how report card grades are earned. Many families, however, believe that the schools could do a better job telling them what skills their children need to learn each year and contacting them if their children do something well or improve.

According to current literature on parental involvement, there is a consensus among researchers that frequent interaction between parents and teachers is key to creating a climate at home and at school that is conducive to learning. For example, Winebrenner (1996) contends that it is very important for schools to regularly send home notes regularly to parents that outline student progress, encourage parents to take part in parent-teacher interviews, and schedule several open house meetings throughout the school year so families can become more familiar with the school. As well, Chrispeels (1987) asserts that communication between the home and school is the foundation for all other forms of family involvement in education. Good two-way communication between families and schools is essential to student success in school and without this communication, it is unlikely that other types of parental involvement will be successful.

As the name suggests, two-way communication implies that the two parties in contact have a two-way flow of ideas and information. However, when communication exists without the opportunity for parents to respond, it can be considered one-way communication, and this type is touted by researchers as being less effective. According to Nason (1997), a great deal of the correspondence between the home and the school does not encourage parents to enter into open dialogue with teachers. For example, many invitations for parents to provide feedback includes filling out a form which usually entails checking, circling, or filling in a blank or at most a line or two. Lindle (1989) supports this view by asserting that parents prefer informal relationships with their children's teachers through notes and phone calls. They appreciate teachers who take the time to find out about their perspectives. In fact, parents report that a "personal touch" is the most enhancing factor in school relations.

At both Albert and George, parent respondents appear quite happy with the ways teachers communicate with them. In the focus group discussion, parents agreed that short written messages from the teacher to the home helps keep them informed about what is happening at the school. For example, one parent expressed great appreciation for the way her child's teacher keeps in touch with school related matters. She said,

> I really like it when my daughter's teacher writes notes to me in her daily agenda. In elementary school, I always had to sign my child's homework notes. I'm glad that the middle schools have continued this practice with Grade 6's, and they are a little more in tune with telling us things as they go. (focus group interview)

This indicates that a student's school agenda can be effective in keeping parents up to date about their child's progress. In return, parents claim that they correspond with the teacher by means of the agenda. This minimizes the frustration of parents and teachers not being able to contact each other easily in other ways.

In addition, research on parental involvement in education provides other examples which characterize successful communication practices between the home and school. Eccles and Harold (1993) claim that as students move to the middle grades and have more than one core teacher, "capsule" nights are often used to provide parents with information about each class and an opportunity to meet the teacher. They also assert that schools should increase personalized communication with families, especially when many teachers interact with the same student every day. Some school districts have attempted to do this by "teaming" teachers, encouraging discussion among the student's core teachers. As well, one member of the team is classified as an "advisory" teacher (i.e., the one who communicates directly with the student and his/her family) for each student in order to enhance opportunities for good communication to occur between the home and school.

Currently at both Albert and George, teachers are grouped according to various grade levels and subject areas and these clusters of teachers form "houses". Comprised mainly of 4-5 teachers per "house", the various groups meet weekly and discuss a wide range of issues that include individual student progress, curricular concerns, and upcoming school events/activities. In the focus group discussion, parents claim that team teaching has enhanced communication from the school to home by providing them

with a holistic view of their children's progress. One parent explains how this has worked for her:

> A policy has been initiated for each house. The four or five teachers in each house get together and ask how each teacher is finding that student. They make notes and then call the parents. Approximately 7 or 8 children per class each week. (focus group interview)

Sanders (1999) describes "Get to Know the Principal" teas as one of a school's most important activities to improve communication. For example, a series of teas were held in different locations around the community and gave parents an opportunity to meet informally with the principal and discuss their views and concerns in an open-ended atmosphere. Parents at both Albert and George claim that both schools do a good job in holding tea and coffee nights as this provides them with an opportunity to meet other parents and discuss their child's progress with the teacher. Saunders also believes that home visits are an important tool to communicate with families who are unwilling to come to the school.

According to the literature, successful school-family partnerships often involve school-generated efforts that include home visits. Although parent respondents at Albert and George say that teachers have not visited them at home, Goodson, Swartz, and Millsap (1991) assert that successful parental involvement programs focus on empowering parents. This can take the form of helping parents move from one type of involvement to another. For example, making the transition from home visits to the school setting. As well, Davies (1991) contends that a home visitor program is an effective method of promoting parental involvement in their children's education. This

program consists of paid staff who visit homes to help families understand what they can do to encourage their children's success in school. The home visitors can provide information about reading programs, school activities, curriculum expectations, child rearing, and summer camps. They also serve as liasons to convey parent concerns back to the school. Chavkin (1990) reports that home visits by school social workers were especially useful in helping a minority family cope with the loss of a sibling who had been killed in an accident. After only initial contacts at home, social workers were able to build a relationship with the family and ensured that the mother receive family therapy at the social agency.

Indeed, the home visit is a unique form of home-school communication, because unlike most other forms of home-school communication, it takes place in the home rather than the school. The teacher and family members can get to know each other in a setting which is comfortable for the family. While home visits can be one way of communicating with families who are reluctant to come to the school, parents at Albert and George suggest that the schools are also using a new technology to link them with classrooms after school hours. In the focus group discussion, parents overwhelmingly assert that the use of a voice mail service by the schools is useful in keeping them informed on various school activities and events. However, one parent admits that there are minor complications associated with type of communication:

> I think the voice mail is excellent! That way you know you are going to get your messages as long as your children don't erase them. Sometimes written notes from school get lost in the shuffle. However, in my house with four children, they save the messages on the phone and I don't even know they are on there sometimes. So I do like to have a paper copy backup if the information is very important. Last week, I went to listen to a new message that came on the phone from the school and I saw that there were two other messages saved that no one told me were on there. The other messages were pertinent because meetings were being held tomorrow night and its already the day after. The messages can stay on for three days. But, my children forgot to tell me they were there. (focus group interview)

Research on parental involvement in education provides us with other ways that new technologies can be useful in keeping parents informed with school related matters. According to Epstein (1992), one widespread arrangement is a homework hotline to help guide students with assignments. For example, in Indianapolis, families interact with schools via a local cable channel that broadcasts a homework hotline; children and families get visual answers to questions about homework assignments. To counteract low attendance at school meetings, some schools are also using tape recordings, videocassettes, or answering machines in classrooms which can send and receive timely messages. Others even organize volunteer work for parents to do at home or on weekends. In addition, voice mail systems are being installed in schools. At Albert and George, voice mail systems are currently being used where principals can leave messages on every parent's phone. Normally, these messages invite parents to come to school meetings or keep them up to date on activities and fund raisers that are taking place. However, Fruchter, Galleta, and White (1992) assert that voice mail can serve other useful purposes. For example, in their study, parents and students can call for taped messages from teachers describing classroom activities and daily homework

assignments. Parents can also leave messages for the teacher, and an autodialing system can place calls to parents to convey changes in school, class-related events, or other information. As well, the traditional telephone is another method of improving communication between families and teachers. However, according to Berger (1987), parents are generally contacted only when there is bad news to report : a child was late, had incomplete homework, or had behaviour problems. Instead, telephone contact between teachers and parents should also occur on a positive note.

As can be seen in Figures 2.5 and 2.6, parents at Albert and George believe that both schools can do a better job in contacting them when their child does something well or improves. At Albert, 40% of the parent respondents claim that the school does not contact them when their children do something well or improve, 28% claim that the school could do better, and 32% assert that the school does well with this. At George, 38% of the parent respondents claim that the school does not contact them when their children does something well or improves, 31% claim that the school could do better, and 32 % believe that the school does well with this. Information obtained from the focus group discussions supports this view. Parent respondents claim that they receive little feedback from the school when their children do something well or improve. For example, one parent said,

> I've never been contacted when my children have done anything well. I have received comments from teachers at both schools regarding my child's progress, but they have not made it a policy to phone home to provide feedback when my children do something well. I had teachers call to tell me about certain things that are happening at the school and they will say things about my child's progress, but they aren't making a point to call and tell me that my child is doing something well. They usually call if my children are sick, or if there's been a problem, or if things are missing with my child's homework. (focus group interview)

The data obtained from the teacher questionnaire supports this notion. At Albert and George, many teacher respondents asserted that they mainly contact parents when it's about problems or trouble. According to Figures 1.7 and 1.8, at Albert, 72.3% of teacher respondents agree that they contact parents mainly when there are problems or trouble with students. At George, 50% of the teacher respondents agree that they contact parents mainly when there are problems or trouble with students. This is important because it demonstrates an area where communication between the home and school could be enhanced.

According to some literature which exists, it is important to let parents know about the positive things their children are doing in the classroom so that communication from the school is not labelled as "bad news". According to Ames, Khoju, and Watkins (1993), parents who perceive that they are receiving frequent and positive messages from teachers get more involved in their children's education than do parents who do not perceive that they are receiving such communications. As well, a book by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in Washington, D.C. (1993), offers some suggestions for developing a positive phone program. These include:

- Provide adequate access to telephones. Teachers need a private and comfortable place from which to make their calls. Schools may need to install extra phone lines in teacher workrooms.
- Make time available for teachers to make the calls. Designate certain times of the year for making positive telephone calls, or encourage one call per week.
- With teachers, develop a set of guidelines for making telephone calls.
- Provide translation services for parents, if needed.
- Keep a reporting system. Maintain a log book so that the school has a record of positive phone calls and can help measure the effectiveness of the program.
- If possible, advertise one evening a week when parents or students can call to ask questions or discuss problems with a teacher or staff member.

However, phone calls are not the only medium through which teachers can provide positive information to parents. Rutherford and Edgar (1979) contend that parent-teacher conferences provide an excellent opportunity for parents and teachers to clarify issues as "verbal exchanges decrease the possibility of miscommunication". Winebrenner (1996) asserts that there is a strong likelihood many parents of struggling students won't expect parent-teacher meetings to be pleasant experiences. However, she believes that it is important for the teacher to begin by giving examples of the child's positive traits. Try to identify a strength that may have been overlooked in the past because it didn't develop in positive ways. For example, many children who get into trouble are excellent leaders. As well, Berger (1987), asserts that teachers should set a cordial, welcoming tone when inviting parents to attend a parent-teacher conference. By doing so, they are showing an awareness of parents' busy lives and obligations, and are giving the parents time options for scheduling the meeting.

While research overwhelmingly demonstrates that teachers and administrators should display a genuine desire to foster effective communication between the home and school, it is interesting to note that some literature recognizes a disconnection that parents feel with regard to education. MacNeill (2000) discovered that teacher interactions with parents are virtually absent in the Kindergarten setting. Her research documents two main factors that account for this: parents not feeling comfortable enough to enter a system of education that they consider unfriendly, and schools bring back unhappy memories that they experienced as students. Elam, Rose, and Gallup (1994) assert that many families feel that their interests are not taken fully into account by educators. At times, parents feel that educators talk down to them or speak in educational jargon they do not understand. Nason (1997) extends this notion by claiming that many of the interactions between parents and teachers display a hierarchical relationship that is often taken for granted. For example, much of the correspondence between the home and school casts parents in a subordinate position by providing them with materials that are intended to be read so they can follow the direction the school has set and comply with its regulations. According to Nason, this type of communication falls short in promoting effective family-school partnerships. Instead, schools should ask parents to share their interests, needs, ideas, and goals for family involvement on an ongoing basis. This could be considered a first step in the restructuring process as parents and teachers can work together in better ways (i.e., correspondence that invites parents to enter into open dialogue) to make parental involvement a centerpiece of school reform.

At Albert and George, however, parent respondents claim to be quite happy with the relationships which exist between them and their children's teachers. In the focus group discussion, parents assert that teachers at both schools convey a genuine desire to keep the lines of communication open between the home and school. For example, one parent said,

> If there is an issue that arises with my regard to my child's education, teachers are very receptive to phone calls. I've had to call on numerous occasions and teachers have welcomed my calls. They are very helpful and I feel welcomed at school. (focus group interview)

This is important because recognizing parents' efforts, making them feel welcome at schools, and communicating effectively with them are useful strategies to get parents involved in their children's education. Berla, Henderson, and Kerewsky (1989) identify key points that schools can follow to promote meaningful participation by parents. They include the following:

- A clear, welcoming parent involvement policy that is published for all to see and in an obvious place.
- The school office is friendly and open.
- The school sponsors parent-parent communication and events. These should be purely fun social events, like a 50s sock hop, a bowling party, a pot-luck dinner, or a card party.
- Parents and school staff should work together to determine parents' needs and provide necessary services

Much of the communication between the home and school deals with student achievement. Ultimately, student success is the goal of any school improvement plan and of all activities that relate to the school. According to Figures 1.7 and 1.8, at Albert and George, teacher respondents believe that parental involvement in their children's education is important for student success in school. For example, 100% of the teacher

respondents at Albert and 91.7% of those at George agree that parental involvement in education is important for student success in school.

Despite the recognized value of parental involvement in education by teachers at both schools, respondents claim that they do not have the necessary time to involve parents in very useful ways. For example, at Albert, 61.2% of the teacher respondents agree that time is a barrier which prevents them involving parents in their children's education. At George, 41.7% of the teacher respondents agree that time is a barrier for them to involve parents in their children's education.

This is important because according to the literature on parental involvement in education, in order to build strong partnerships between the home and school, teachers need time to get to know parents and devise plans on how they can work together. Aronson (1996) asserts that assigning a parent facilitator, who is paid to be a part-time liaison between the school and parents helps teachers maintain contact with parents. These facilitators also handle many of the logistical tasks associated with building school-family partnerships such as, contacting parents to encourage them to volunteer in the classrooms, conducting educational workshops, and providing outreach to those parents who have minimal contact with the school. Cochran and Dean (1991) claim that it is also important for teachers to have time to work with colleagues and brainstorm ideas that could lead to greater parental involvement in their children's education. They also stress the importance of an in-service training program to help teachers learn how to empathize with parents and recognize their strengths, make the most of parent teacher conferences, and find creative ways to involve parents in school activities.

