

**Independence and Support:
Making Parent/School Relationships Work
for Teenage Students**

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Faculty of Education
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Education
University of Prince Edward Island**

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Suzanne, and four children - Brent, Dustin, Katie and Lauren. Without their encouragement, understanding and support, none of this would have happened. To my mother-in-law, Catherine, thank you for never doubting that I would finish and for helping me along the way. As well, a special thanks goes to my trusty advisor, Fiona O'Donoghue for making me believe that I could do this.

Abstract

This qualitative study was designed to explore the role teenage students play in shaping the relationship their parents/guardians have with their high school. It examines some of the benefits and barriers to parental involvement and looks at how students can control parental access to information from the school. The site is a rural dual track (French Immersion and English) high school of 800 students situated in Prince Edward Island, Canada. The data is collected from a randomly distributed survey and subsequent interviews. There were 136 surveys completed by students in grades 10-12 as well as four interviews (conducted after the survey) with students wishing to further discuss the subject of parental involvement. The survey consisted of 14 questions both open and closed-ended and the interviews were made up of four open-ended questions. The questions on both instruments were similar and the responses were consistent between the surveys and the interview data. Through the data analysis it was discovered that the students did play a role in shaping the amount of parental involvement and the access to information that parents have. Some of the major factors governing the desire for teens to keep information from their parents centre around a desire for independence, privacy, and space.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Overview

Parents and guardians have long had an influential impact on the education of the children in their care. Bhavnagri and Krolikowski (1999) discuss the significance of home and community visits during the period 1870 -1920 stating that “the conditions of the neighborhoods affected the well-being of the children.”(p. 3) In order to build relationships between the home and school, home visits are resurfacing today in urban areas (Gomby, Culross, & Behrman, 1999) and once again, the linkage between home and community environment and school is being seen as significant.

Many researchers have studied the benefits of involved parents (Gadsen, 1994; Johnson, 1993; Lustberg, 1998; Petrie, Lindauer, McKinney, & Bennett, 1997) but few have examined the roles that children play in fostering or hampering strong relationships between parents/guardians and schools. Do some students encourage parental involvement while others attempt to dissuade parents or guardians from entering into this aspect of their lives? Are some parents/guardians kept unaware of opportunities for involvement because newsletters and announcements regarding meetings and other gatherings are not passed along by the students in their care? A high school student wishing to keep their school life a private matter from parents or guardians may be able to do so without a lot of effort. This study examines the role of children in shaping the relationship between the home and school for high school aged students.

Topic and Purpose of the Study

As a high school teaching vice-principal (as I was when conducting this research), I

believed in finding out why parental involvement seems so limited at the high school level. It would be a lot easier to run things at school if some tasks could be handled by parent volunteers. If this is so, one must ask why there are very few, if any, parent volunteers within the school? Since teachers and parents are often united in their concern for the well being of children, it stands to reason that teachers and parents are working together toward common goals. Wouldn't it make sense for the two sides to join energies and work together? Something just does not seem to add up.

As a teacher I was curious about the role students play in shaping this limited involvement. Are teenagers embarrassed to see their parents or guardians at school? Do they want their school lives to remain private and out of reach of the adults in their lives? A grade one student is often thrilled to see someone from home at school but can the same be said of a grade eleven student? I feel we are remiss when we forget to include the children when speaking of increased parental involvement in education.

The purpose of this research is to explore the roles that high school students play in determining the level of parental/guardian involvement in their education. One can surmise that some students do not care either way if the adults in their lives are involved in the school while others may be thrilled to have a parent or guardian involved in their high school years. Others are likely to raise objection to having the watchful eye of home upon them yet again and some may feel a stigma attached to having their parents/guardians present in the school. Are there some peer and social factors at play here? If you are in high school, is it "cool" to tell your parents about what goes on at school? Do some teens feel that there is peer pressure exerted upon them to seek independence and keep parents out of their school lives? The big question is 'if students do wish to control

parental/guardian involvement in high school, what do they do to keep the involvement at a manageable level?' Maybe an increased awareness of the relationship at play here will eventually lead to an increase in parental involvement at this high school in years to come.

Framework and General Research Questions

There is no shortage of literature dealing with the notion of parental involvement; the topic is about as old as the concept of formal education itself. Home and School Associations frequently distribute pamphlets discussing how parents and guardians can maximize their involvement in their children's education. Concern for children of all ages is vital yet they usually are not seen as having a say in or any control over the level of parental/guardian activity at the school. There appears to be a gap in the literature when it comes to high schools and parental involvement and a larger gap exists surrounding any active role played by teenagers in shaping the depth to which parents/guardians are involved. The research questions guiding this thesis are:

- 1. What roles, if any, do teenagers play in fostering or hampering strong relationships between parents/guardians and the high school?*
- 2. How might children help shape parent-high school relationships?*
- 3. Are teens the missing piece of the puzzle, what might aid in helping build stronger parent-school relationships?*

Research Approach

This study is situated in the qualitative genre (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) utilizing survey research. It focuses primarily around responses to open-ended questions but has both qualitative and quantitative survey questions supplemented by four interviews. The researcher does not attempt to manipulate the research setting nor place any prior constraints on what the outcomes of the research will be. The research follows some of

the methodologies of action research (Argyris & Schon, 1989; Feldman & Capobianco, 2000; Glanz, 1999; Patton, 1990; Rowley, 2003; Whyte, 1989; Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002) in that the specific stakeholders in this case will be given the results should they wish to use them in future decision making (Patton, 1990). More specifically, this is known as practitioner research (Cockley, 1993; Fecho, 2003; Hirsch, 2000; Traverse, 2002; Zeni, 2001) as the researcher is involved in the situation and not an outsider looking in on what is taking place.

The study centres around a rural high school with an active parents' group that follows the Parents' Council model (The School Act of PEI, 1988; Handbook on School Councils, 1996). At the time of the research, the researcher was a teacher representative with this group. Data collection stems from a random survey and in-depth interviews with students. The purpose of this data analysis and the study in general is to explore the role teenagers have in shaping the relationships their parents or guardians have with this high school. It is possible that we underestimate the impact that students have on the formation of these relationships and as a researcher I felt that it would prove interesting to ask a variety of students what they feel their role in the process is.

Schools have long relied on the support of parents and guardians in a number of capacities. A parent at the elementary level may be asked to help serve the hot meal of the day or possibly read to the students. These same people may be asked to help out with a school team or at a school skate, Fun Day, or other school-related activity. The need for extra hands at the lower grades seems endless and parental help is certainly appreciated. A parent at the intermediate level may do some of these same things but on a smaller scale. The role of 'parent as coach' may increase but the presence of parents in the corridors of

these schools appears to lessen. At the high school level, parents are not as visible as in either of the other two levels but the presence of parents as coaches and advisors is seen. Parents may also be seen supervising at dances and at events such as Safe Grad and Prom. The role is definitely different at each level as is the extent of participation. One has to wonder if this decreased parental presence is related to the increased need for independence among teens. Is this simply a naturally occurring evolution of the home and school relationship?

Data Collection

The study is situated in one rural high school in Prince Edward Island, Canada. Data will be collected from students in grades ten, eleven, and twelve through a randomly distributed survey with additional interviews used to describe the case. This research will focus on the responses of survey participants and the results of the interviews. The open-ended questions will help to describe the individual sense of the situation for the participants. In this respect a qualitative approach is more likely to net a richer picture of this site and its participants than would quantitative methods. As well, the site is quite unique in its demographics such as size, location, and feeder area and a study utilizing a larger sample size (as quantitative research may demand) might not be as applicable here. The survey begins with some general, closed-ended questions to allow the respondents time to ease in to dealing with the more demanding questions. The sample size in this research will be made up of 50 students from each grade level (10-12). These were chosen via purposeful random sampling (Champion, 2002; Patton, 1990; Sheppard, 2003) by selecting two English Literature classes at each grade level and sampling the whole of each class and this may serve as representative of students their age within our school. In

any given year there are between nine and eleven English classes running, two-thirds of which are at the academic level and one-third is at the general/practical level. I chose English classes because high school students can opt to take other subjects at various points throughout their high school careers but usually take English at their grade level and thus the sampling of students from each grade is more likely to be age representative. The interviews that follow are with students who wished to discuss this topic further and thus are purposefully chosen as “information rich” cases. (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p.397).

The surveys and subsequent interviews are mainly comprised of what Marshall and Rossman (1999) refer to as open-ended questions in which the responses “unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it.” (p.108) The combination of survey and interviewing allows “the researcher to understand the meanings that people hold for their everyday activities.” (p.110)

Data Analysis Strategies

Since the data emerged from the collation of survey data, interviews, and interactions with the transcripts of these processes, the data analysis relies more on “editing strategies” that are “less prefigured” than “template strategies” relying on predetermined sets of codes (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.151). The overall idea is to use what Marshall and Rossman (1999) refer to as “editing and immersion strategies ... [where]...the categories are generated through prolonged engagement with the data--the text.” (p.154)

The overall approach to the data is inductive (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997; Patton, 1990). As Patton (1990) states, inductive analysis finds the researcher attempting to “make sense of the situation without imposing preexisting

expectations on the phenomenon or setting under study.” (p. 44) The attempt is to explore the existing relationships and examine these for patterns as they emerge from the data.

Research on Parental Involvement

For this study the literature fields for exploration are quite varied. Journal articles in the fields of Secondary Education, Parenting Teenage Children, and Curriculum and Supervision at the High School level provide the bulk of the research literature for this thesis. There are also a number of reports and studies that have been completed by the U.S. and Canadian governments at the national and state/provincial level that are of significance to this study. It would be erroneous to speak of parental involvement while ignoring current U.S. legislation such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Educate America Act of 1994 (ERIC Digest 134). That country’s government has created a funding eligibility standard based on levels of parental involvement.

Significance of the Study

This research has potential significance for and will likely be of interest to a number of groups. If indeed high school aged students have some control over the level of involvement that the significant adults in their lives have in the education process, then we may wish to change existing practice. It may be possible to change the attitude of teenagers by presenting them with the benefits of increased parental involvement such as more one-on-one time with teachers and increased extra-curricular options. If teenage students have the power to control parental involvement in education, any change in existing practice should probably begin with them. Students may be interested in learning that they control how much involvement the adults in their home lives have in the education process and may find significance in this research. Parents and guardians may

also be interested in the research and the fact that their teens are controlling adult behavior.

Administrators looking to lessen the burden of their overtaxed teaching and secretarial staffs may be quite interested in this research. The findings could offer new ways to increase parental presence within the school and may also suggest how to strengthen the bond between the home and the school. Some teachers are dedicated to the concept of parents in the schools and might find this research interesting. The role of students may indeed prove to be significant, giving this research the potential to contribute to scholarship as such information has not really surfaced within the literature to this point. This research could help us to find other ways to strengthen the relationship between home and school and will have the potential to contribute to improving existing practices at the school level as well as at the teacher training level. Teacher training institutions might become more cognizant of the fact that teens play a role in shaping the extent of parental/guardian involvement in high schools and they may change how they approach this topic with teachers in training. Indeed this research and its findings could have significance to a number of different groups and has the potential to change the way we are utilizing parents at this high school and at others.

Limitations of the Study

Since the high school in this study is a rural one that houses students from an area of approximately 2500 square kilometres, the factors impacting parental involvement may be influenced by sheer distance. Some parents would have to travel for almost an hour to get to the school and may feel that this is too much of an obstacle to overcome. If parents lived closer to the school they may feel more comfortable “dropping by”. The logistics of

the study in terms of school locale may also make the results of the study less transferable to other situations and thus this will be a limitation. It would be hard to find a dual track (French immersion and English) high school of 800 students located in the centre of a 2500 square kilometre feeder area and thus the findings might very well be unique to this situation. Be this as it may, there are a number of common qualities between different high schools and thus some of the findings may apply to other high schools in other areas.

Another important factor to consider here is my own involvement in the school. It is possible that my position in the school as teacher/vice-principal may have influenced this study, the data collection, and its findings. I know a great number of the students and parents and have a solid working relationship with many of them. This likely led to high participation in the survey but may have led people to respond with what they think I wanted to hear. This certainly may have impacted on the study and I had to be careful as the authority of my position might have had unforeseen consequences on the participants in this study. I certainly kept these limitations at the fore as I conducted this research and recorded any instances where bias or influences seemed to appear. I kept a researcher's log throughout this study and planned to record this type of information there if it became significant in the research study.

Conclusion

The research in this thesis may have a positive impact on this rural high school. Few have ever questioned the role of parents in this school as parents of high school aged students in this area do not get as involved in the school as their counterparts at the elementary level or even as they do or have done as parents of elementary aged children. The question of why this is the case is rarely addressed and this study may pose some

insights into this question by exploring the possible impact of the actions of teenage students on the involvement of the home in high school education.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

Theoretically this research is a type of action research known as practitioner research (Cockley, 1993; Traverse, 2000; Zeni, 2001). I am interested in looking at how people describe parental involvement in schools and the role teenage students play in controlling this involvement. Cockley (1993) says that practitioner research is “research conducted by people involved in the situation, not outside observers.” (p. 3) The research in this study is attempting to look at the experiences of teenage students and from their perspectives and is not based on the researcher’s locatedness. As Zeni (2001) points out, practitioner researchers are not “outsiders peering from the shadows into the classroom, but insiders responsible to the students.” (p. 2) McMillan and Schumacher (1997) state that the understandings of the subject at hand are viewed from the perspectives of the participants and that the researcher “constructs a picture that takes shape as he or she collects data and examines the parts.” (p. 101-102) The shared experiences that emerge might highlight relationships between the experiences of the participants in relation to the research questions.

This research deals with literature from a wide range of areas. There are a number of reports and articles that deal with how and to what extent parents/guardians may be involved in the education of the children in their care. There does not appear to be any body of literature or research that discusses the control or power that teenage students have over the depth of involvement of the home in the education of high school students. Perhaps a look at the literature dealing with some of the more common understandings of

what parental involvement entails, the benefits of this involvement, how it might be encouraged or discouraged, resistance and barriers to changes of this nature, legislation and policies dealing with parental involvement, and some of the existing models of successful parental involvement might uncover some of the areas where teenage students may exert control over this situation. Through examining literature dealing with areas of similar background to this topic, I hope to draw some connections to the research questions.

Defining Parental Involvement

There are a number of different facets of parental involvement and many people have differing views on the subject. The notion of parental involvement is as varied as the instances where one encounters it, something different in every situation. What one person does to be involved may be quite different than what another does and thus the concept of parental involvement is hard to adequately define. Ascher (1986) describes parental involvement as “one of the vaguest and most shifting in its meanings” (p. 109) of all educational issues. The concept means a variety of things to a variety of people and this can confuse the discussion of parental involvement. Hickman (1999) points out that a number of researchers have defined for themselves operational categories and types of parental involvement (Gordon, 1977; Bauch et al., 1973; Cervone & O’Leary, 1982; Hester, 1989; Epstein, 1988) and these are quite similar. In general, these categories deal with providing children with the necessities for education (health, safety, preparation), communication with the school, volunteering, attendance at school events, participation in learning activities outside of school (e.g.. teachers in their own home), parents as decision makers, and parents as learners. There are a number of different roles and categories but

most aspects of the relationship between home and school can loosely fit into the above. Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brisse (1987) feel that the easiest definition divides the aspects of parental involvement into activities that are based in the home and ones that are school based.

Finn (1998) speaks of parental engagement in the school lives of children. He says that their engagement is “associated with school performance” through “organizing and monitoring the child’s time ... helping with homework ... and discussing school matters with the child.” (p. 20) Finn refers to a parent’s role as vital to school success and “extensive research reviews find that the home environment is among the most important influences on academic performance.” (p. 20) This idea also appears in Vandegrift and Greene (1992) who point to a popular notion of parental involvement where parents are involved “when they actively participate in school-sponsored activities ... or help their children in ways visible to their children or others.” (p. 57) They say this makes parents supportive and active and thus involved in their children’s education. The parents do not need to go to the school to be active forces in the educational lives of their children and we must start “rethinking parental involvement.” (p. 58)

Benefits of Parental Involvement

A large number of researchers cite various benefits to having parents/guardians involved in the education of young people (Baas, 1991; Becher, 1986; Connolly, Hatchette, & McMaster, 1998; Foster, 1990; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Holland, 1999; Manzo, 1998; Maynard & Howley, 1997; Mundschenk & Foley, 1994; Peterson, 1989; Riley, 1994). Henderson and Berla (1994) state that the “evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning,

children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life.”(p. 1) They point out that students learn from people with whom they bond and that it is important for them to know that “parents and teachers respect each other.” (p. 11) As well, the benefits of continued involvement once children reach middle and high school are that children “make a better adjustment, keep up the quality of their work, and develop realistic plans for their future.”(p. 18)

Mundschenk and Foley (1994) link academic success of students to parental involvement and indicate that when parents are involved in school activities, “students report more positive attitudes toward school and develop regular homework habits.” (p. 16) Connolly, Hatchette, and McMaster (1998) believe that children “internalize their parent’s positive expectations toward school in their own school attitudes.” (p. 8) Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) further this and feel that parents influence their children’s educational success through modeling of school-related behaviors and attitudes. They state that by involving themselves in the education of their children, parents “behave in ways that demonstrate that activities related to schooling are worthy of adult interest and time.” (p. 8) Cotton and Wiklund (2001) feel that the benefits of parental involvement are felt by the students, the school system and the parents themselves. They say that increased parental involvement leads to improved rapport and this translates into greater parental support; “the many ways in which parent involvement benefits students’ achievement, attitudes, and behavior have a positive impact on school staff. Everyone benefits from parental involvement.”