Davies (1991) suggests that one way schools can promote parent involvement in education and a closer working relationship between educators and families is through action research teams. These teams consist of teachers who study ways to improve their own methods of involving parents. They meet at least monthly to do background reading in parent involvement, receive training, interview other faculty about attitudes toward parental involvement, discuss the success of past efforts to involve parents, and design projects to increase teacher-parent collaboration. Levine (1991) supports this notion by claiming that effective school programs should be "data-driven" in the sense that appropriate information should be collected and used by the participants involved in carrying out the plans for improvement. He claims that schools are very complex organizations with every staff member possessing different personal histories and backgrounds. Real positive and lasting change comes about when everyone pulls in the same direction. However, to accomplish this, substantial staff development time must be provided to allow for teachers to use new instructional approaches and equip them with more effective teaching mechanisms. He also contends that providing stipends for in-service training conducted after school hours is an important component of any successful staff development effort.

At Albert and George, many teacher respondents believe they should receive recognition for time spent on parent involvement activities. For example, at Albert, 66.6% of the teacher respondents agree that they should receive recognition for time spent on parent involvement activities. At George, 91.6% of the teacher respondents claim that they should receive recognition for time spent on parent involvement.

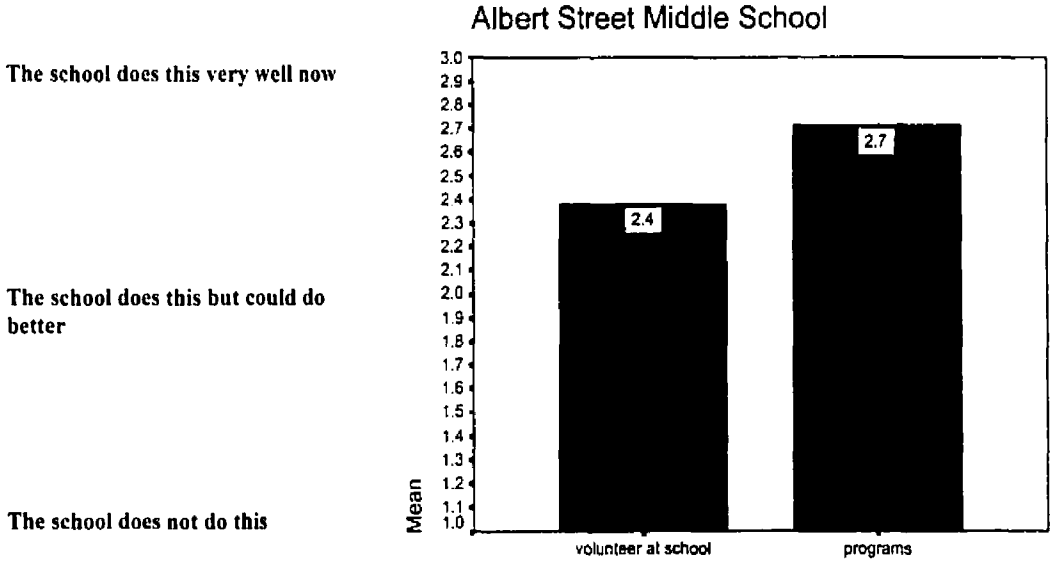
The research findings presented above indicate the importance of good two-way communication between the home and school. At Albert and George, many parents say they are quite satisfied with the current practices employed by both schools to keep them informed about their children's education. Voice mail, newsletters, and parent-teacher interviews were ranked highly by respondents as effective communication tools; however, it is important to note that parents would like to receive increased correspondence from the schools when their children do something well or improve. Epstein (1995) documents a variety of benefits that are associated with effective communication. These include numerous advantages for students, parents, and teachers. For students, they become aware of their own progress, and actions needed to maintain or improve grades; improve their understanding of school expectations and procedures for behaviour attendance and other policies; make informed decisions about courses and programs; and display improved awareness of their own role in partnerships, serving as a courier and communicator. For parents, they better understand school programs and policies; monitor child's progress; respond more effectively to students' problems; and interact more with schools and teachers. For teachers, they show increased use of communications with families and awareness of their own ability to communicate clearly; appreciate the use of parent networks for communications; and increase their ability in two-way communications for family views of children's programs and progress.

Type Three: Volunteering

Parents can make significant contributions to the environment and functions of a school. Schools can get the most out of this process by creating flexible schedules, assemblies, and events so more parents can participate. Schools can also organize volunteer work, provide training, and match the talents and interests of parents to the needs of students and teachers. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 present the views of parents at Albert and George regarding their satisfaction with the ways both schools invite them to volunteer.

Figure 3.1 : The extent to which parents feel that Albert Street Middle School invites them to volunteer at the school and attend different programs

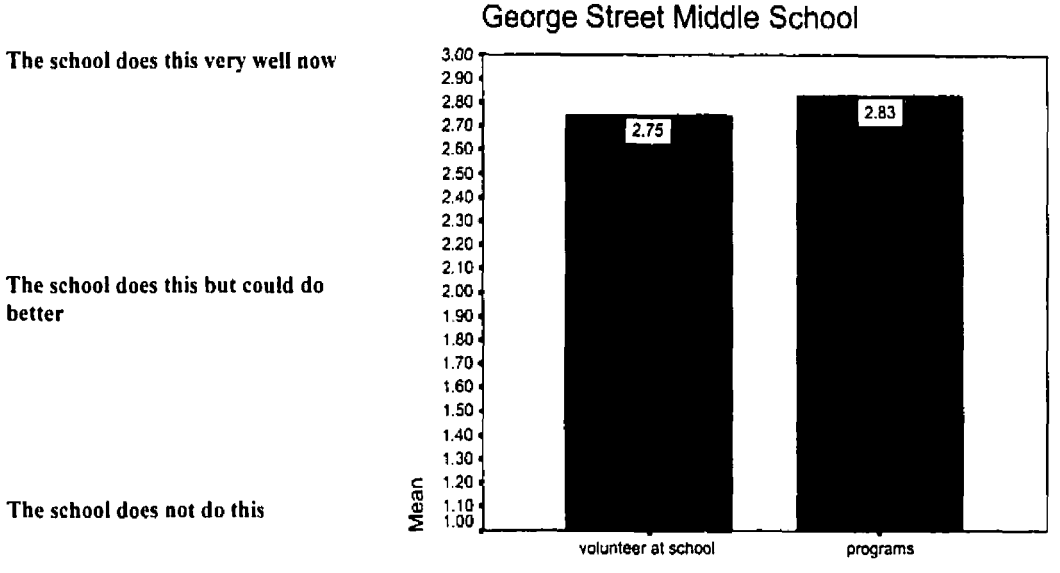
Figure 3.1



{The above diagram summarizes the parent respondent satisfaction with the way Albert Street School invites them to volunteer at the school and attend different programs. Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement by circling a category on a Likert scale of three points (1 = The school Does Not Do this, 2 = The school Does this but Could Do Better, 3 = The school Does this Very Well now). The mean score indicates where respondents are, on average, with regard to each statement. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 7.4% for any question.}

Figure 3.2 : The extent to which parents feel that George Street Middle School invites them to volunteer at the school and attend different programs

Figure 3.2



{The above diagram summarizes the parent respondent satisfaction with the way Albert Street School invites them to volunteer at the school and attend different programs. Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement by circling a category on a Likert scale of three points (1 = The school Does Not Do this, 2 = The school Does this but Could Do Better, 3 = The school Does this Very Well now). The mean score indicates where respondents are, on average, with regard to each statement. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 4.6% for any question.}

At Albert, 23% of the parent respondents claim that the school does not invite them to volunteer, while 17% believe that the school could do a better job in asking them to help out at school. In comparison with George, 7 % of the parent respondents claim that the school does not invite them to volunteer, while 11 % believe that the school could do a better job with this. As well, 66 % of the parent respondents at Albert and 58% of those at George claim that they have never volunteered at school or in their

child's classroom. Although a greater percentage of parents at Albert claim that the school does not invite them to volunteer at the school as opposed to George, the qualitative data obtained from the last section of the parent questionnaire indicates that many parents are not currently involved with volunteering in the schools. For example, parent respondents do not cite any specific examples of how they are currently involved in the schools. However, they provide ways that they would like to be more involved. For example, at Albert, parents say they would like to volunteer in various school activities; participate in fund raisers; tutor/help out in the library, and supervise at lunch hours in the school yard. At George, many parents claim that they would like to volunteer more in the classroom, help develop the outside playground, participate in fundraising, and purchase books for the library.

Information obtained from the focus group interviews supports this view. Parent respondents did not provide any specific examples of how they are currently involved with volunteering at school. In fact, one parent claims that she was turned down by her child's teacher when she asked to participate in the school during school hours. She said,

> At my child's school, parents have tried and tried and tried to be involved in the school lunch program. However, the teachers say they are happy to run it on their own. On different days, different teachers supervise the program and it seems to me as if teachers are not interested in parents being involved in hot lunch. (focus group interview)

Although much research on parental involvement in education documents different ways parents can volunteer in the schools, some parents have identified barriers that prevent them from becoming involved in the school. Being a single parent, working part-time, attending university, and their children's attitude towards parental involvement were common themes that emerged throughout the focus group and questionnaire data and speak to the hectic pace of family life today. One parent that participated in the focus group discussion asserted that her work schedule gives her less time and flexibility to participate in school events. She said,

> Personally, work is a barrier for me because I work five days a week and it's nearly impossible for me to get to school during the day. For something important, it could be arranged I suppose. My son was asking me just the other day if I went to "coffee or tea with the principal". I said "no" because I had to work. He replied by saying, " well then... what's the matter... isn't he your buddy?" (focus group interview)

The literature on parental involvement supports this view. Collins, Cooper, and Whitmore (1995) assert that lack of time on behalf of parents, as well as teachers and principals, was an obstacle which reduced the likelihood of parental involvement. For example, parents claim that work, family commitments and participation as volunteers in other community groups inhibited them from being involved in schools. However, according to Covey (1989), time is not the real issue. Effective personal management involves putting things first and organizing and executing life around priorities. If a lack of time prevents parents from being involved in their children's education, it may also signify a lack of commitment to their children's education.

Despite the fact that time has been mentioned in the literature as an obstacle to parental involvement in school activities, some parents believe that their child's attitude has also prevented them from getting involved. In the focus group discussion, parent respondents believe that their children are attempting to establish independence as they move out of elementary school. One parent claims that her child discouraged her from being present on school grounds. She said,

> I almost was in tears! I came to her school to pick her up for a dental appointment. She had only been at the school for two weeks and she was looking this way and that way so I tooted the horn. She got in the car and said, "never toot the horn at me again mom so close to school, my God, I wanted to pretend that you weren't my mother...I was just going to run back into the school, I didn't want anyone to see me getting in the car". (focus group interview)

According to Jackson and Cooper (1992), the opportunity for parents to stay intensely involved in school decreases as students become increasingly independent and as peers come to have greater influence. For example, the authors assert that as children go through adolescence, peer relationships, values, and standards dominate their lives, and parents exercise less and less influence on behaviour. This is a time when parents themselves are often at a loss as to how to react to the changing moods and behaviours of their children. As well, Eccles and Harold (cited in Takanishi ,1993), reaffirm this notion by asserting that the child's sex and age are important predictors in determining the extent of parental involvement. For example, parental involvement drops off rather dramatically as children move into middle school for a number of reasons including parents feeling: that young adolescents both desire and need independence; that the children do not want them to come to school; and that they are no

longer able to help their children with homework as it becomes too advanced and technical.

At the same time, research on parental involvement in education by Loucks (1992) indicates that it is important for parents to be in-school participants by attending athletic events, helping with fund-raising activities, and helping with proms, building floats, building sets, and similar activities where specific skills are needed. According to Loucks, this type of involvement can help make parents feel more positive about school. However, some research does not consistently document links between parents that are involved in their child's school and academic achievement. For example, Ho and Willms (1996) assert that there is little or no relationship between academic achievement and parental visits to the school, volunteer work, and attendance at school events. Despite this anomaly in the research, there are tangible benefits associated with family members volunteering in the school.

At Albert and George, many parents say that they do not volunteer at the schools. However, despite lack of time and their children's attitudes towards parental involvement in the schools, many assert that they would like to be more involved in volunteering. For example, parents would like to participate in fund raisers, tutoring children, helping out in the library, supervising at lunch hours in the school yard, and helping to develop the outside playground. Epstein (1995) documents some of the benefits associated with this type of involvement. They include numerous advantages for students, parents, and teachers: For students, they improve their skills in communicating with adults; show an increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or attention from

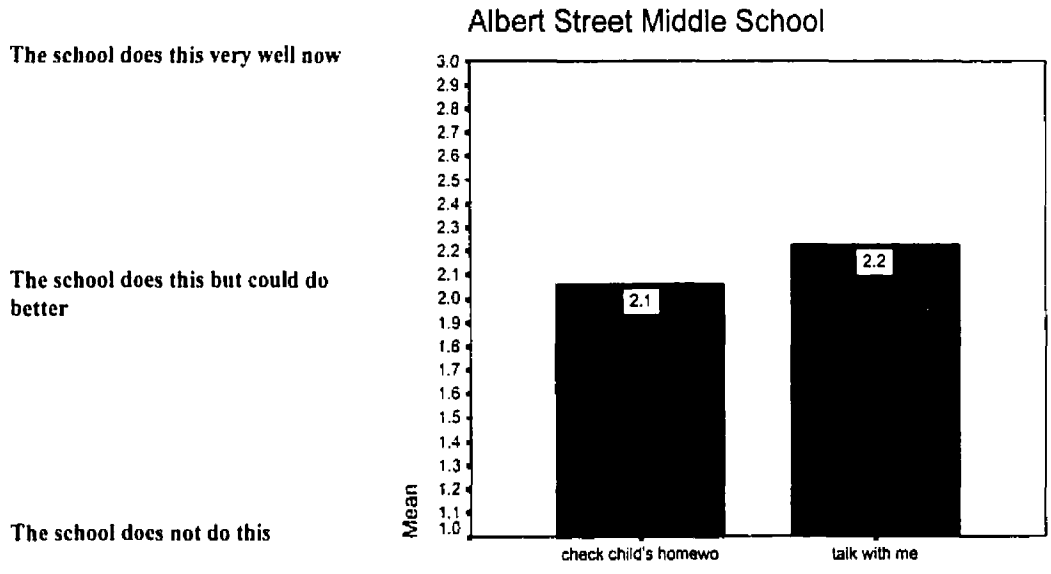
volunteers; and heighten their awareness of many talents, occupations, and contributions of parents and other volunteers. For parents, they improve their understanding of the teacher's job; display an increased comfort in school interactions and carryover of school activities at home; develop gains in specific skills of volunteer work; increase all-family awareness that families are welcomed and valued at school; and improve their self-confidence in ability to work in school and with children. For teachers, they improve their awareness of parent talents and interest in school and children; pay greater individual attention to students with help from volunteers; and display a readiness to involve families in new ways including those who do not volunteer at school.