Riley (1994) points to a U.S. government survey completed in 1993 which states that half of the students with below average grades felt their parents had spent little or no time

on homework with them. He says that the role of parents and the benefits of having them involved are not to be underestimated. He speaks of the dominant role that parents play in “influencing a child’s confidence and motivation to become a successful learner.” (p. 69) Riley goes on to say that when parents take an active role in the education of their children, the results are increased achievement, better attendance, reduced dropout potential, and decreased trouble with the law. Hoover-Dempsey et. al. (2001) indicate that parental involvement in homework appears to influence student outcomes “because it offers modeling, reinforcement, and instruction that supports the development of attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors associated with successful school performance.” Holland (1999) discusses the findings of Henderson and Berla’s 1996 study on this topic and they found family involvement to be the most accurate predictor of student success. They wrote that parental involvement was a good thing for all students and not just for those whose parents are involved with the school, that the school itself tends to improve as a whole. The benefits that parental involvement can have for the individuals and the school in general seem endless.

Resistance and Barriers to Involvement

There are many barriers to parental involvement and factors such as accessibility, transportation, and time seem to be some of the reasons why some parents/guardians are not as involved in the education of young people as others are. Freeman (2000) argues that socioeconomic class is a factor governing access to schools for some parents and that middle-class parents are likely to see themselves as active members of the school community while working-class parents are more apt to see themselves as receiving services through the education system. Bensman (1999) argues a similar point in stating

that for some families the idea of a partnership with the school seems natural while for others it does not appear to be an option; some people see the door as open while others see it as closed. Finders and Lewis (1994) refer to some immigrant and low income parents as feeling “disenfranchised from school settings” and for them “school experiences, economic and time constraints, and linguistic and cultural practices” have acted as barriers to involvement. They point out that parents who have dropped out of school often “do not feel confident in school settings.” Davis (2000) says that people enter schools with a “variety of prior experiences with schools ... [and] may have underlying issues of suspicion or other conflicts that can affect the relationships between home, community, and school.”

Crozier (1999) points out that there are a number of barriers that can stand in the way of parental involvement. “Lack of time, having several children to look after, often at different schools, and work and other commitments, all mediate parents’ potential inclination to be involved.” Wirth (1991) says that “full-time working parents can feel isolated, lacking time to socialize with neighbors and friends, or perhaps feeling guilty about taking time away from their families.” Wirth goes on to say that a school’s “success in involving working parents starts with its positive attitude toward them.” Peterson (1989) says that some parents are “too distrustful of schools to help them educate their children” and empathy “is critical in any program for disadvantaged parents.” (p. 4)

McCarthy (2000) believes that parental involvement in education is influenced by factors such as culture, income, language, and parents’ perceptions of their roles in both school and the family in general. McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) further this in stating that parents’ belief in their ability to make a difference is also crucial. If a parent feels that

their actions can make a difference in the education of their children, these parents are more apt to participate than those who believe their actions to have little impact on the school. They further this point by suggesting that some schools are more inviting to parents than others. Another aspect of barriers and resistance to parental involvement in education centres around the need for independence among adolescents. Cotton and Mann (1994) remind us that some adolescents are at a stage of development where they do not want their parents around. Finn (1998) points out that the “opportunity for parents to stay intensively involved in school diminishes as students become increasingly independent and as peers come to have greater influence.” (p. 23)

Though the research points to the benefits of parental involvement, teacher education institutions do not seem to be strongly emphasizing parental involvement in education. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) state that “parent involvement does not seem to have fully entered the mainstream of teacher education.” (p. 287) Current practices in teacher education and those experienced by teachers are not necessarily congruent. Hiatt-Michael (2001) points out that this is changing but slowly and as of 2001, California was the only state to “enact legislation mandating prospective teachers and certified educators” to partner with parents and guardians. (p. 2) Burke (2001) points to a 1998 study done by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory that found most secondary teachers valued parent involvement at the high school level, though only a small percentage of teachers felt it was their responsibility to recruit the parents. There are a number of inconsistencies in how various groups deal with the idea of parental involvement in education.

Legislation and Policies Concerning Parental Involvement

Many people see the benefits of increased parental involvement in education and the U.S. Department of Education has responded with many reports, studies, and recommendations and that country has changed some of its legislation to meet this demand. The Goals 2000 legislation directly involves parents in setting standards and in leading educational reform and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized to create compacts in some schools and is designed to enable parents and teachers to work together for children (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Title I funding is available to school districts in areas of high poverty and a number of states such as California, Kentucky, West Virginia, Florida, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Missouri (U.S. Department of Education, 1997) are taking advantage of the extra funding for schools and districts by attempting to increase parental involvement in education. Baker and Soden (1998) believe that the impact of this new legislation and incentive funding is causing school districts all across the U.S. to develop innovative approaches to increasing parental involvement. In Canada there is an interest in increasing parental presence and involvement in schools (Connolly, Hatchette, & McMaster, 1998; Zubot, et al, 1982) but nothing as large or on a national basis as is currently the case in the U.S.

Partnering With Families and Communities

The U.S. National PTA believes that schools and families have a shared responsibility in developing school policies since both are affected by them (National PTA, 1995). The U.S. Department of Education (1997) released a series of papers, "Family Involvement in Children's Education", that extends this partnership well beyond the school day. This document says that it is up to schools to support families in providing activities outside of

school. They go on to say that schools with successful parent partnerships see student success and achievement as a shared responsibility and realize that parents must be given support and opportunities to get involved. Berger (1991) points out that the job of schools is already “exceedingly difficult ... but their task will be made easier when a true parent-teacher-community alliance occurs.” (p. 218)

Mundschenk and Foley (1994) talk of “parity-oriented relationships [that] require that all participants view each other as equals in the decisionmaking [sic] process.” (p. 16) They say that trust and respect are vital to the success of these collaborative partnerships. Mundschenk and Foley go on to state that communication between the home and school is the most critical element in forming successful partnerships. In an article entitled *Fathers’ Involvement in Their Children’s Schools* (Nord, 1997), the National Center for Educational Statistics indicate that as children grow older, schools offer a decreased amount of opportunity for parents to be involved. Communication between the home and school also appears to lessen as students grow older.

The state of Kentucky is a leader in this respect and has devised the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership, a statewide program for educating parents (Henderson & Raimondo, 2001). Since Kentucky has given until 2014 for all schools to improve and achieve proficiency in all subject areas or be faced with consequences, many schools are turning to parents for help (Henderson & Raimondo, 2001). As early as 1981, the city of Edmonton, Alberta was attempting to determine what further education and support the parents of its students needed (Zubot, 1982).

Existing Models and Their Measures of Success

There are a number of successful programs that involve the family in the education of

young people. Drake (1995) feels that we have too many different directions available to us when it comes to effectively utilizing parents in our schools and that people are often confused and disjointed in their approaches. Drake suggests the Comer Model which has the relationship between parents and school personnel as the primary element in developing a supportive climate for children. Another element of increasing parental involvement rests in Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act (1994) which has schools receive extra funds if they develop a compact that clarifies what is expected of the families and schools in order to reach higher standards (U.S. Department of Education's "A Compact for Learning", 1997). In Texas they have what is called the Alliance Schools Initiative that is attempting to restructure the relationships between all of those involved in the education of children in order to increase achievement and performance among students (U.S. Department of Education's "Family Involvement in Children's Education", 1997). There are a number of different options for schools and districts looking to increase their effective utilization of parents/guardians as resources both inside and outside of the school.

Conclusion

The various types of parental involvement are apparent in the literature mentioned above. The idea of parental involvement means many different things to many different people. The research indicates that there are great benefits to parental involvement yet no unified approach to using parents as a resource seems to exist. It is important to remember that not all parental involvement requires parents or guardians being present at the school; educational support from home is a large part of parents/guardians being involved in the education of the students in their care. Trust and respect are important factors in being

able to engage parents and sustain their involvement in education. Communication is vital to making this relationship successful. All parties must feel equity in the partnership and each must value the position of the other in order to benefit most from this relationship. There are a number of very successful models in existence today but they are not common knowledge within our school systems. Things are improving but the rate of change is slow.

Chapter Three

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

Parents/guardians might be considered a resource in the public school system. What determines the level of development of relationships between the home and school? How might students, particularly those in their teenage years affect parental/guardian-school relationships? What roles, if any, do teenagers play in shaping relationships between parents/guardians and the school at the high school level? The school being studied is a rural, dual track (French Immersion and English) high school of 800 students in grades 10-12. It is a “composite” high school which replaced a number of small, community high schools, that serves an area of approximately 2500 square kilometres. When I was a teacher and vice-principal at this school, parental involvement and the roles teenage students play in shaping this involvement became an area of interest for me and I feel that it deserves further exploration.

Researcher's Role

As a high school teacher I had a keen interest in finding out why parental involvement appears to be limited at the high school level. Activities could run more smoothly at school if some tasks could be handled by parent volunteers. As a teacher I was curious about what role the students play in shaping this involvement. Are teenagers embarrassed to see their parents or guardians at school? Do they want their school lives to remain private and out of reach of the adults in their lives? I am an advocate for increased involvement of the home in the education process and would really like to find some way to make this a

reality at this school. My involvement as a parent, teacher and member of the Parents' Council, while it may constitute a limitation in the research setting, also provided an insider perspective which is clearly identified in the research.

I was introduced to the members of the Parents' Council as a teacher interested in doing Masters' work dealing with parental involvement in schools. This seemed acceptable to all and the issue did not really surface again. My intentions were shared with the committee at the beginning of my involvement and I continued on with full disclosure as the trust that had been building could have been lost if I failed to keep them fully abreast of what was going on in my research.

As a community member I have been involved in a number of volunteer activities. It has been my experience that people are willing to help if they are asked to do so. Invitations to lend assistance to or take over specific tasks often lead to silence within a room but asking someone to make a call or to show up at an event on a certain day often brings compliance. People sometimes feel that they have nothing to offer but their expertise is usually welcome in situations such as schools. If we can find a way to get more people to share their time and experience, our schools and communities will benefit greatly. This hope is at the root of this research.

Overall Design of the Study

The research in this study is primarily survey research supplemented by four interviews. I believe that this is the best approach to the topic as the research aims to explore the extent to which teens might control the degree of home involvement in their schooling. The training that I have, both through workshops and experience in community leadership and group facilitation has been a benefit in conducting this research. People know that I

value what they have to say and that I respect what they are doing as students, parents, staff, etc. (after all, most people do try to do the best that they can). My volunteer efforts in the school and community show people that I really do have the best interests of young people and their school and community at heart. Thus as a researcher, I bring nonresearch-oriented experience to the situation. This experience enhances the overall process and its credibility. This study uses a survey as a means of gaining information from high school students regarding their views and perceptions of parental involvement in education at the high school level. As the researcher, I offered to discuss the subject further with students interested in doing so and this led to the survey data being supplemented with interviews and their transcriptions.

The study is situated in one rural high school in Prince Edward Island, Canada. Data were collected from students in grades ten, eleven, and twelve through a randomly distributed survey with additional interviews used to supplement the data. This research focuses on the responses of survey participants and the results of the interviews. The open-ended questions help to describe the individual sense of the situation for the participants. In this respect a qualitative approach is more likely to net a richer picture of this site and its participants than would quantitative methods. As the researcher is part of the situation/setting being examined, qualitative methodology is more likely to accommodate this relationship than would quantitative research strategies. "Qualitative researchers self-consciously draw upon their own experiences as a resource in their inquiries." (Denizen & Lincoln, 1998, p. xi) As well, the site is quite unique in its demographics such as size, location, and feeder area and a study utilizing a larger sample size (as quantitative research may demand) might not be as applicable here. Marshall and

Rossman (1999) state that qualitative methods search “for a deeper understanding of the participants’ lived experiences” and that is the focus of this research (p. 60).

This study is designed to examine the control that might be exerted by teens on the level of parental involvement in a high school setting. This may be difficult information to obtain through anonymous surveys as the participants may have difficulty seeing where the research is going if they have never thought about the topic before. In order to compensate for this potential lack of time to prepare, the survey begins with some general, closed-ended questions to allow the respondents time to ease into dealing with the more demanding questions. It was the researcher’s hope that if people get a sense of the potential value of this research they may be more apt to participate fully in the study and its interviews. The participants needed to feel somewhat comfortable with me as the researcher and needed to be assured that they would be treated fairly and respectfully and that their time and effort would be respected.

Site and Population Selection

As a teaching high school vice-principal, I was often in contact with parents and guardians. Over time it became apparent to me that some parents and guardians are unclear on school policies. In addition, many parents seem unaware of opportunities that exist for parental involvement and input into the school during the regular school day. It seems as though people are willing to help out at the school if they can, as is apparent when people are asked directly to assist, yet few tend to join the setting outside of the formal Parent-Teacher Interview times. I believe that there are great benefits to inviting and encouraging the participation of parents and feel that greater efforts in this regard will enhance this school and what can be offered to the students.

This site, the high school in which I taught at the time of this research and data collection, has been chosen for study for a number of reasons. I am familiar with the policies of the school and the efforts, both past and recent, made to elicit the help of parents and guardians. I was part of the school-parent group (called the Parents' Council) and was an advisor to students in a number of after-school activities. My rapport with the general student body and with members of the Parents' Council was positive. I believe that this aided in my gaining access to the site and the potential participants in the study. As well, from the beginning, the principal of the school was aware of the general intent of my research and offered support to the concept of using the school and its students as a potential site and population for this study.

As an active member of the Parents' Council I was continuously building relationships with the parents involved. They are a varied group with differing levels of experience with school councils. Some have been members of a Home and School Association since their children started school while others have only become involved in recent years. The members of the council appear united in their concern for education and for the well being of the school and the differences that they bring to the meetings serve to enrich our discussions.

The sample size in this research was to be made up of 50 students from each grade level (10-12). These were chosen via purposeful random sampling (Champion, 2002; Patton, 1990; Sheppard, 2003) by randomly selecting two English classes at each grade level (one academic and one general/practical). I sampled the whole of each class (those who consented and wished to participate in the survey) and this was to serve as representative of students their age within the school. There are between nine and eleven

English classes running at each grade level in any given year, two-thirds of which are at the academic level and one-third at the general/practical level. As class sizes are not uniform, the sample size was to be roughly 150 respondents. As it worked out, the maximum number of participants between the six classes was 164 and of those, 136 opted to participate and 28 declined. The survey was conducted during class time and this may partially account for the high response rate. The interviews that followed were with students wishing to discuss this topic further and thus were purposefully chosen as information-rich cases (Patton, 1990). All survey participants were invited to meet with the researcher at a later point if they wished to discuss the topic of parental involvement further (see note at the bottom of the survey form, Appendix A). The students who opted to participate in the interviews may have had a special interest in the topic and/or may not be indicative of a typical student at this school. The interview data thus cannot stand on its own. Since there were fewer than six people who chose to be interviewed (four), I conducted interviews with all of those interested. If there had been more than six, I would have conducted one or more focus groups of no more than 10 students as a means of managing the potential volume of data while respecting and valuing the time and efforts of all who wished to participate in further discussion.

Data Collection Methods

Cockley (1993) points out that teachers often try to improve their teaching by trying new things. This alone is not research but when teachers “examine a situation or problem very carefully to find out why or how”, this can become research. This practitioner research suits the school setting because the researcher is part of the situation or setting being examined and has an interest in the findings as they relate to their everyday

practices. One does not need to be a participant in the group being studied (as with participant observation) but is still part of the setting. The researcher can be more involved with the setting than is often the case with the objective stance taken by a quantitative researcher. Marshall and Rossman (1999) say that immersion in the setting offers the researcher “the opportunity to learn directly from his [sic] own experience of the setting.” (p. 106) It is through my role as council member, teacher and parent that I got the opportunity to form a rapport with the participants. Once participants started to feel comfortable with me and the research, this likely led them to be more inclined to assist in the study. This is something that would be subtle and maybe even subconscious and thus hard to detect but still may have been a factor here and is worthy of note.

The surveys and subsequent interviews are mainly comprised of what Marshall and Rossman (1999) refer to as open-ended questions in which the responses “unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it.” (p.108) The combination of survey and interviewing allows “the researcher to understand the meanings that people hold for their everyday activities.” (p.110) The combination of these data collection methods has provided a rich description of how the participants feel regarding the topic.

Data Management Strategies

This study has generated a significant amount of data. There are completed surveys, tape recordings, transcripts, revisions/comments from the interviews, and observations that needed to be managed. The interviewees agreed to the tape recording of the interviews and I taped the sessions while recording observations and comments on paper. For each interview I had a number of extra tapes and batteries as well as a back up tape recorder and only one interview was housed on each side of a tape. These tapes were

labeled with a code that links them to the interviewee (e.g., a participant named Paul who is interviewed on May 20/03 may appear as P1/04/03) and then the interview was transcribed using a word processing program. These transcriptions were copied and sent out to the participants for verification and comment and the comments were to be recorded in the researcher's log but none were returned in the self-addressed stamped envelopes provided. The surveys are to remain anonymous and thus have no codes to link them to any of the respondents.

Both the surveys and interviews were conducted at the school where I was somewhat able to regulate the excess noise and interruption. The transcribing of the various interviews took place soon after the interviews were conducted. This allowed the participants the opportunity to read and respond while the discussion was still fresh in their minds and it allowed the researcher better opportunity to record comments that arose. The copies of the transcripts, both on the computer and in paper form, were cut and placed into the categories that emerge using cut and paste technologies (both manual and computer assisted cutting and pasting were utilized).