Type Four : Learning at Home

With the support of teachers, family members can supervise and assist their children at home with homework and assignments and other school related activities. According to Epstein (1995), the type of involvement that families are most interested in is how they can help their children with learning at home. Figures 3.3 and 3.4 present the views of parents at Albert and George regarding their satisfaction with the ways both schools explain to them how to check their children's homework and assign homework that requires their children to talk with them about things learned in class.

Figure 3.3 : The extent to which parents feel Albert Street Middle School explains to them how to check their children's homework and assigns homework that requires their children to talk with them about things learned in class.

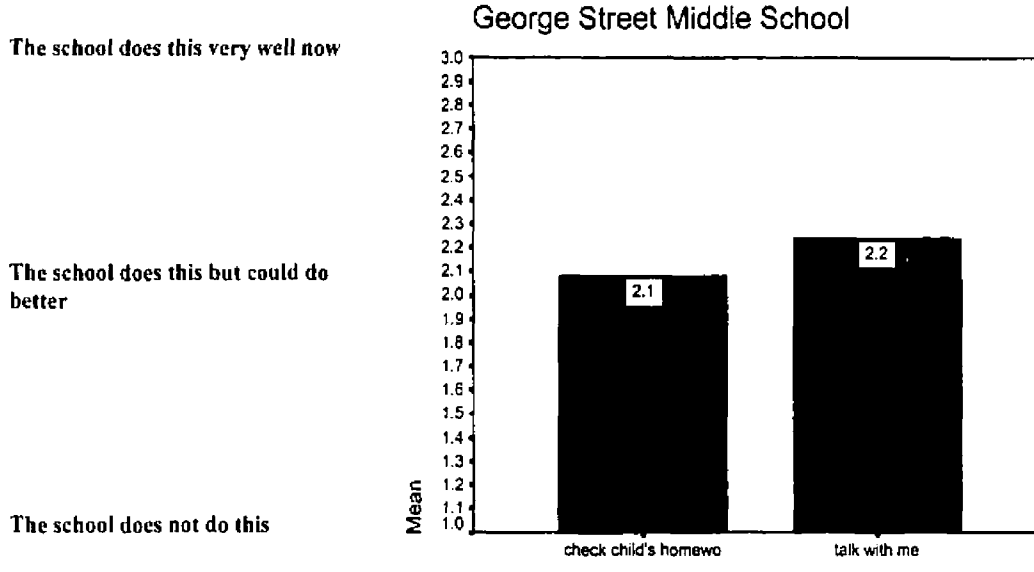
Figure 3.3



{The above diagram summarizes the ways that parents feel Albert Street Middle School explains to them how to check their children's homework and assigns homework that requires their children to talk with them about things learned in class. Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement by circling a category on a Likert scale of three points (1 = The school Does Not Do this, 2 = The school Does this but Could Do Better, 3 = The school Does this Very Well now). The mean score indicates where respondents are, on average, with regard to each statement. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 1.2% for any question.}

Figure 3.4 : The extent to which parents feel George Street Middle School explains to them how to check their children's homework and assigns homework that requires their children to talk with them about things learned in class.

Figure 3.4



{The above diagram summarizes the ways that parents feel George Street Middle School explains to them how to check their children's homework and assigns homework that requires their children to talk with them about things learned in class. Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement by circling a category on a Likert scale of three points (1 = The school Does Not Do this, 2 = The school Does this but Could Do Better, 3 = The school Does this Very Well now). The mean score indicates where respondents are, on average, with regard to each statement. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 4.9% for any question.}

At Albert, 32 % of the parent respondents claim that the school does not explain to them how to check their child's homework, while 31% assert that the school could do a better job. As well, 20% of the parents believe that the school does not assign homework that requires their children to talk with them about things learned in class and 36% claim that the school could do a better job. At George, 27% of the parent respondents assert that the school does not explain to them how to check their child's homework, while 37% believe the school could do a better job. As well, 14% of the parents believe that the school does not assign homework that requires their children to talk with them about things learned in class and 47% assert that the school could do a better job.

In this category of parental involvement, the percentages are relatively high indicating both schools could do more in explaining to parents how to check their children's homework and in assigning homework that requires their children to talk with them about things learned in class. Figures 3.3 and 3.4 indicate that many parents help their children with homework. For example, 56% of the parent respondents at Albert Street and 53% of those at George claim they help their children with homework many times. Only a small percentage indicated that they have never helped their children with homework.

According to the qualitative data obtained from the final section of the parent questionnaire, parents at both schools expressed concern regarding their capacity to help their children with homework. For example, parents with children taking French Immersion in school claim that their inability to speak French has inhibited them from

being as involved in homework as they would like to be. Information obtained from parent respondents during the focus group interviews supports this view. One parent said,

> My child's in French Immersion and that makes it hard for me. It's a late immersion program and I'm not bilingual and I find it hard to help my child with homework. (focus group interview)

As well, others assert that the math text book Interactions is too abstract, containing little structure and has frustrated them when they attempt to help their children with homework. One solution to this problem could involve teachers communicating the importance of this new math program to parents along with suggestions on how parents could assist their children at home with math. As well, teachers could provide parents with supplementary math activities to be done at home that accommodate for parents diverse interests, ideas, and goals for their children on an ongoing basis This is important because according to the literature, parents can play an active role in practising schoolwork with their children at home. For example, Stearns and Peterson (1973) assert that students improve academically when their parents tutor them at home. When parents learn how to teach their children, they not only give the children new skills, but also build their feelings of competence. This increased confidence motivates the children to perform better in school.

Many researchers on parental involvement in education have identified parental engagement at home as being the most effective type of involvement in terms of increased student achievement. A study conducted by Ballen and Moles (1994) reports that monitoring children's homework has been shown to increase academic

achievement. It is not necessary for parents to know all the answers. It is more important for parents to demonstrate their interest by providing a quiet, well-lit place for doing homework, encouraging children's efforts, being available for questions, and being willing to discuss materials the child is learning. Another study by Ho and Willms (1996) suggests that parental involvement at home, particularly in discussing school activities and helping children plan their programs, had the strongest relationship to academic achievement.

In fact, much research on parental involvement in education points to specific attitudes and behaviours that are related to improved academic performance. Clark (1983) discerned that parents of students that do well in school have distinct ways of interacting with their children. They create emotionally supportive home environments and provide reassurance when their children encounter failure. In another study, Clark (1993) lists different variables that contribute to children's academic development. These include parents: providing a quiet place for their children to study, sending the children to school regularly, providing a regular time for home-study activities, and expecting children to complete homework assignments.

This research indicates that parents do not need to know all the answers to their children's homework in order to help them succeed in school. Instead, monitoring their children's homework has been shown to increase academic achievement. For example, as indicated by the preceding review, it is important for parents to demonstrate their interest by providing a quiet place for their children to do homework, encourage their children's efforts, and be willing to discuss material their children are learning.

Other research provides specific examples of how schools are currently helping parents become more involved with students' learning at home. MacNeill (2000) devised a series of homework assignments that encourage parents to interact with their children. She asserts that there are three key components which characterize meaningful homework. These include: 1. homework which recognizes and respects the diversity in the home learning environments of children, 2. parents and children who complete the homework based on their home knowledge, and 3. parents and children who evaluated the homework and shared the evaluation with the teacher. She also claims that these homework activities help children and parents develop positive attitudes toward school and acquire the understanding that learning can take place at home as well as in school. Sanders (1999) describes the successful implementation of a homework telephone line that assists families' in monitoring their children's homework. Each teacher in the school has a code number which parents are given at the beginning of the school year. When a parent wants to know his or her child's homework assignment, the parent can call the homework line, enter the teacher's code number, and get relevant information. Epstein (1992) reports that the use of a cable channel which broadcasts a homework hotline and answers to questions on homework assignments has been effective in helping parents support their children's learning at home. A study conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (1997) asserts that, in England and Wales, schools are giving parents an outline plan of the year's work at the beginning of the school year so parents can offer both encouragement and resources at home.

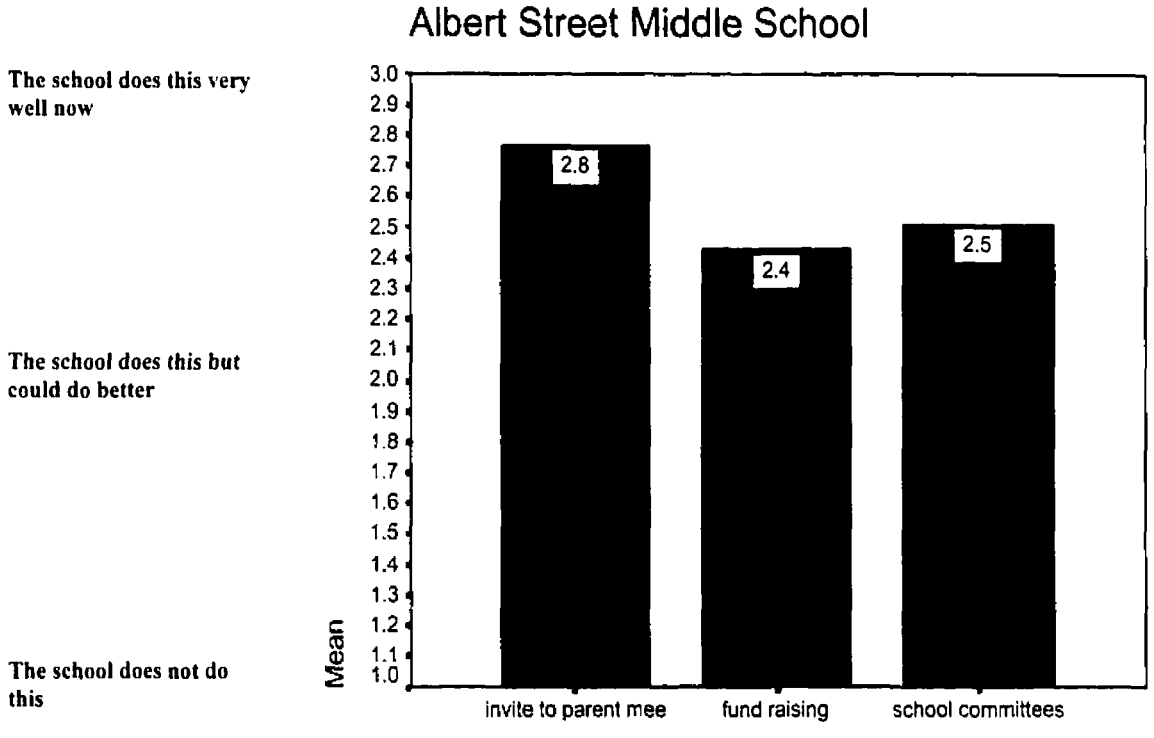
Together, these findings demonstrate the importance of schools reaching out to families and providing them with information on how they can take a direct role in their children's education. At Albert Street and George Street, parents believe that both schools could do a better job in explaining to them how to check their children's homework and in assigning homework that requires their children to talk with them about things learned in class. While French Immersion and Interactions math were noted by many parents as being barriers to involvement with homework, it is important to note that schools can address these obstacles. For example, schools can communicate to parents the importance of these different programs in their children's education and provide them with advice and suggestions on how to help their children at home with these subjects in a language they understand. Epstein (1995) claims that there are a variety of benefits associated with this type of involvement. These include numerous advantages for students, parents, and teachers. For students, they develop positive attitudes toward schoolwork; gain skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and class work; complete their homework; and view their parents more similar to teachers, and home more similar to school. For parents, they learn how to support, encourage, and help their children at home; improve their understanding of instructional programs at the school; become increasingly aware of their children as learners; and appreciate a variety of teaching skills. For teachers, they improve their abilities to design homework assignments; develop an awareness of family time; and display increased satisfaction with family involvement and support.

Type Five : Decision Making

In New Brunswick, schools include families as participants in school decisions, governance and advocacy through School Parent Advisory Committees (SPACs), District Parent Advisory Councils (DPACs), and other parent organizations. Training and information should be provided to the parents so they can make the most of those opportunities. This opportunity should be open to all segments of the community, not just people who have the most time and energy to spend on school affairs. Figures 3.5 and 3.6 illustrate the views of parents at Albert and George regarding their satisfaction with the ways both schools invite them to parent meetings, ask them to help out with fund raising, and include them on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement.

Figure 3.5 : The extent to which parents at Albert Street Middle School feel the school invites them to parent meetings, asks them to help out with fund raising, and includes them on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement.

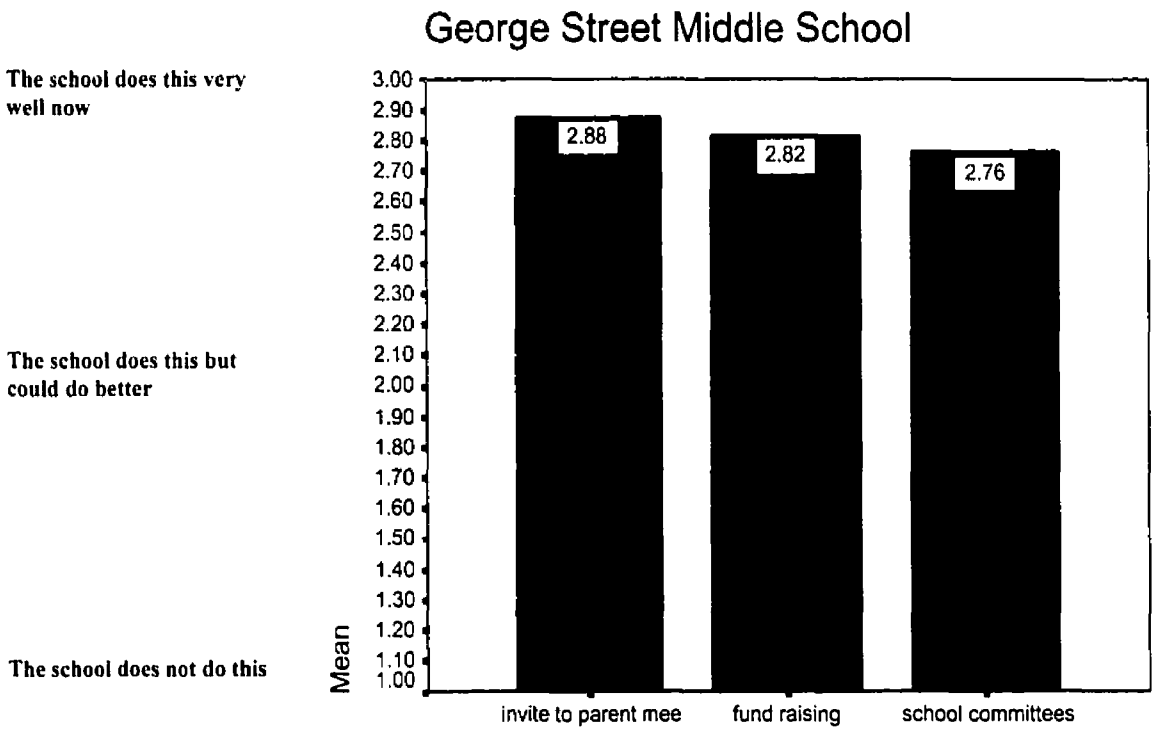
Figure 3.5



{The above diagram summarizes the ways that parents feel Albert Street Middle School invites them to parent meetings, asks them to help out with fund raising, and includes them on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement. Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement by circling a category on a Likert scale of three points (1 = The school Does Not Do this, 2 = The school Does this but Could Do Better, 3 = The school Does this Very Well now). The mean score indicates where respondents are, on average, with regard to each statement. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 6.6% for any question.}

Figure 3.6 : The extent to which parents at George Street Middle School feel the school invites them to parent meetings, asks them to help out with fund raising, and includes them on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement.

Figure 3.6



{The above diagram summarizes the ways that parents feel George Street Middle School invites them to parent meetings, asks them to help out with fund raising, and includes them on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement. Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement by circling a category on a Likert scale of three points (1 = The school Does Not Do this, 2 = The school Does this but Could Do Better, 3 = The school Does this Very Well now). The mean score indicates where respondents are, on average, with regard to each statement. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 4.9% for any question.}

At Albert, 82% of the parent respondents claim that the school does well in inviting them to parent meetings, 62% believe the school does a good job in asking them to help out with fund raising, and 65% assert the school does well in including them on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement. At George, 90% of the parent respondents claim that the school does well in inviting them to parent meetings, 87% believes the school does a good job in asking them to help with fund raising, and 81% asserts the school does well in including them on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement.

For the purposes of this discussion, the term "governance" includes any activity which provides parents the opportunity to take part in decision making about school programs. This may include being a member on a School Parent Advisory Council, District Parent Advisory Council, or school committee/organization. Currently, school governance is a very popular topic in New Brunswick. In fact, if one looks across the country, educational governances issues have dominated the agendas of most provinces. Newspapers, magazines, and governments continually describe and demand increased parental participation in education by including parents in decision making. For example, *The Green Paper*, released by the New Brunswick Department of Education (2000), places increased emphasis on restoring parents and other community members to the center of the decision making process. It calls for suggestions from the general public on how New Brunswick can better define the shape of its current educational governance framework.

According to Joyce Epstein's six different types of family involvement in education, school governance definitely deserves to be a topic of study. However, the overbearing emphasis placed solely on this type of involvement provides us with a very narrow definition of parental involvement in education. For example, other areas such as parenting, volunteering, learning at home, communicating, and collaborating with the community are equally important and have been given far less attention by the New Brunswick Department of Education. In fact, the study conducted by Ho and Willms (1996) indicates that there is a stronger relationship between student academic achievement and parental involvement at home, particularly in discussing school activities and helping children plan their programs as opposed to involvement at the school which involved volunteering and attendance at parent meetings. As well, Berla, Henderson, and Kerewsky (1989) contend that parents should be involved in many different ways in their children's education. For example, parents should be homework helpers, good listeners, and effective communicators with their children regarding education.

Given this research base, it is pertinent to ask why unprecedented efforts are being made in the Province of New Brunswick to boost the role of parents in school governance. My research clearly indicates that parents are currently satisfied with their level of involvement in school decision making at the school level. For example, 65% of the parent respondents at Albert and 81% of those at George are currently happy with the ways both schools include parents on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement. As well, during the focus group interviews, when

parents were asked to describe their satisfaction with the different ways both schools currently involve them, no one mentioned school parent advisory committees. The qualitative data obtained at the last section of the questionnaire supports this view. When parents were asked, "What is one thing that you or your family could do to help this school?", many responded by saying that they would like to volunteer more in the school by participating in school fund raisers, helping out in the library, and taking part in school trips. No references were made to joining school parent advisory committees or other parent organizations.

It is important to note, however, that school governance refers to all those who have the authority to make school-based decisions. In New Brunswick, there is a debate that much of the school governance authority rests in the hands of the provincial government. According to an article published in *The Daily Gleaner* (March 22, 2000), parent advisory council members Gina Atkinson and Marilyn Noble and University of New Brunswick education professors Alan Sears and Marian Small claim that this is fundamentally undemocratic as the school governance structure should include input from all citizens in New Brunswick. While parental governance in education is seen as a cure that will lead ultimately more effective schools and school improvement, the collective interests of parents may not play a substantive role at the departmental levels. Therefore, research is needed that provides information on the effectiveness of the departmental office in communicating and responding to the needs and interests of parents so that parental governance in education can more purposely define its role in the educational field.

Research on parental involvement in education suggests that the most successful parent participation efforts are those which offer parents a variety of different roles. Brandt (1989) supports this view by asserting that any one type of parental involvement, whether it be parent-teacher conferences, parent groups, or volunteering efforts, cannot cover the full range of ways parents and teachers should work together for their children's education. He also claims that when parents help their child at home in a particular subject, it's likely to increase the student's achievement in that subject. By contrast, involving a few parents in decision-making on school committees probably will not increase student achievement, at least in the short term.

The lack of evidence connecting parental involvement in governance and student achievement should not be taken to mean that parents should not be included in some aspects of school decision making. Parent respondents at Albert and George claim they are currently satisfied with the ways both schools currently involve them in the decision-making process. According to Epstein (1995), there are a variety of benefits associated with this type of involvement. These include numerous advantages for students, parents, and teachers. For students, they become more aware of the representation of their parents in school decisions and understand that their rights are protected. For parents, they provide input into policies that affect their children's education; have a feeling of ownership for the school; share experiences and make connections with other families; and become more aware of school, district, and state policies. For teachers, they become aware of parent perspectives in policy development and decision-making, and view parents as equal partners on committees and in leadership roles.

Type Six : Collaborating with the Community

Schools can provide families with information on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services offered by other agencies. They can also help families and community groups provide services to the community, such as recycling, art, music, drama and other activities for seniors, etc. Figures 3.7 and 3.8 illustrate the views of parents at Albert and George regarding their satisfaction with the ways both schools provide them with information on community services they may want to use.

Figure 3.7 and 3.8 : The extent to which parents at Albert and George Street Middle Schools feel both schools provide them with information on community services they may want to use.

Figure 3.7 →

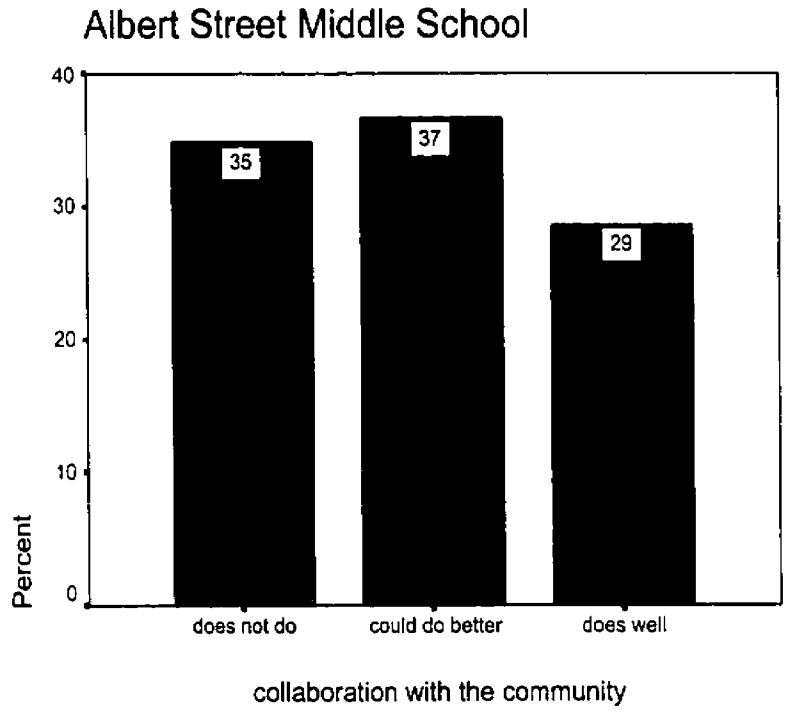
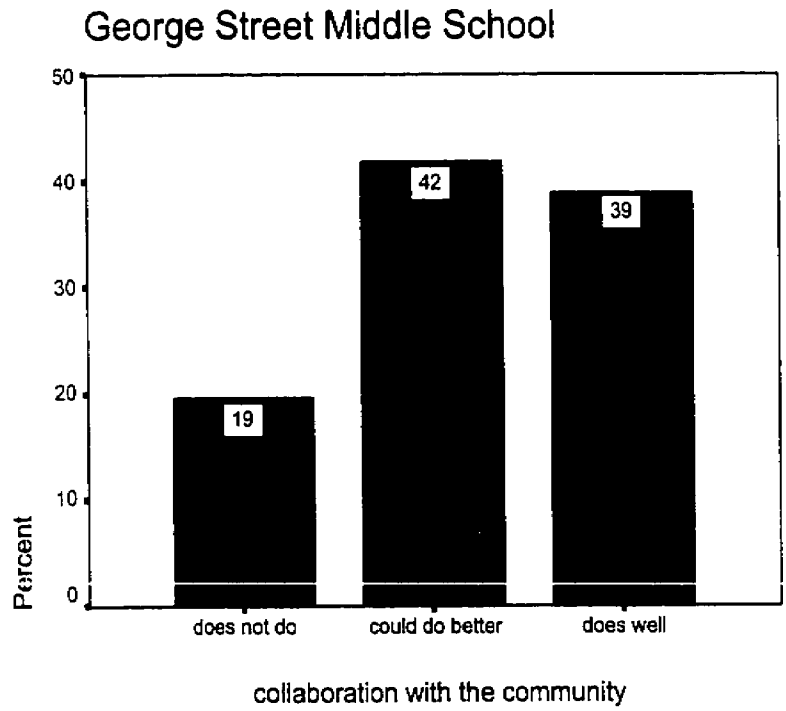


Figure 3.8 →



At both Albert and George, many parent respondents believe the schools could do a better job in providing them with information about community services they may want to use. For example, 35 % of the parent respondents at Albert believe the school does not provide them with any information on community services, 37 % believe the school could do a better job with this, and 29% assert that the school is currently doing a good job. At George, 19% believe that the school does not provide them with any information on community services, 42% contend that the school could do a better job with this, and 39% believes the school does well.

According to information obtained from the focus group interviews, parents claim that both schools do some things to involve the community in their children's education. For example, parents mentioned presentations done at school by local community groups such as the YMCA and Lion's Club. As well, parents mentioned field trips to the museum and local library. However, many parent respondents would like to improve their collaboration and exchanges with community groups, individuals, and different public agencies. In the words of one parent,

> I think that any opportunity for increased education from the community would be welcome. We do lots of in-services at my work place so why can't teachers do the same thing, have different people from the community come in and give children different perspectives on things. This would give children the opportunity to learn about things happening in the community. There are lots of partnerships that could take place that don't. For example, my son is interested in astronomy. Are there people out there that can help? The university is only a couple blocks away and I think we should be tapping into this resource more often. Maybe this is where parents could be more involved. (focus group interview)

This suggests that creating links with the school and the community is a very important component of parental involvement in education and one that should not be overlooked.

Research on parental involvement in education provides other suggestions that illustrate how parents and schools can collaborate with the community. Eccles and Harold (1993) claim that agencies and businesses may join with the schools to support children's educational experiences. For example, mental and physical health services are offered to a school by Healthstart (an agency in St.Paul, Minnesota). As well, Epstein and Connors (1995) claim that community resources may be tapped to provide parent education on adolescent development; to facilitate communication by getting local radio or television stations to assist with announcements; and to extend participation on school committees by including business representatives. Other activities include "educational parties" for families in the homes of middle grade students to increase parental involvement in education or community agency fairs to introduce families to health, education, recreation, job training, or other services. Sanders (1999) adds to this by asserting that a middle school in the United States was able to provide students with extra counselling through partnerships with a local university and counselling agency. By creating a partnership with a national volunteer organization, another school was able to create a parent room where parents can meet and relax with a cup of coffee.