The surveys, tapes and other raw data are being kept in a safe place to ensure that confidentiality and privacy remain intact. The original tapes and one hard copy of the transcripts are being kept in a locked safe. All of the tapes and printouts have been labeled in such a way as to protect the identity of participants. All data (surveys, transcripts, and tapes) will be kept in the locked safe for a period of three years following acceptance of this thesis, at which time the transcripts and surveys will be shredded and the tapes destroyed.

Once the survey results, transcripts and notes became available, I read and reread them

in search of coding categories. These categories are based on emergent themes and patterns and come out of what Marshall and Rossman (1999) describe as “editing or immersion strategies.” (p. 154) Once the codes were somewhat established I used the word processing program’s copy and paste feature to group lines and sections of the transcripts based on key words, phrases, and concepts. This then led to further categorization of the data. This was an iterative process and the copying, pasting and categorizing occurred a number of times. The process and its results have been recorded in detail in the researcher’s log and this too was read and reread for any possible emergent information.

Ethics

The proposal for this research was submitted to the University of Prince Edward Island Research Ethics Board and approved in late May 2003. The Western School Board was contacted and permission was granted to conduct this research in one of their high schools. The principal agreed that I could contact the teachers of the potential classes involved and each volunteered to have their class complete the survey. Each class, identified by its course and section code, was written on a piece of paper and the papers were placed in a hat according to grade and level (e.g.. all grade 10 academic English classes were put together and one selected). One of the school secretaries randomly drew six papers, one academic and one general/practical class from each grade. All of the students in the chosen classes were given a written explanation of the research, the procedure, and the survey. I answered any of their questions and handed out the consent form to be signed by the students and their parents/guardians. It was made clear that the surveys would remain anonymous and be seen only by me, the researcher and that

participation was voluntary. Students were made aware that they must return the signed consent form before doing the survey. Those who did not return the consent form did not complete the survey.

The process for the interviews was similar in that the students showed interest in being interviewed, the researcher explained the procedure to the students and gave them the consent form, and these had to be returned signed before the interview could take place. The interviews were taped with permission of the respondents and the transcripts were typed and returned to the participants for member checking. All were given the opportunity to respond to or add to these transcripts if they so desired and were provided with a self-addressed stamped envelope in which to return the additional information. The interview tapes and original copies of transcripts are stored in a locked safe. No names were used in the paper that could link the transcripts back to the respondents.

Data Analysis Strategies

Since the data emerged from collation of survey data, observations, interviews, and interactions with the transcripts of these processes, the data analysis relied more on “editing strategies” that are “less prefigured” than “template strategies” relying on predetermined sets of codes (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.151). I read and reread the transcript “searching for segments of text to generate and illustrate categories of meaning.” (p.151) Some of the themes include information regarding views of parental involvement (positive and negative), examples of shaping and control of the depth of participation by teenagers, the desire for independence among teenage students, managing the balance between the need for support and space, negotiating communication, parental access to information from the school, and the like. These are some of the categories

and patterns that emerged from the data and these and the other categories will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Four which deals more specifically with the findings.

The key words that helped in the cutting and pasting of these transcript documents were not known before the data were collected but the researcher planned that data reduction would take place through sorting on a key word basis. I created a new file for each key word and examined that data for patterns to emerge and thus some text appears in multiple categories. As a means of enhancing this process I printed extra copies of the transcripts and coded these with coloured highlighters and then cut and pasted them. The results of this coding were added to the word processed coding that took place. The main idea was to use what Marshall and Rossman (1999) refer to as “editing and immersion strategies...[where]...the categories are generated through prolonged engagement with the data--the text.” (p.154)

The overall approach to the data is inductive (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997; Patton, 1990). As Patton (1990) states, inductive analysis finds the researcher attempting to “make sense of the situation without imposing preexisting expectations on the phenomenon or setting under study.” (p. 44) In this research situation, I attempt to explore the existing relationships and examine these for patterns as they emerge from the data. Patterns may have already been in existence but yet remained uncovered by the participants in this setting and the highlighting of these could lead to further understandings of the situation by those directly involved in it.

I searched the data for negative cases and alternative explanations (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 408) for the findings but found little. Though the purpose of this research was to explore the situation as it exists and attempt to determine if a link exists

between teens and the level of participation of the home in school, there are some ideas that emerged that may help to strengthen the relationship between the home and school and these may be a plus. As a teacher I welcome any suggestions for increasing parental presence in the school and there may be others who feel the same way. These ideas will be explored in more depth later in this writing.

Trustworthiness Features

The volume of raw data collected through this research may appear overwhelming at first glance. Reading, recording, and interpreting the survey data was a lengthy process. There were many hours of transcription, coding and analysis but all was conducted by the researcher alone though I had made arrangements to use the services of two other typists if the need were to arise.

The overall credibility of the study lies in the fact that as a researcher I am close enough to the situation to gain access to the site yet distant enough to report things as they unfold. My children are not yet of high school age so as a parent I am not in contact with these parents. The surveys were conducted in similar settings (in the classroom) under similar conditions as were the interviews (in the same small, quiet office). The surveys were all uniform and the interview questions were asked in the same wording and in the same order each time. A field test was done of both the survey and the interview. The purpose of the study, what would occur at the various steps of the research process, and how the participants would remain anonymous and their responses confidential were fully disclosed to the participants.

Transferability features of the study lie in the “thick description” that I provide of the site and participants in this study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 16). Examination of

relationships, beliefs, and events helps to set the context for this research and will help others to conceptualize the situation more clearly. The information gained through the study of this description allows readers to decide if the study is indeed “useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions.” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.193)

To find another rural dual track 10-12 high school that serves a feeder area of 2500 square kilometres would be difficult but there are schools with some of these same characteristics where some of the findings might be of interest. As well, this research study contributes to the body of literature on parental involvement in schools in general and in high schools more specifically. The fact that the survey draws on the experiences of a cross-section of participants from grades 10-12 (academic and general/practical stream) and the data are supplemented with the interview data will also help this research and its findings to be useful to others in similar situations.

Dependability

Dependability concerns are addressed through the tracking and charting of changes and choices throughout the research process. My research log houses any changes that occurred during the research. Any changes that were made required decisions and these are noted. Why something changes or happens in a certain way is a vital piece of information that may be lost if not recorded. The research log captures these pieces of information that may not appear in the transcript information.

The member checking (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.195) that took place with the transcripts allows for greater accuracy in these records. Though they did not choose to reply or add to their interview transcripts, the ability for the participants to add to their responses after reading the transcripts also adds to the trustworthiness and dependability

of the data. Were there anything to add or change, the interview participants were given the opportunity to do so. They were also encouraged to make comment if they so wished (see Appendix F). I kept two sets of notes while observing and interviewing, one set for general observation and the other for tentative coding ideas, categories, and thoughts. This better allows for “judgment-free note taking.” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.195) The research questions were modified slightly throughout the course of the study as refinements seemed necessary. The field testing led to a change in format for the survey questions as well as minor clarifications in wording in both the surveys and interview questions.

Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the research design and methodology used in this research study. The researcher’s role was described and examined as was the site and population selection. The procedures for data collection, management, and analysis were outlined. The ethical considerations in this study were discussed and the plans to keep the participants informed were laid out. The research’s trustworthiness features and the means of ensuring dependability were addressed. The next chapter deals with the analysis of the data collected through this research.

Chapter Four

Analysis

Introduction

As stated previously, this research was conducted in a rural, dual track (French Immersion and English) high school serving approximately 800 students in grades 10-12. The school offers a full compliment of pre-apprentice and technical programs and is known for being the starting place for many of our local trades people. The community support of the school is strong yet the presence of community members as visitors in the school is not what it could be. A number of the parents/guardians that I have spoken to follow the media coverage of school activities and are aware of many of the major events and initiatives. On this level it appears that the parent community is well informed yet when speaking with some students, it appears as though the parents are only aware of a small portion of the events taking place at the school and among the students. It is this disparity that is at the heart of this research.

The survey instrument used in this study is made up of 14 questions. Six of these questions are closed-ended questions, seven are open-ended and one has both components in it. The survey was administered to six classes, two at each grade level from grades 10-12. One class at each grade level was at the academic level and one was at the general/practical level. To determine which classes were to be surveyed, the researcher simply put the names of all English classes at each level operating during this semester into a hat and had a school secretary select one representative of each group (for example, there were four grade 12 academic English classes operating this semester and of the four, one was chosen at random out of a hat). The total possible number of respondents was

164 and 136 of these students (82.9%) opted to participate in all or most of the survey. There were 28 students who were either absent during the survey, failed to pass in a permission form, or who declined to participate.