Indeed, one cannot discuss parental involvement in education without mentioning the strong role that the community can play. At Albert and George, many parent respondents believe that both schools could do a better job in providing them with information on community services they may want to use. Epstein (1995) documents specific benefits that are associated with this type of involvement. These include advantages for students, parents, and teachers. For students, they increase their skills and talents through enriched curricular experiences; become more aware of career opportunities; and take greater pride in the community. For parents, they interact with other families in community activities; increase their knowledge and use of local resources; and develop pride for their contributions to the community. For teachers, they become more aware of community resources to enrich the curriculum; become more knowledgeable in referring children and families to needed services; and enhance their pride in the community.

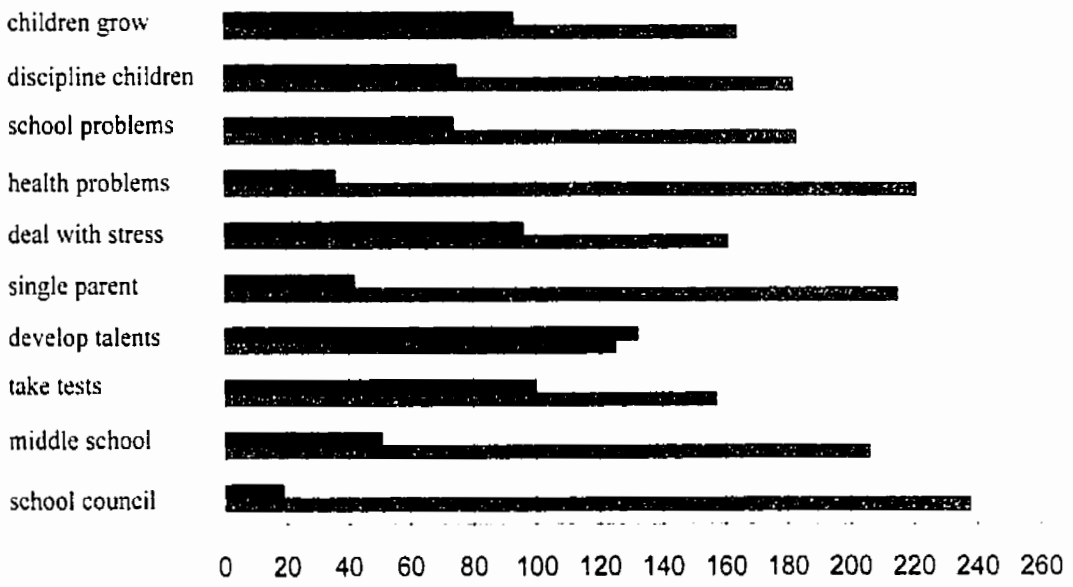
Workshop Topics at Albert and George

Question Five of the parent questionnaire provided parents with a list of various workshop topics and they were asked to indicate which topics interested them. Parents responded by checking either "yes = 1" or "no = 2". Figures 3.9 and 4.0 display the results using clustered bar graphs. The darker shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that would like to attend the workshops, while the lighter shaded bars represent the parent respondents that do not want to attend workshops. Below is a list of the workshop topics that parents were asked to respond to.

- How children grow and develop at my child's age
- How to discipline children
- Solving school problems and preventing dropping out
- Preventing health problems
- How to deal with stress
- Raising children as a single parent
- How to help my child develop his/her talents
- Helping children take tests
- Understanding middle schools
- How to serve on a school committee or council

Figure 3.9 : Of the 257 parent respondents at Albert Street School, the following chart illustrates the number of parents that want and do not want to attend workshops.

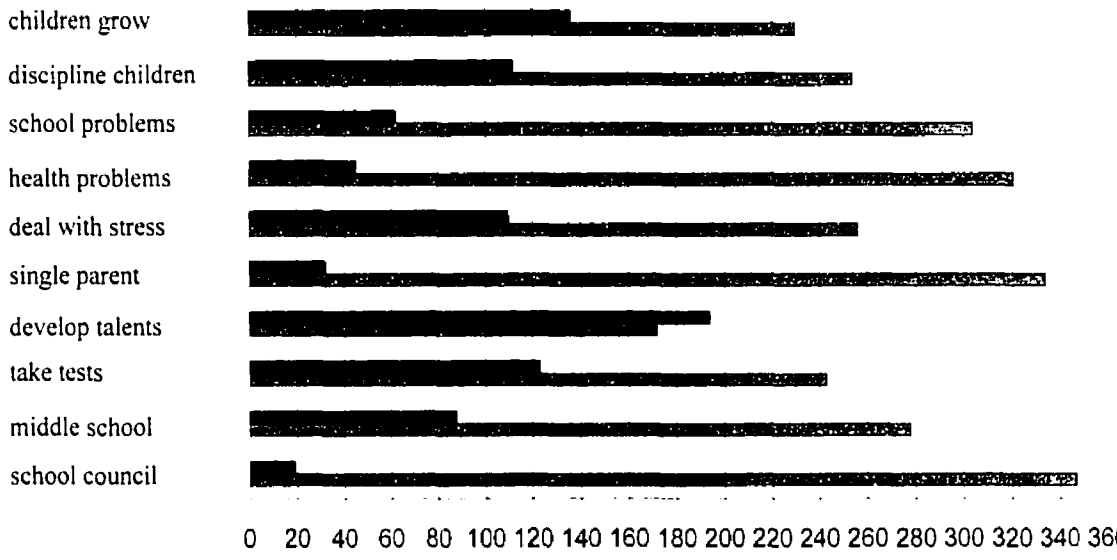
Figure 3.9



(Darker shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that would like to attend workshops on various subjects. Lighter shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that do not want to attend workshops. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 2.5% for any question)

Figure 4.0 : Of the 366 parent respondents at George Street School, the following chart illustrates the number of parents that want and do not want to attend workshops.

Figure 4.0



(Darker shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that would like to attend workshops on various subjects. Lighter shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that do not want to attend workshops. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 2.2% for any question)

These clustered bar graphs show distinct similarities between both schools and indicate that parents are generally uninterested in the workshop topics that were presented in this section of the questionnaire. Of some interest to parents were topics on how to help children develop their talents, how children grow and develop, how to deal with stress, and helping children take tests. Other topics such as understanding middle schools, solving school problems and preventing dropout, preventing health problems, and raising children as a single parent received less emphasis. Overwhelmingly, parent respondents did not want to attend a workshop on how to serve on a school committee or council. As well, an examination of the frequency data suggests that many parents respondents do not want to attend workshops.

These results indicate that many parents do not want to attend workshops on the various topics listed in this section of the questionnaire. As well, 94% of the parent respondents at Albert and 95 % of those at George indicated that they did not attend a workshop at the schools in the past year. However, the Albert Street School Parent Advisory Committee and George Street School Parent Advisory Committee included an extra section at the end of the parent questionnaire listing different workshop topics that parents could check to indicate if they were interested in them. Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 display these results.

Here is a list of the workshop topics that parents were asked to respond to.

- Fitting in: social skills and peer pressure
- Fitting in: helping the teen with special needs
- Fitting in: gifted kids
- School yard bullying
- Testing the boundaries: adolescent rebellion
- Communication, trust, and mutual respect
- Communicating with the school
- Homework: supporting academic success
- Social isolation: the loner
- Helping your teen cope with divorce
- Adolescent sexuality
- Keeping your sense of humour
- Mood swings and anxiety
- Body image and adolescence
- Media influences & young teens
- Sibling relations during the teen years
- Setting appropriate limits and consequences for your teen
- Conflict resolution with your teen
- Ways for parents to get involved in the school
- Extracurricular activity options
- Your teen's social life: what's appropriate?
- Helping your teen cope with loss
- Realities of substance abuse
- The parental juggling act: finding balance in your life

Figure 4.1 and 4.2 : The workshop topics provided by the Albert Street Middle School SPAC. Of the 257 parent respondents at Albert Street School, the following charts illustrate the number of parents that want and do not want to attend workshops.

Figure 4.1

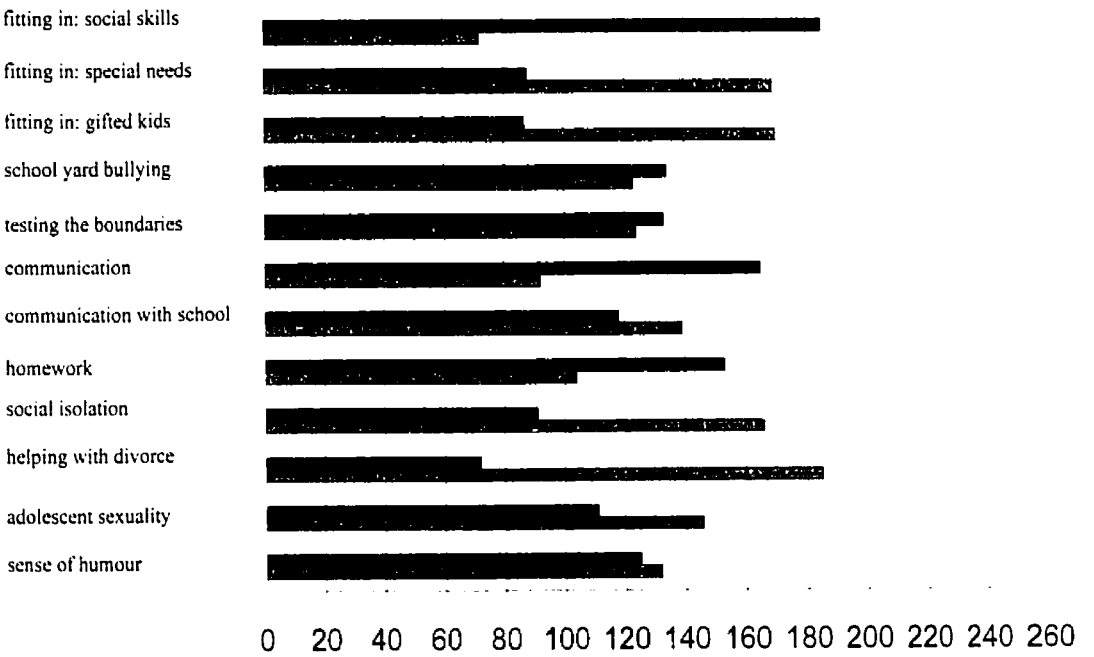
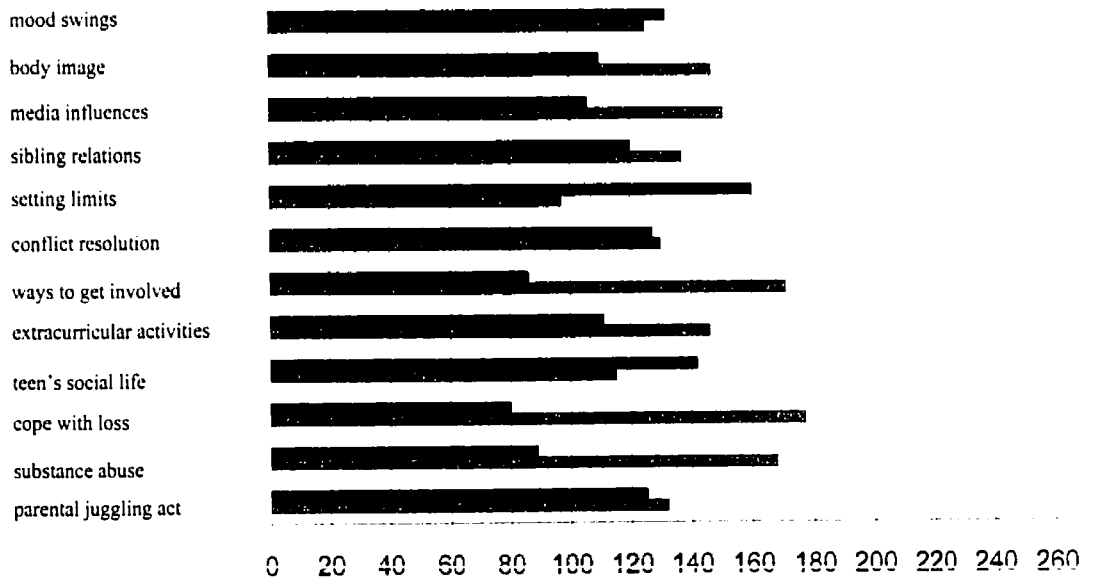


Figure 4.2



(Darker shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that would like to attend workshops on various subjects. Lighter shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that do not want to attend the workshops. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 35% for any question)

Figure 4.3 and 4.4 : The workshop topics provided by the George Street Middle School SPAC. Of the 366 parent respondents at George Street School, the following charts illustrate the number of parents that want and do not want to attend workshops.

Figure 4.3

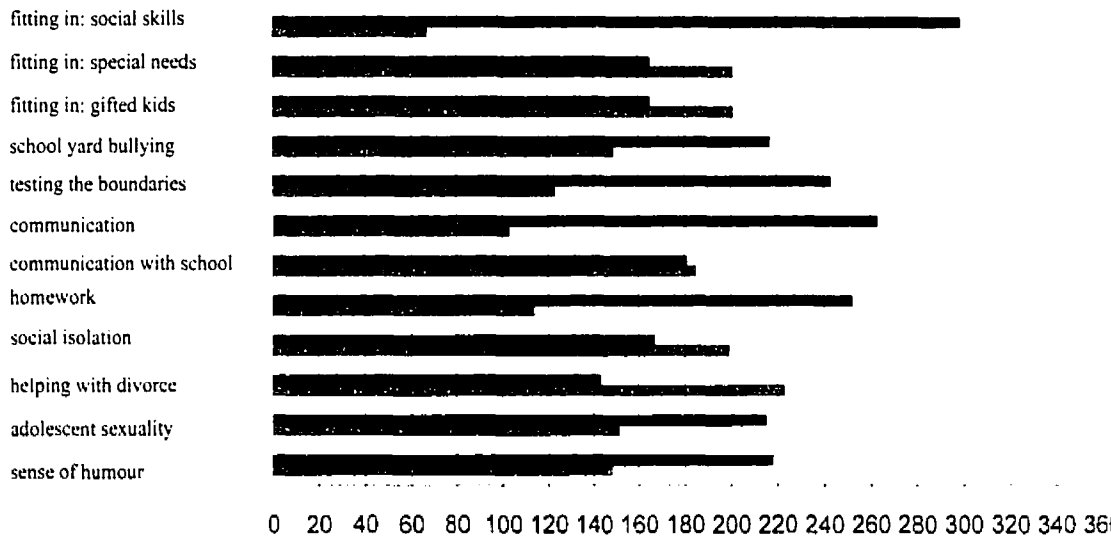
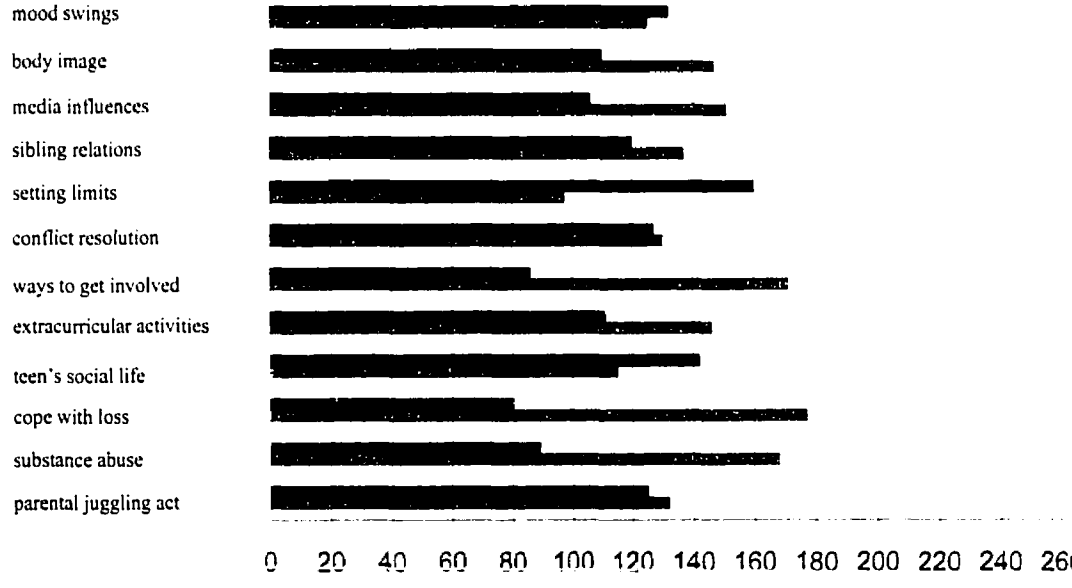


Figure 4.4



(Darker shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that would like to attend workshops on various subjects. Lighter shaded bars represent the number of parent respondents that do not want to attend the workshops. Nonrespondents were disregarded and did not exceed 23% for any question)

The results from both schools display remarkable similarities and illustrate which workshop topics parents are most interested in. For example, parent respondents at both schools claim they would like to attend workshops on the following: fitting in: helping their teens with social skills and peer pressure; communication, trust, and mutual respect; homework: supporting academic success; setting appropriate limits and consequences for your teen; and your teen's social life: what's appropriate. Of little interest to parents were workshops that deal with helping their teens cope with divorce, the realities of substance abuse, helping their teens cope with loss, ways for parents to get involved in the school, fitting in: gifted teens, and fitting in: helping teens with special needs. However, an analysis of the frequency data for this section of the questionnaire suggests that many parent respondents are not interested in workshops.

The information obtained from the focus group interviews supports this view. When parent respondents were asked if they are currently happy with the ways that both schools currently involve them, no one mentioned that they would like to attend more workshops. As well, the qualitative data obtained from the final section of the parent questionnaire suggests that many parents do not want to attend workshops. For example, when parents were asked to describe the best things that the school could do to help them with their children, many replied by saying they would like more detailed report cards and having the school provide extra tutoring for their children. However, none of the parent respondents requested workshops.

Despite the fact that many parent respondents claim to be uninterested in attending workshops at the school, according to the literature which currently exists on parental involvement in education, workshops can provide parents with a good training ground to expand their knowledge of the school and understand more about their children. According to Winebrenner (1996), it is very important for schools to offer classes in effective parenting, even if only a few people show up. She emphasizes the importance of providing parents with "information nights" on various educational topics, learning styles, and advice on creating and maintaining positive parent-child relationships. As well, Berla, Henderson, and Kerewsky (1989) assert that one of the key factors parents can use to evaluate their children's middle school is if the school is making an effort to keep parents informed about what to expect from their children during these years. This may take the form of workshops, information sessions, or open houses.

Chapter 5 : Conclusion and Recommendations

The information obtained from the parent and teacher questionnaires provide a valuable insight into the different ways that parents are currently involved in their children's education along with teachers' perceptions of parental involvement. Using Epstein's six different types of parental involvement in education, I have documented how parents are involved at each level. Figure 4.5 provides a brief overview of the ways parent respondents believe both schools involve them in relation to Epstein's framework.

Figure 4.5 : Summary of how parents believe Albert and George Street Schools involve them in relation to Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement in Education

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Type One: **Parenting**

-Many parent respondents at Albert and George believe both schools could do a better job in helping them understand their child's stage of development. For example, many parents assert that they are concerned about their children's safety and would like to receive more information from the school on how to talk with their children at home about topics that include the following : bullying, teasing, peer pressure, alcohol, drugs, and smoking. As well, many parents say that they would like to receive more information on how to talk with their children about school violence.

Type Two: **Communicating**

- Many parent respondents at Albert and George believe both schools do a very good job in keeping them informed about things happening at school. For example, voice mail messages, school newsletters, and parent-teacher conferences were ranked highly by respondents as effective communication tools. However, many parents claim that they would like to receive more information from the schools when their children do something well or improve.

Type Three: **Volunteering**

- Many parent respondents at Albert and George claim that they would like to be more involved in volunteering. For example, parents at both schools assert they would like to participate more often in fund raisers, tutoring children, helping out in the library, supervising at lunch hours in the school yard, and helping to develop an outside playground. However, many parents also claim that there are specific barriers that prevent them from being as involved in the school as they would like to be. For example, lack of time, being a single parent, attending university, and their children's attitude towards parental involvement at school during school hours were common themes that emerged throughout the data and speak to the hectic pace of family life today.

Type Four: **Learning at Home**

- Many parent respondents at Albert and George believe that both schools could do a better job in explaining to them how to check their children's homework and in assigning homework that requires their children to talk with them about things learned in class. French Immersion and Interactions Math were noted by many parents as being obstacles that prevented them from being involved in their children's homework.

Type Five: **Decision-Making**

- Many parent respondents at Albert and George believe that both schools do a good job in involving them in school decision-making. However, recent reform initiatives by the New Brunswick Department of Education places an increased emphasis on boosting the role of parents in decision-making. This is interesting because my research indicates that parents are currently happy with the ways they are involved in decision-making . Instead, equal emphasis should be given to other areas of involvement such as parenting, volunteering, learning at home, communicating, and collaborating with the community.

Type Six: **Collaborating with the Community**

- Many parent respondents at Albert and George believe that both schools could do a better job in providing them with information about community services they may want to use. They claim that both schools currently do some things to involve the community in their children's education. For example, parents mentioned presentations done at school by local community groups such as the YMCA and Lion's Club. However, many parents would like to see this type of involvement extended to include partnerships with the university.

Overall, the information obtained from the parent questionnaire suggests that parents are generally happy with the ways that both schools involve them in the education of their children. For example, many parents at Albert and George believe that both schools are very good, they feel welcome at the schools, and assert that the teachers care about their children. As well, my research indicates that parents, in general, are interested in their children's education and, in particular with the progress made by their own child. For example, many parents would like to receive more information from the schools when their children do something well or improve. Parents would also like to receive more information from the school explaining how they can check their children's homework and would like to see both schools assign more homework that requires their children to talk with them about things learned in school. The different categories presented in the parent questionnaire allowed me to better understand and measure the different forms of parental involvement that currently exist at Albert and George Street Middle Schools.

The teacher questionnaires administered at both schools were also very useful in providing information that is needed to build relationships among families, schools, and communities. For example, as indicated by Figures 1.7 and 1.8, it is interesting to note that 100% of the teacher respondents at both schools consider parental involvement to be important for a good school. However, 77.7% of the respondents at Albert and 83.3% of those at George assert that they need in-service education to implement effective parent involvement practices. This indicates that teachers recognize the need to develop skills to involve families in their children's education. However, it also suggests that

training is required to prepare teachers to work effectively with families.

Both parent and teacher questionnaires have provided an effective guide for targeting specific areas where intervention is needed to increase parental involvement in their children's education. Figure 4.6 outlines several recommendations that have emerged from the research and suggests ways to improve family involvement in education.

Figure 4.6 : Recommendations to Improve Family Involvement in Education at Albert and George Street Middle Schools

- **Emphasis needs to be placed on involving parents in many different ways in their children's education in addition to school governance**
- **Overcome the barrier of time**
- **Appropriate training for teachers**
- **More frequent and positive contact between the home and school**
- **Information form the home to the school on how parents can talk with their children about school violence and safety issues**
- **Teacher recognition for time spent on parental involvement activities**
- **Teachers could provide parents with useful suggestions on how to help their children at home with homework**
- **Home visits to encourage communication between the home and the school**
- **Establish a homework hotline to help keep parents informed about school related matters and provide extra help for students with regard to assignments**
- **Provide parents with more information about community services they may want to use**

In New Brunswick, educational governance has dominated the agenda of practices to increase parental involvement in education. However, my research indicates that parents and teachers are currently satisfied with their level of involvement in decision-making at the school level. It is important to note that research on parental involvement in education suggests that family engagement in their children's education works best when parents are given a variety of different roles to play. Other areas of involvement such as parenting, volunteering, communicating, learning at home, and collaborating with the community should not be neglected.

At both Albert and George, parents and teachers also indicated that time is a barrier to family engagement in education. For example, parents say that being a single parent, working part-time, and attending university gives them less time and flexibility to be involved in their children's education. Teachers' schedules are also restrictive and many indicated that lack of time prevents them from involving parents in useful ways. According to the literature on parental involvement in education, schools can be flexible in scheduling parent meetings and events to allow all parents to take part and meet, at least occasionally. For teachers, it is important to provide staff development and allocate time to enable them to work effectively with families as partners in the educational process. As well, schools could provide time during the school day for teachers to meet with parents or visit them at their homes. Freeing up teachers from routine duties, such as lunchroom supervision, is one way of providing teachers with time to meet students' family members.

Teachers at both Albert and George claim that they need in-service to implement effective parent involvement practices. According to the literature, it is important for teachers to receive appropriate training, obtain replicable examples of activities and programs they can model, and attain support from administrators and other school personnel. This training should be ongoing and emphasize the benefits of family partnerships with the school. Teaching is more rewarding and successful when teachers have supportive relationships with their students' families.

At Albert and George Street Middle Schools, parents say that both schools can do a better job in contacting them when their children do something well or improve. Many respondents claim that are mainly contacted when there are problems or trouble with their children. According to the research on parental involvement, it is important to let parents know about the positive things that their children are doing in the classroom. This may take the form of telephone calls or written notes to parents. As well, teachers and principals could work together to set up a weekly classroom report system to report students' progress and respond to parents' concerns.

In light of recent shootings at schools in both Canada and the United States, parents at Albert and George Street Middle Schools are concerned about school violence and safety issues. They would also like to receive more information from the school on how to talk with their children at home about such topics as bullying, teasing, peer pressure, alcohol, drugs, and smoking.

According to the teacher respondents at Albert and George, many believe that they should receive recognition for time spent on parent involvement activities. The literature on parental involvement in education supports this view. Providing stipends or compensatory time off for teachers to meet with parents or visit them at their homes is an acceptable means of forming a strong network of support between the home and school.

At Albert and George Street Middle Schools, parent respondents believe that both schools could do a better job in explaining to them how to check their children's homework and in assigning homework that requires their children to talk with them about things learned in class. Research on parental involvement in education indicates that teachers should devise homework assignments that encourage parents to participate and interact with their children. As well, many parents at Albert and George say that French Immersion and Interactions math were barriers that prevented them from being involved in helping with homework at home. Here, schools can provide families with advice and suggestions on how to help their children at home with these subjects in a language they understand.

Parent respondents at Albert and George Street Middle Schools claim that teachers have never visited them at home. However, research on parental involvement in education suggests that it is important to encourage activities that bring the school to the parents. For example, home visits can be effective in reaching parents who are impossible to reach otherwise, welcome new families to the school, report on student progress, or survey parents for their views on particular school-related topics. It is

important to note that home visits can be conducted by many individuals. Some of these include: teachers, teachers' aides, or trained volunteers.

Both Albert and George Middle Schools currently have voice mail which is a highly efficient method of providing information to parents on topics such as school activities, events, or even school policies. However, this is not a form of direct, two-way communication between the home and school. Research on parental involvement in education provides us with another way that new technologies can be useful in keeping parents informed with school-related matters. For example, a homework hotline could be established whereby parents and children could call to get help with questions about homework assignments. This could involve forming a partnership with the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick.

At both Albert and George Street Middle Schools, many parent respondents believe both schools could do a better job in providing them with information about community services they may want to use. For example, parents mentioned they would like to improve their collaboration and exchanges with community groups, individuals, and different public agencies such as the YMCA, Lion's Club, and the University of New Brunswick. Research on parental involvement in education supports this view by providing other suggestions that illustrate how parents and schools can collaborate with the community. Some include forming partnerships with businesses and community resources that provide parents with information on adolescent development or extra counselling for students.

Areas of Future Study

This research has provided a "snap shot" of current parental involvement practices at two middle schools in Fredericton, New Brunswick. As well, it has documented the attitudes and perceptions of both parents and teachers regarding family engagement in the education of their children. However, further research is needed in order to forge the possibilities for future success with regard to parental involvement in education programs and practices. Thus, this section proposes suggestions for future researchers in the field to consider.