The responses for the closed questions were read, tabulated and recorded on a master survey. These have also been converted into percentages as these figures may prove to be helpful for quick reference. The results for each closed question were also converted into a graph for easier viewing and interpretation. The responses for the open-ended questions were read and transcribed and categorized or grouped into common patterns and themes. These were further grouped within these themes as a means of identifying similar responses from various respondents. Most of these responses required an additional category entitled “Other Issues” or simply “Other” as some respondents offered information that did not really fit in with what was provided by others. Though some of the information may have been different or seemed to be a little off topic, it is still valuable to this study and was recorded.

As a means of dealing with the survey and its results, the questions will be stated in the order in which they appear on the survey instrument and the student responses will follow. Where possible I have included selections and snippets from the survey transcriptions to further illuminate the positions and ideas put forth by the respondents. It is hoped that these will show the level of thought and care that went in to the survey responses. Possible connections and patterns will be discussed at this time and further discussion and connections will be the topic of the following chapter, Chapter Five, entitled *Findings*. As well, the discussion of the interviews and their relationship to the surveys will also be discussed in Chapter Five.

Responses to Survey Questions

1. How often do parents receive school newsletters?

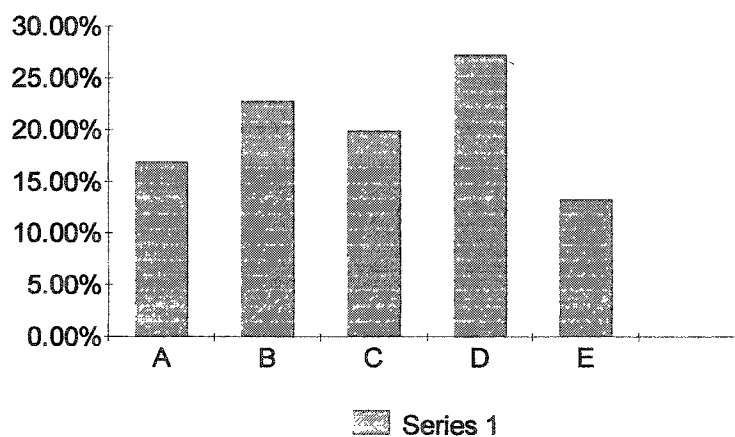
Figure 1

How Often Parents Receive Newsletters

23	always	16.90%
31	most of the time	22.80%
27	sometimes	19.90%
37	rarely	27.20%
18	never	13.20%

Table 1

How Often Parents Receive Newsletters



Scale

- A = always
- B = most of the time
- C = sometimes
- D = rarely
- E = never

As seen in *Figure 1* and *Table 1*, approximately 40% of the students stated that school newsletters reached parents/guardians always or most of the time and roughly the same

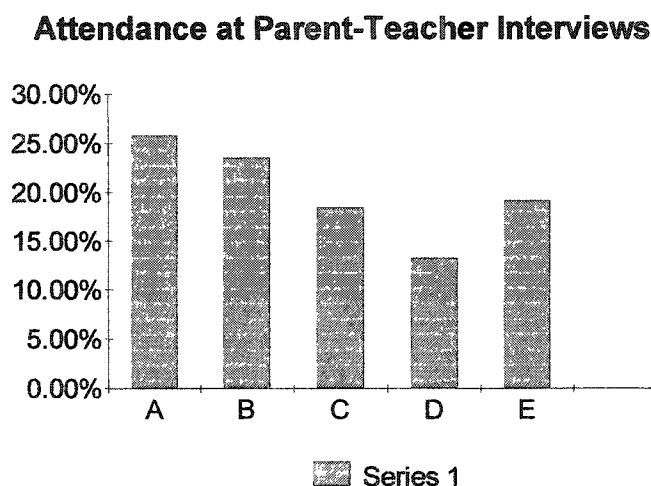
number stated that these newsletters were rarely or never delivered to parents/guardians. Almost 20% said that these newsletters made it home sometimes. This is interesting as later in the survey, 36 respondents mentioned that keeping newsletters from parents is a means of keeping them away from knowledge about meetings, report cards and parent-teacher interview times. As well, 18 students stated that more newsletters or a better means of delivering newsletters to parents/guardians would be a way of improving communication between the school and parents/guardians. Some students felt that the current system of having students deliver newsletters to parents was not very effective and suggested having these mailed out to the home and posted on the school's web site in order to have them more accessible to parents/guardians. A number of students appear to agree that the information in these newsletters is important but that the actual method of delivery for these is not as effective as some would believe it to be. If indeed fewer than 50% of the homes receive the newsletters, it would appear that there could be better ways of passing along the information commonly associated with the newsletter.

2. When parent-teacher interviews occur, how often do your parents/guardians attend?

Figure 2

How Often Parents Attend Parent-Teacher Interviews

35 always	25.80%
32 most of the time	23.50%
25 sometimes	18.40%
18 rarely	13.20%
26 never	19.10%

Table 2*Scale*

- A = always
- B = most of the time
- C = sometimes
- D = rarely
- E = never

As noted in *Table 2* almost 50% of those surveyed stated that their parents/guardians attend parent-teacher interviews always or most of the time and over 18% attend sometimes while only slightly over 32% said that their parents/guardians rarely or never attend. From this we may speculate that a large number of parents/guardians feel that parent-teacher interviews are valuable and a worthwhile use of their time. When parent-teacher interviews are mentioned in subsequent questions during the survey (namely when students are asked how communication between the school and home could be improved, question # 14), most of the 18 responses speak of these in a positive light. These meetings appear to be working for most of those involved here and some students feel that these should occur more frequently and in the case of two responses should be mandatory (as will be discussed further in question #14). For some parents/guardians this

is the only time that they are physically present in the school and thus to increase the frequency of these interviews would increase the actual number of face-to-face contacts between school personnel and parents/guardians. From these results we can conclude that the personal contact given through these meetings has some meaning to parents/guardians.

3. On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being not involved at all and 5 being heavily involved, how would you rate the level of involvement your parents/guardians have in your education?

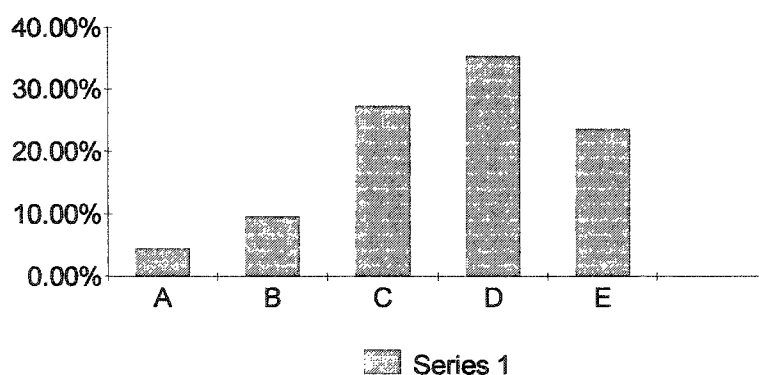
Figure 3

Scale of Parental Involvement

6	1	4.40%
13	2	9.60%
37	3	27.20%
48	4	35.30%
32	5	23.50%

Table 3

Scale of Parental Involvement



Scale

A = not involved

B = minimal involvement

C = some involvement

D = moderate involvement

E = heavy involvement

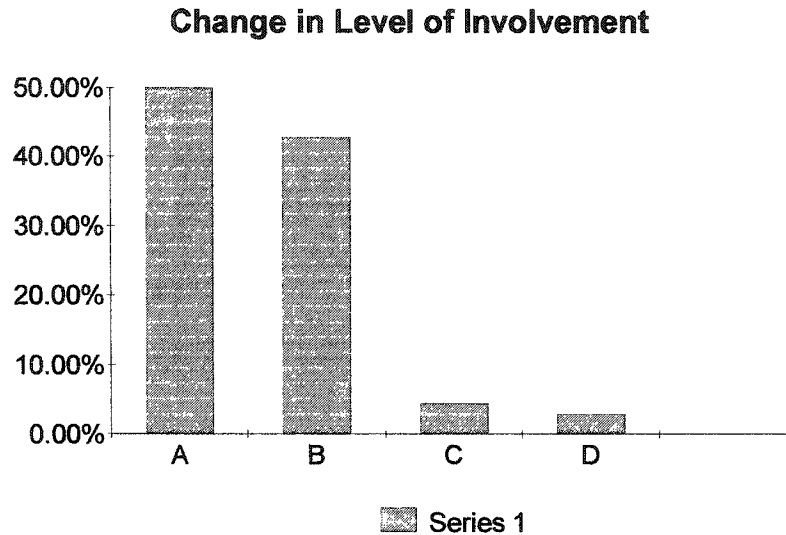
From these results (as shown in *Figure 3* and *Table 3*) we can see that almost 59% of those surveyed feel that their parents/guardians are quite involved in their education and another 27.2% feel their parents/guardians are involved to some degree while only 14% of respondents felt that their parents/guardians were not involved or only slightly involved in their education. Unfortunately, since this was an anonymous survey, it is impossible to see if these same 14% are experiencing academic and social difficulties and if there is a connection here. This may be a topic for another study but is beyond the scope of this research study. Overall the level of involvement shown in the responses to this question is quite impressive as one may suspect that the level of involvement of parents/guardians in the education of high school level students would be less than this survey would indicate. Some possible explanations for the perceived level of involvement may come out of the responses to the next question, an open-ended question regarding whether or not this level of involvement has changed over the years that the students have been in school.