More research is needed to understand the importance of the different types of parental involvement in education. My observation is that all types of parental involvement in education are beneficial for students. For example, research indicates that parental involvement works best when parents are involved in a variety of ways. However, further research should reveal what types of parental involvement contribute most to student achievement. It may be that specific types of involvement are more important to student achievement than others.

Although my intent was not to focus solely on school governance, it is a very relevant topic which is being emphasized by the New Brunswick Department of Education. There is an ongoing need to assess its progress by compiling the attitudes and perceptions of parents, teachers, department officials, and community members regarding school governance. My research suggests that both parents and teachers are satisfied with educational governance in its current form at the school level. However, I recommend a study that examines their satisfaction with governance issues at the

departmental levels in regard to public accountability. As well, one might expect future studies to document and further justify parental involvement in school decision-making.

Little research exists on the similarities and differences which exist between parental involvement in education in urban and rural schools. A study examining the discrepancy between both settings would be useful in pointing to characteristics that are more common in some areas than elsewhere. This is important because the different types of parental involvement in education may not be beneficial to all schools. In fact, parental involvement programs may work best when they respond to distinct features of the locations they serve.

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Appendix One : Teacher Questionnaire

November 1999

Dear Teacher:

Our school in conjunction with Paul Caines (graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick) is currently working to improve ways that schools and families can help each other and help all children succeed in school. The purpose of this questionnaire is to guide our planning, to let you offer additional ideas and suggestions, and to provide a current "snapshot" of the different parental involvement practices being employed in the school. In order to elicit your viewpoints on this, we are providing you with a copy of our questionnaire.

Please note that all information you provide will be strictly anonymous and confidential. No individual will ever be identified. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Of course, you may skip any question, but we hope you will answer them all. Responses will be grouped to give this school a "portrait" of present practices, opinions, and trends. To make the results useful for our school, however, we need every teacher's ideas and experiences. We are counting on you to help.

This questionnaire has been reviewed and approved by the director of School District #18 and the Faculty of Education Ethics Review Committee. If you have any questions about the questionnaire, please feel free to contact me by phone 454-9753 or email b3xs @ unb.ca.

After the study is completed, we will share your school's results with you in a summary report. The results will also be published in a Master's thesis.

Please complete the survey and return it to : _____

You may seal it in an envelope if you wish.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP !

Sincerely,

_____

Paul Caines

NOTE: In all questions in the booklet, "parent" means the adult in the family who has the most contact with the school about the child.Please feel free to expand your answers in the margins or back page of the booklet.

*** If you are interested in participating in a group discussion (with other teachers) on the topic "parental involvement in education" please provide your name and phone number on the line below***

Q-1. The first question asks for your professional judgement about parental involvement. Please circle the one choice for each item that best represents your opinion and experience.

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree	Not Sure	Agree		Strongly Agree
a. Parent involvement is important for a good school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Most parents know how to help their children on schoolwork at home.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. This school has an active and effective parent organization.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. Every family has some strengths that could be tapped to increase student success in school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. All parents could learn ways to assist their children on schoolwork at home, if shown how.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f. Parent involvement can help teachers be more effective with more students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g. Teachers should receive recognition for time spent on parent involvement activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h. Parents of children at this school want to be involved more than they are now at most grade levels.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
i. Teachers do not have the time to involve parents in very useful ways.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
j. Teachers need in-service education to implement effective parent involvement practices.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
k. Parent involvement is important for student success in school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
l. This school views parents as important partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
m. The community values education for all students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
n. This school is known for trying new and unusual approaches to improve the school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
o. Mostly when I contact parents, it's about problems or trouble.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
p. In this school, teachers play a large part in most school decisions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
q. The community supports the school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
r. Compared to other schools, this school has one of the best school climates for teachers, students, and parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Q-2. Teachers contact their students' families in different ways. Please estimate the percentage of **your students' families** that you contacted this year in these ways:

a. Letter or memo	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
b. Telephone	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
c. Meeting at school	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
d. Scheduled parent-teacher conference	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
e. Home visit	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
f. Meeting in the community	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
g. Report card pick-up	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
h. Performances, sports, or other events	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All

Q-3. Some teachers involve parents (or others) as volunteers at the school building. Please check the ways that you use volunteers *in your classroom and in your school this year.* Please **check** all that apply.

A. In my **CLASSROOM**, volunteers...

____ (a) I **DO NOT** use classroom volunteers
____ (b) Listen to children read aloud
____ (c) Read to the children
____ (d) Grade papers
____ (e) Tutor children in specific skills
____ (f) Help on trips or at parties
____ (g) Give talks (e.g., on careers, hobbies, etc.)
____ (h) Other ways (please specify) _____

B. In our **SCHOOL**, volunteers...

____ (a) Are **NOT USED** in the school now
____ (b) Monitor halls, cafeteria, or other areas
____ (c) Work in the library, computer lab, or other area
____ (d) Teach mini-courses
____ (e) Teach enrichment or other lessons
____ (f) Lead clubs or activities
____ (g) Check attendance
____ (h) Work in "parent room"
____ (i) Other ways (please specify) _____

THIS YEAR, how many volunteers or aides help in your classroom or school?

C. Number of different volunteers who assist me in a typical week = ____ .

D. Do you have paid aides in your classroom? ____ NO ____ YES (*how many?* ____)

E. Number of **different** volunteers who work anywhere in the school in an average week = ____ (approximately)

Q-4. Please estimate the percent of **your students' families** who did the following this year:

a. Attend workshops regularly at school	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	100%
b. Check daily that child's homework is done	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	100%
c. Practice schoolwork in the summer	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	100%
d. Attend parent meetings regularly	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	100%
e. Attend parent-teacher conferences with you	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	100%

Understand enough to help their child at home:

f. ... reading skills at your grade level	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	100%
g. ... writing skills at your grade level	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	100%
h. ... math skills at your grade level	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	100%

Q-5. Schools serve diverse populations of families who have different needs and skills. The next questions ask for your judgement about specific ways of involving families at your school.

Please **circle** one choice to tell whether you think each type of involvement is:

NOT IMPORTANT => NOT IMP (means this IS NOT part of your school now, and SHOULD NOT BE)

NEEDS TO BE DEVELOPED => DEV (means this IS NOT part of your school now, but SHOULD BE)

NEEDS TO NE IMPROVED => IMPRV (means this IS part of your school, but NEEDS TO BE STRENGTHENED)

A STRONG PROGRAM NOW => STRONG (means this IS a STRONG program for most parents AT ALL GRADE LEVELS at your school)

TYPE OF INVOLVEMENT	AT THIS SCHOOL ...		
a. WORKSHOPS for parents to build skills in PARENTING and understanding their children at each grade level.	NOT IMP STRONG	DEV	IMPRV
b. WORKSHOPS for parents on creating HOME CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING.	NOT IMP STRONG	DEV	IMPRV
c. COMMUNICATIONS from the school to the home that all families can understand and use.	NOT IMP STRONG	DEV	IMPRV
d. COMMUNICATIONS about report cards so that parents understand students' progress and needs.	NOT IMP STRONG	DEV	IMPRV
e. Parent-teacher CONFERENCES with all families.	NOT IMP STRONG	DEV	IMPRV
f. SURVEYING parents each year for their ideas about the school.	NOT IMP STRONG	DEV	IMPRV
g. VOLUNTEERS in classrooms to assist teachers and students.	NOT IMP STRONG	DEV	IMPRV
h. VOLUNTEERS to help in other (non-classroom) parts of the school.	NOT IMP STRONG	DEV	IMPRV
i. INFORMATION on how to MONITOR homework.	NOT IMP STRONG	DEV	IMPRV
j. INFORMATION for parents on HOW TO HELP their children with specific skills and subjects.	NOT IMP STRONG	DEV	IMPRV

k. Involvement by families in parent group leadership, other COMMITTEES, or other decision-making roles.	NOT IMP STRONG	DEV	IMPRV
l. Programs for AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, recreation, and homework help	NOT IMP STRONG	DEV	IMPRV

Q-6. Teachers choose among many activities to assist their students and families.
Please **circle** one choice to tell how important each of these is for **you** to conduct **at your** grade level.

	HOW IMPORTANT IS THIS PRACTICE TO YOU?						
	NOT IMPORTANT	A LITTLE IMPORTANT		PRETTY IMPORTANT		VERY IMPORTANT	
a. Have a conference with each of my students' parents at least once a year.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Attend evening meetings, performances, and workshops at school	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. Contact parents about their children's problems or failures.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. Inform parents when their children do something well or improve.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. Involve some parents as volunteers in my classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f. Inform parents of the skills their children must pass in each subject I teach.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g. Inform parents how report card grades are earned in my class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h. Provide specific activities for children and parents to do to improve students' grades.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
i. Provide ideas for discussing TV shows.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
j. Assign homework that requires children to interact with parents.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
k. Suggest ways to practice spelling or other skills at home before a test.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
l. Ask parents to listen to their children read.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
m. Ask parents to listen to a story or paragraph that their children write.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
n. Work with other teachers to develop parent involvement activities and materials.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
o. Work with community members to arrange learning opportunities in my class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
p. Work with area businesses for volunteers to improve programs for my students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
q. Request information from parents on their children's talents, interests, or needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
r. Serve on a school committee.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Q-7. The next questions ask for your opinions about the activities that you think should be conducted by **the parents of the children you teach.** Please **circle** the choice that best describes the importance of these activities **at your grade level.**

PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES	NOT IMPORTANT		A LITTLE IMPORTANT		PRETTY IMPORTANT		VERY IMPORTANT
a. Send children to school ready to learn.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Teach children to behave well.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. Set up a quiet place and time for studying at home.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. Encourage children to volunteer in class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. Know what children are expected to learn each year.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f. Check daily that homework is done.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g. Talk to children about what they are learning in school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h. Ask teachers for specific ideas on how to help their children at home with classwork.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
i. Talk to teachers about problems the children are facing at home.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
j. Attend parent meetings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
k. Serve as a volunteer in the school or classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
l. Attend assemblies and other special events at the school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
m. Take children to special places or events in the community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
n. Talk to children about the importance of school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Q-8. The next question asks how you perceive others' support for parental involvement in your school.
Please **circle** one choice on each line. How much support does each give <u>now</u> to parental involvement?

	NO SUPPORT		WEAK SUPPORT		SOME SUPPORT		STRONG SUPPORT
a. You, personally	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Other teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. The principal	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. Other administrators	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. Parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f. Others in the community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g. The school board	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h. The district superintendent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Q-9. Over the past two years, how much has the school involved parents at school and at home?

____ (1) School involved parents **less this year** than last

____ (2) School involved parents **about the same** in both years

____ (3) School involved parents **more this year** than last

____ (4) Don't know, **I did not teach** at this school last year

The last questions ask for general information about you, your students, and the classes you teach. This will help us understand how new practices can be developed to meet the needs of particular schools, teachers, and students.

Q-10 **YOUR STUDENTS AND TEACHING**

A. (a) What grade(s) do you teach THIS YEAR? (Please **circle** all that apply)

PreK K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

(b) If you do not teach, please give your position: _____

B. How many ***different students*** do you teach each day, on average?

Number of different students I teach on an average day = _____

C. Which best describes your teaching responsibility? (Please **check** one)

____ (1) I teach several subjects to **ONE SELF-CONTAINED CLASS**.

____ (2) I teach **ONE** subject to **SEVERAL DIFFERENT CLASSES** of students in a departmentalized program.

____ (3) I teach **MORE THAN ONE** subject to **MORE THAN ONE CLASS** in a semi-departmentalized or other arrangement

____ (4) Other (please describe) _____

D. Please **check** the subject(s) you teach in an average week (PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

____ (a) Reading	____ (e) Social Studies	____ (i) Advisory	____ (m) Other
____ (b) Lang. Arts/ English	____ (f) Health	____ (j) Physical Education	(please describe)
____ (c) Math	____ (g) Art	____ (k) Home Economics	_____
____ (d) Science	____ (h) Music	____ (l) Industrial Arts	

E. (a) Do you work with other teachers on a formal, interdisciplinary team? ____ No ____ Yes

(b) If **YES**, do you have a common planning time with all of the teachers on your team? ____ No ____ Yes

F. (a) On average, how many minutes of homework do you assign on most school days?

none 5-10 25-30 35-45 50-60 over 1 hour

(b) Do you typically assign homework on weekends? ____ Yes ____ No

G. About how many hours each week, on average, do you spend contacting parents?

____ (a) None

____ (b) Less than one hour

____ (c) One hour

____ (d) Two hours

____ (e) Three hours or more

H. About what percent of your students are:

____ % (d) White

____ % (e) Other _____

100 %

I. **About** how many of your students are in (please **circle** the estimate that comes closest)

(a) Chapter 1	**0%**	**10%**	**20%**	**30-50%**	**60-80%**	**90-100%**
(b) Special education	**0%**	**10%**	**20%**	**30-50%**	**60-80%**	**90-100%**
(c) Gifted and Talented	**0%**	**10%**	**20%**	**30-50%**	**60-80%**	**90-100%**
(d) Free or reduced lunch	**0%**	**10%**	**20%**	**30-50%**	**60-80%**	**90-100%**

J. About what percent of your students are:

____ (a) **Above average** in achievement
____ (b) **Average** in achievement
____ (c) **Below average** in achievement
100 %

K. About what percent of your students:

____ % (a) Promptly deliver memos or notices home from the school
____ % (b) Complete <u>all</u> of their homework on time

Q-11. YOUR EXPERIENCE AND BACKGROUND

A. What is your experience?

____ (a) Years in teaching or administration

____ (b) Years in **this school.**

B. What is your gender?

____ (a) Male

____ (b) Female

C. What is your highest education?

____ (a) Bachelor's

____ (b) Bachelor's + credits

____ (c) Master's

____ (d) Master's + credits

____ (e) Doctorate

____ (f) Other (please describe) _____

Q-12 **OPTIONAL:** We would like to have your ideas on the following questions if you have a few more minutes.

a. What is the most successful practice to involve parents that you have used or that you have heard about?

b. In what ways could better partnerships with families help you as a teacher?

c. In what ways could better partnerships with the community help you as a teacher?

d. In what ways has parental involvement changed over the past year or two at this school? Please give examples.

e. Do you have any other ideas or comments that you would like to add? (Please feel free to add other pages)

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP !

© 1993, Joyce L. Epstein and Karen Clark Salinas, Johns Hopkins University, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, Baltimore, Maryland.

Appendix Two : Parent Questionnaire

Nov 1999

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Our school in conjunction with Paul Caines (graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick) is currently working to improve ways that schools and families can help each other and help all children succeed in school. The purpose of this questionnaire is to guide our planning, to let you offer additional ideas and suggestions, and to provide a current "snapshot" of the different ways you are involved in your child's education. In order to elicit your viewpoints on this, we are providing you with a copy of our questionnaire. Your answers will be grouped together with those from many other families. **Please note that all information you provide will be strictly anonymous and confidential.** No individual will ever be identified. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Of course, you may skip any question, but we hope you will answer them all. We are counting on your ideas so that our projects will be useful to all families. This questionnaire has been reviewed and approved by the director of School District #18 and the Faculty of Education Ethics Review Committee. If you have any questions about the questionnaire, please feel free to contact me by phone 454-9753 or email (b3xs@unb.ca) or, you may contact the school. After the study is completed, we will share your school's results with you in a summary report. The results will also be published in a Master's thesis.

Please have your child return this booklet to the classroom teacher **Tomorrow** or **As soon as possible**.

If you have more than one child in this school, please return only **One Booklet** for the family.

Thank You Very Much For Your Help! Sincerely,

_____
Paul Caines

A. This booklet should be answered by the parent or guardian who has the most contact with this school about your child.

Who is filling in the booklet? Please if you are...

____ (1) mother	____ (5) aunt	____ (9) guardian
____ (2) father	____ (6) uncle	____ (10) other relative
____ (3) stepmother	____ (7) grandmother	____ (11) other (please describe)
____ (4) stepfather	____ (8) grandfather	_____

B. How many children in your family go to this school this year? (Please circle how many).

1 **2** **3** **4** **5** **or more**

C. What grades are they in? (Please circle all of the grades of your children in this school.

Grade 6 **Grade 7** **Grade 8** **Other**

If you have more than one child at this school, please answer the questions in this booklet about your **Oldest Child** at this school.

D. Is your oldest child a: ____ Boy or ____ Girl? Please check

Please note: This questionnaire has been *Double Sided* to conserve paper.

Q-1. We would like to know how you feel about the school right now.
This will help us plan for the future. Please **Circle** one choice for each statement.

YES	Means you AGREE STRONGLY with the statement
yes	Means you AGREE A LITTLE with the statement.
no	Means you DISAGREE A LITTLE with the statement.
No	Means you DISAGREE STRONGLY with the statement.

	How do you feel about these?			
a. This is a very good school.	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
b. The teachers care about my child	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
c. I feel welcome at the school	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
d. This school has an active parent organization	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
e. My child talks about school at home	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
f. My child should get more homework	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
g. Many parents I know help out at schools	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
h. The school and I have different goals for my child	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
i. I feel I can help my child in reading	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
j. I feel I can help my child in math	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
k. I could help my child more if the teacher gave me more ideas	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
l. My child is learning as much as he/she can at this school	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
m. Parents at this school get involved more in the younger grades	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
n. This school is known for trying new programs	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
o. This school views parents as important partners	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
p. The community supports this school	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**
q. This school is one of the best schools for students and for parents	**YES**	yes	no	**NO**

Q-2.Some families want more information about what their children are learning in each subject.
Check which subjects you want to know more about to help your child.

____ (a) Math Skills	____ (e) Social Studies	____ (i) Current Events
____ (b) Reading Skills	____ (f) Science	____ (j) Study Skills
____ (c) Writing Stories	____ (g) Handwriting	____ (k) Other (please describe)
____ (d) Spelling	____ (h) Speaking Skills	

Q-3. Families get involved in different ways at school or at home. Which of the following have you done this year with the Oldest Child you have at this school? Please **Circle** the choice item.

NEVER	means you **Do NOT** do this or **Not Yet** this year
1-2 TIMES	means you have done this **One** or **Two Times** this year
A FEW TIMES	means you have done this a **Few Times** this year
MANY TIMES	means you have done this **Many Times** this year

a. Talk to my child about school	**NEVER**	**1-2 TIMES**	**FEW TIMES**	**MANY TIMES**
b. Visit my child's classroom	**NEVER**	**1-2 TIMES**	**FEW TIMES**	**MANY TIMES**
c. Read to my child	**NEVER**	**1-2 TIMES**	**FEW TIMES**	**MANY TIMES**
d. Listen to my child read	**NEVER**	**1-2 TIMES**	**FEW TIMES**	**MANY TIMES**
e. Listen to a story my child wrote	**NEVER**	**1-2 TIMES**	**FEW TIMES**	**MANY TIMES**
f. Help my child with homework	**NEVER**	**1-2 TIMES**	**FEW TIMES**	**MANY TIMES**
g. Practice spelling or other skills before a test	**NEVER**	**1-2 TIMES**	**FEW TIMES**	**MANY TIMES**
h. Talk with my child about a TV show	**NEVER**	**1-2 TIMES**	**FEW TIMES**	**MANY TIMES**
i. Help my child plan time for homework and chores	**NEVER**	**1-2 TIMES**	**FEW TIMES**	**MANY TIMES**
j. Talk with my child's teacher at school	**NEVER**	**1-2 TIMES**	**FEW TIMES**	**MANY TIMES**
k. Talk with my child's teacher on the phone	**NEVER**	**1-2 TIMES**	**FEW TIMES**	**MANY TIMES**
l. Go to parent meetings	**NEVER**	**1-2 TIMES**	**FEW TIMES**	**MANY TIMES**
m. Check to see that my child has done his/her homework	**NEVER**	**1-2 TIMES**	**FEW TIMES**	**MANY TIMES**

n. Volunteer at school or in my child's classroom	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
o. Go to special events at school	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
p. Take my child to a library	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
q. Take my child to special places or events in the community	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
r. Tell my child how important school is	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES

Q-4. Schools contact families in different ways. ***Circle*** *one choice to tell if the school has done these things this year.*

DOES NOT DO	*means the school* **DOES NOT DO** this
COULD DO BETTER	means the school **DOES** this but **COULD DO BETTER**
DOES WELL	means the school **DOES** this **VERY WELL** now

	This school...		
a. Help me understand my child's stage of development	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
b. Tell me how my child is doing in school	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
c. Tell me what skills my child needs to learn each year	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
d. Have a parent-teacher conference with me	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
e. Explain how to check my child's homework	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
f. Send home news about things happening at school	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
g. Give me information about how report card grades are earned	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
h. Assign homework that requires my child to talk with me about things learned in class	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
i. Send home clear notices that I can read easily	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
j. Contact me if my child is having problems	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
k. Invite me to programs at school	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
l. Contact me if my child does something well or improves	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
m. Ask me to volunteer at the school	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
n. Invite me to parent meetings	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
o. Ask me to help with fund raising	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
p. Include parents on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL

q. Provide information on community services that I may want to use	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL

Q-5. Some families want to attend workshops on topics that want to hear more about.
Check the ones that interest you ... or suggest a few...

_____ (a) How children grow and develop at my child's age

_____ (b) How to discipline children

_____ (c) Solving school problems and preventing dropping out

_____ (d) Preventing health problems

_____ (e) How to deal with stress

_____ (f) Raising children as a single parent

_____ (g) How to help my child develop his/her talents

_____ (h) Helping children take tests

_____ (i) Understanding middle schools

_____ (j) How to serve on a school committee or council

_____ (k) Other topics you want? _____

(l) In the past year, did you attend a workshop at school?

_____ No _____ Yes On what topic? _____

Q-6. Over the past two years, how much has the school involved you at school and at home?
Please check the appropriate category.

_____ (1) The school involved me **less this year** than last
_____ (2) The school involved me **about the same** in both years
_____ (3) The school involved me **more this year** than last
_____ (4) My child **did not attend** this school last year

Q-7. All communities have information that would help families. Which services in your community would you like to know more about. **Check** the information you want.

_____ (a) Health care for children and families
_____ (b) Family counselling
_____ (c) Job training for parents/adults
_____ (d) Adult education
_____ (e) Parenting classes
_____ (f) Child care
_____ (g) After-school tutoring
_____ (h) After-school sports
_____ (i) Other after-school clubs or lessons to develop talents
_____ (j) Community service that children can do
_____ (k) Summer programs for children
_____ (l) Information on museums, shows, and events in the community
_____ (m) Other (describe the community information you need) _____

_____

The last questions will help us plan new programs to meet your family's needs.
(Please answer these questions about your oldest child in this school).

Q-8 About Homework

a. About how much time does your child spend doing homework on most school days?
Minutes my child does homework on most school days: (Please circle one)

none **5-10** **25-30** **35-45** **50-60** **over 1 hour**

b. How much time do you spend helping your child with homework on an average night?

Minutes of my time: none 5-10 15-20 25-30 35-45 50-60 over 1 hour

c. How much time could you spend working with your child if your teacher showed you what to do?

Minutes I could spend: none 5-10 15-20 25-30 35-45 50-60 over 1 hour

d. Do you have time on weekends to work with your child on projects or homework for school?
(Please check yes or no)

____ Yes ____ No

Q-9 About Your Child And Family

a. How is your oldest child at this school doing in schoolwork?

____ (1) **TOP** student

____ (2) **GOOD** student

____ (3) **OK, AVERAGE** student

____ (4) **POOR** student

b. How does your oldest child at this school like school this year?

____ (1) Likes school a lot

____ (2) Likes school a little

____ (3) Does not like school much

____ (4) Does not like school at all

c. How often does your oldest child at this school promptly deliver notices home?

____ (1) Always

____ (2) Usually

____ (3) Once in a while

____ (4) Never

d. How often does your oldest child at this school complete all homework on time?

____ (1) Always

____ (2) Usually

____ (3) Once in a while

____ (4) Never

e. **WHEN** can you attend conferences, meetings, or workshops at the school? Please check all that apply.

____ Morning ____ Afternoon ____ Evening ____ Cannot ever attend

f. How many adults live at home? ____ Adults (include yourself)

g. How many children live at home? ____ Children

h. What is your highest education?
Please **check** one

____ (1) Did not complete high school

____ (2) Completed high school

____ (3) Some college or training

____ (4) College degree

i. Are you employed now?
Please **check** one

____ (1) Employed full-time

____ (2) Employed part-time

____ (3) Not employed now

Q-10. **WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE YOUR IDEAS...**

a. What is your greatest concern as a parent?

b. What school practice to involve parents has helped you most, and why?

c. What is **one thing** that you or your family could do to help this school?

d. What is the best thing that this school could do next year to help you with your child?

e. Any other ideas or suggestions?

*** If you are interested in participating in a group discussion (with other parents) on the topic "parental involvement in education" please provide your name and phone number on the line below***

PLEASE HAVE YOUR OLDEST CHILD AT THIS SCHOOL RETURN THIS TO THE TEACHER TOMORROW OR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
You may seal it in an envelope if you wish.

The last page of this questionnaire was specifically designed by the ASMS SPAC →

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR HELPING US !

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Let's Talk, Parent-to-Parent

Your George Street School Parent Advisory Committee and Parent Support Group need your input!

Which of the following do you think you would use if they were available? Please

_____Speakers on parenting topics
_____Parenting workshops offered by the school
_____Information about parenting programs being offered in the community
_____Practical recommended reading suggestions for parents in the "Middle Matters" newsletter
_____Parenting resources (books, magazines, audio cassettes, videos) available at the school's resource centre
_____An ongoing parent resource group
_____A "parent mentor" or "resource parent" program (experienced parents to call when you have a concern)
_____Informal meeting with the guidance counsellor
_____A workshop re: How to interpret your child's report card and gain the most from parent-teacher interviews Other suggestions? _____

What day of the week is best for speakers or workshops? Please *circle* all that apply

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday

What time of day is best for speakers or workshops? Please *circle* all that apply

Weekday Noon-Hour Weekday Evening Saturday Morning Saturday Afternoon Sunday Afternoon
Other: please specify _____

What time of the year is best? Please *circle* all that apply Fall Winter Spring

Our school offered an orientation for Grade 6 and 7 parents last spring.

Did you attend? Please *check* _____ Yes _____ No _____ Not applicable

If you did attend, did you find it useful? Please *check* _____ Yes _____ No _____ Not sure

How do you think it might have been improved? _____

How useful do you find the following: Please *check*

Talk-Mail notices: _____ Very helpful _____ Don't pay much attention to them _____ Annoying

Middle Matters newsletter: _____ Very informative _____ Little interest or value _____ No interest or value

What topics interest you as the parent of a middle school student?

_____ Fitting in: social skills and peer pressure
_____ Fitting in: helping the teen with special needs
_____ Fitting in: gifted kids
_____ School yard bullying
_____ Testing the boundaries: adolescent rebellion
_____ Communication, trust, and mutual respect
_____ Communicating with the school
_____ Homework: supporting academic success
_____ Social isolation: the loner
_____ Helping your teen cope with divorce
_____ Adolescent sexuality
_____ Keeping your sense of humour
_____ Mood swings and anxiety
_____ Body image and adolescence
_____ Media influences & young teens
_____ Sibling relations during the teen years
_____ Setting appropriate limits and consequences for your teen
_____ Conflict resolution with your teen
_____ Ways for parents to get involved in the school
_____ Extracurricular activity options
_____ Your teen's social life: what's appropriate?
_____ Helping your teen cope with loss
_____ Realities of substance abuse
_____ The parental juggling act: finding balance in your life

Other suggestions: _____

We're thinking of starting a parent subcommittee to explore these areas. If you would like to help with planning, please leave your name and phone number with the school office (453-5419) or contact Marilyn Noble at (458-5800).
Thank you very much for your input!