4. Has this level of involvement changed over the years that you have been in school? Please explain.

The responses for this question shed a good deal of light in terms of the level of parental involvement over the course of the education of those surveyed. Sixty-eight respondents (50%) felt that there was indeed a change in the level of involvement, with some students experiencing less parental involvement now and some finding more now that they are in high school. Fifty-eight respondents (42.7%) believed that there was no significant change in the level of involvement over the years they were in school. Six students (4.4%) gave responses that were neither a definite yes or no and four students (2.9%) chose not to respond to that question. *Table 4* below illustrates these changes in

parental involvement levels as seen by the survey respondents.

Table 4



Scale

A = change in level of involvement

B = no significant change in level of involvement

C = unsure

D = no response

For the 40 students experiencing less parental involvement now, 35 stated that the level of involvement was strong in the early years (elementary) and began to taper off as the years passed. The level of involvement was not as strong but was still significant in the junior high or intermediate school years. Many students (18) mentioned the need for independence, their ability to handle school on their own, and their increasing maturity as reasons for not needing as much school involvement from their parents/guardians as they ventured through high school. Eight of the respondents have attributed this to their parents/guardians consciously pulling back to allow the responsibility to rest on the students' "shoulders" to "prepare" them for university, college, and/or the workforce. One student stated that when they were younger, they

needed their parents to help with homework but now there is not much need for this so the parents are trying to get involved in other ways such as by supporting them in extra-curricular activities. It appears as though a large number (70%) of those who felt there was a definite decrease in the level of parental involvement saw this as a naturally occurring part of a student's development into adulthood and thus did not perceive it as a negative occurrence. Five others have said they know that they can ask for help whenever they need it but do not often have to go this route. There were three students who believed that their parents/guardians either could not help them, felt that the work was too difficult to offer assistance to them or who were intimidated by the subject matter and thus the involvement had declined as the students progressed through the grades. Unfortunately there were three students who felt that there was a direct relationship between the decrease in involvement and the level of caring offered by the parents.

A number of students (28) feel that they are experiencing more parental involvement now that they are in high school. Four of these said that the involvement was fairly heavy in the early years of elementary school, dropped off sharply in intermediate school and then increased dramatically as they entered high school. Nineteen others (68% of those indicating an increase in involvement) have stated that their parents/guardians have become more involved since high school started. The general consensus as to why this is the case is that the parents/guardians know that the decisions made in high school are important ones that can affect the rest of the lives of these students and they want to be involved in the decision-making process. Eleven of the respondents referred to high school as the "most important part" of their education and/or said that their parents/guardians were pushing them harder, offering them more encouragement, and applying more

“pressure” now that graduation is looming near. These students seem to feel that this is a means of preparing them for their next step, college or university and/or the workforce.

One student attributed the new level of concern to the fact that his/her parents want academic success so this person can “get scholarships for university because they can’t afford to put me through themselves.” This adds an interesting dynamic to the possible motivation for being involved in your child’s education. The importance of a high school education and its impact on one’s future paths seems to be a motivating factor in how involved parents/guardians of some high school students become over the course of the high school years.

Of the 58 students (42.7%) who felt that there was no significant change in the level of parental involvement over their school career, only five indicated that their parents had hardly ever been involved in their schooling and two of these consider themselves to be the independent type who would not need or want involvement or assistance anyway. Twenty of those surveyed considered their parents/guardians to be strongly or heavily involved throughout their time in school, often attending “every meeting or event.” Three students used words like “extremely involved” and “interested” to describe how their parents had always been part of their schooling. Thirty-three respondents indicated that there was no significant change in the level of involvement over the years but they did not indicate whether this meant that their parents/guardians were heavily involved or only marginally involved in their education.

As stated earlier, there were six students who offered responses that were a little hard to categorize. One respondent stated that their parents are concerned and become involved when the student is struggling but this has not happened in a while. From this,

one could assume that the parents are willing to be involved when needed but it would be erroneous to assume that they are not involved or that this indicates some sort of change in involvement levels. Another student refers to their parents as “supportive” and “really wanting [the student] to attend university and do something with” their life. Once again, this shows that the parents have concern but does not indicate any specific change in involvement patterns or levels. One student credits their parents with wanting to help but not being able to. They state “my parents help as much as they can but sometimes the work is too hard.” This may mean that when the work was less difficult, the parents helped more but this may be mere conjecture as the student has not explicitly stated as much. Though these students did not specifically indicate their parents’/guardians’ level of involvement as the others had done, their responses certainly are meaningful and add a positive sense of caring on the part of these parent/guardians.

The responses to this question allow us to see that indeed a large number of students seem satisfied with the level of involvement of the home in their education: those experiencing strong involvement seem to be, for the most part, content with this and can understand why their parents/guardians are so interested in their schooling. Those experiencing a more limited level of parental involvement seem equally content in being left to make their own choices and decisions. It is fairly clear that the maturation process, the notion of getting older and needing more independence, is a major factor. The idea of making the “right” choices and decisions for one’s future and the consultative role that parents/guardians play in this are also important here.

5. Using the same scale as in question 3 (1 being not involved and 5 being heavily involved), how involved would you like your parents/guardians to be in your education at this point?

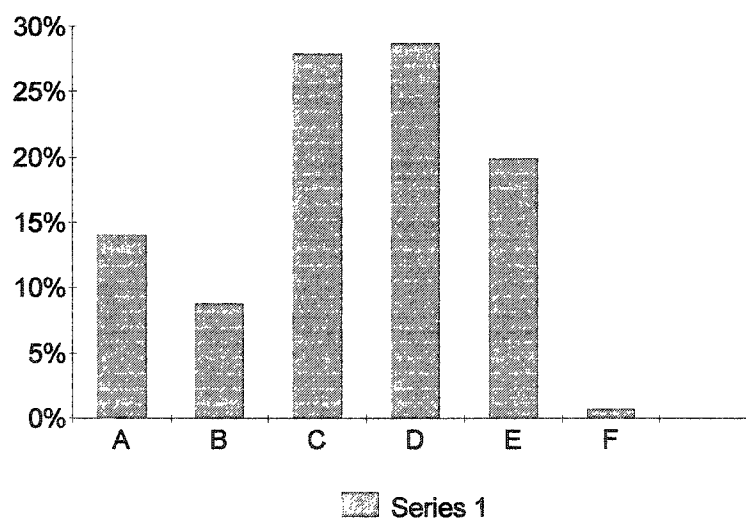
Figure 4

Desired Level of Parental Involvement

19	1	14%
12	2	8.80%
38	3	27.90%
39	4	28.70%
27	5	19.90%
1 no response		0.70%

Table 5

Desired Level of Parental Involvement



Scale

- A = not involved
- B = minimal involvement
- C = some involvement
- D = moderate involvement
- E = heavy involvement
- F = no response

As evident in both *Figure 4* and *Table 5*, 76.5% of respondents would like some parental involvement in their education. The majority of these students would prefer more moderate involvement than would the 19.9% who desire heavy involvement from parents/guardians. There are 22.8% who would rather have little or no parental involvement. The responses to this question indicate that overall, the majority of those high school students surveyed would like to have some level of parental involvement in their education. One student wrote “I want her to be involved because if it wasn’t for her being involved, I would not be in school.” From this we could gather that the supportive role of parents is one that is important at the high school level and this is something that these students are able to recognize.

It is interesting to compare the level of parental involvement as seen by the students in survey question #3 and the amount they would like as seen in question #5. In question #3, 86% felt that there was some involvement from parents/guardians be it slight, moderate or heavy. Question #5 reveals that 76.5% would like parents/guardians to be involved to this degree. In the former question, 14% felt that parents/guardians were not really involved but the latter question reveals that 22.8% do not want much parental involvement. As well, we can conclude from this that a good number of the students surveyed wish to have some level of parental involvement and from this we can gather that they have some belief in the benefits of having parents/guardians at least somewhat involved in high school education.

6. Have you ever consciously kept information about your school work from your parents/guardians?

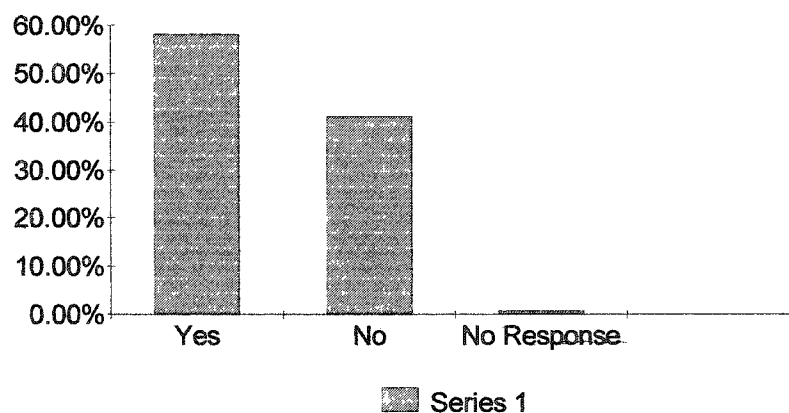
Figure 5

Keeping Information Hidden From Parents

79 yes	58.10%
56 no	41.20%
1 no response	0.70%

Table 6

Keeping Information Hidden



According to the responses to this survey question (see ***Figure 5/ Table 6***), there are more students who have consciously kept information about their school work from their parents/guardians than students who have not kept this type of information from parents/guardians. The responses in this question deal specifically with information regarding school work and do not enter into the realm of a student's social life. School performance is one area where parental involvement can cause students to be held accountable for their performance in the classroom. At the same time, while in the classroom, students are relatively free to perform as they wish provided they are working

within the parameters of acceptable behavior as set out by the teacher. It has been my experience that some high school students exercise their “right to fail” much to the dismay of their parents yet the parents/guardians feel almost powerless in improving the situation. When the parents/guardians do talk to the teacher(s) involved, I have found that the parents/guardians have been less than fully informed about things like classroom performance and the day-to-day productivity of their teen. The results of this survey question speak well to the possible need on the part of the students to keep some information private and as we will see in some of the later questions, some students have definite reasons for keeping their parents/guardians somewhat unaware of what goes on in their school lives.

7. Have you ever consciously hidden a negative mark or school happening from your parents/guardians?

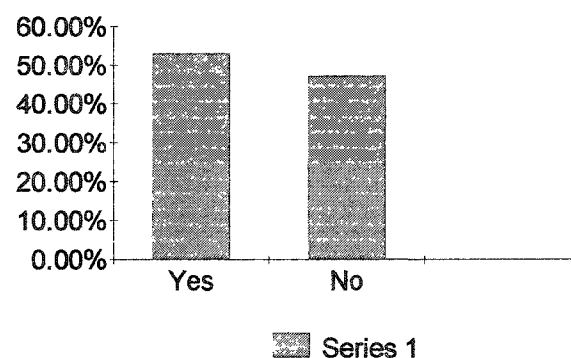
Figure 6

Ever Hidden a Negative Mark/event?

72 yes	52.90%
64 no	47.10%

Table 7

Hidden a Negative Mark/Event



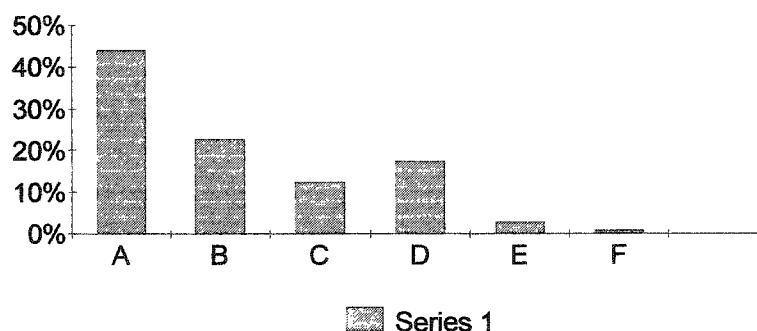
As we can see in both *Figure 6* and *Table 7*, the field between “yes” and “no” in this question is quite small, only 5.8%. The previous question was less specific, speaking about school work in general and the difference between “yes” and “no” was larger at 16.9%. This question (#7) asks students about consciously withholding a negative mark or happening at school and the respondents were split almost 50/50 (52.9% to 47.1%). There is a difference between not mentioning that you have an assignment due in a couple of days so you can go out with your friends one evening and not telling your parents/guardians that you failed your math midterm and it is likely that some students would do the former but hesitate in doing the latter. This may account for part of the difference between the responses for these two questions but there are likely numerous other factors at play here.

8. Describe the level of involvement that you believe parents/guardians of high school students should have in the education of the teens in their care (how much should they know about what goes on at school)?

The responses to this question provide a wealth of information about what these students feel is acceptable involvement and how involved parents/guardians really need to be or should be in the school lives of the teens in their care (see *Table 8*). In order to manage the data here, the responses have been grouped in terms of the indicated level of involvement the respondents believe parents/guardians should have: strong involvement, moderate involvement, involvement limited by the student, minimal involvement, no involvement, and unclear (meaning that the level was not explicit through wording used). These categories are quite large in scope but all of the responses fit in to one of them. They are represented below in *Figure 7* and *Table 8*.

Figure 7***Involvement Parents Should Have***

A = 64 (44.0%)	Strong Involvement
B = 33 (22.8%)	Moderate Involvement
C = 18 (12.4%)	Involvement Limited By The Student
D = 25 (17.3%)	Minimal Involvement
E = 4 (2.8%)	Unclear
F = 1 (0.7%)	No Involvement Necessary

Table 8**Involvement Parents Should Have*****Strong Involvement***

Sixty-four of the respondents (44%) indicated that they believe parents/guardians should have a strong level of involvement in the education of the teens in their care. I have used their words wherever possible and these direct quotes are offset using quotation marks. Many (26 respondents or 40.6% of responses in this category) felt that parents/guardians should be informed of everything when it comes to the education of their teenagers. Four others indicated that a strong level of involvement on the part of parents/guardians can help to motivate “children to stay in school and get an education” and this, in turn “can push you to get things done.” An additional 21 students saw heavy

involvement as a necessity if the parents/guardians are to be effective in helping high school students “make choices for the future.” If parents/guardians are there to help the students, then a good, solid sense of what is happening in the school lives of these teens is essential. One respondent wrote that parents/guardians “should know everything in case someone is being bullied.” They went on to explain the negative potential (possible suicide) if parents/guardians do not know this about the student in their care. At any rate, the benefits to strong involvement are obvious to some respondents.

The question of how much information parents/guardians need to know or should be told is one that brings with it lots of debate. As noted above, some of those who believe in strong parental involvement (26 respondents) feel that parents “have the right and should know about everything that goes on around their teens.” Four others argue that “parents should be involved most of the time but don’t have to know about everything that goes on at school.” One student suggests that “parents should know all that is possible but should also react properly” because “some students are afraid of their parents’ reaction so they keep things hidden.” Another student says that “parents should be heavily involved and aware of what goes on on school property” but they should not be “that involved that they make decisions for our future.” Parents who know what is going on are less likely to be surprised by a bad mark or report says one student. There are three students who feel that parents/guardians who are on top of things can offer more help when students need it. As seen above, a number of students in this category feel that parents should be heavily involved but one student cautions that with this comes the responsibility of reacting properly when the news is less than perfect. One student cautions that too much involvement might “smother” the teen but the more a parent knows, the less they have to

worry about. Suffice it to say that according to these students, there are benefits to having well-informed parents and guardians.

Moderate Involvement

There were also a number of students (33) who felt that a moderate level of parental involvement would be better when it comes to their education. Some respondents (22.7%) feel that parents should be involved but to a lesser degree than that seen above. Seven of them remind us that teenage students are to be learning independence and one cautions that too much involvement has the potential to create a situation “where the student cannot handle it on their own without parental involvement.” Three students in this category spoke of parents/guardians having enough knowledge of how their children are doing so they can help if problems occur. In seven responses words like “privacy”, “space”, “pry”, “independence”, and “nosy” were used to indicate that students do not wish to have their parents/guardians taking over for them or to have these people fully aware of all aspects of school life. The need for independence, space, and privacy are beginning to surface more clearly at this point in the survey responses.

The shift toward independence is felt again in the next few responses. Ten of the respondents in this category agree that parents/guardians should be somewhat involved but that the students should have some say over how this relationship with school life manifests itself. Two responses remind us that high school is the time for independence and for making their own decisions and choices and that though parents should still care, the ultimate responsibility for poor choices and negative actions must rest with the student. One student speaks of less pressure when parents are not as heavily involved but another reminds us that it is important for parents to show teens that they indeed do care

about them and their life at school because this encourages the students to work harder. In essence, a majority of these students see the benefits of having parents/guardians involved to some degree but the need for doing some of it on their own is clearly present in these responses.

Involvement Limited By the Student

Another group of respondents indicated that involvement is okay but it must be controlled or limited by the students themselves. Eighteen of the students surveyed (12.4%) felt that their parents/guardians should know only “as much as their children want them to know” and that since the students are the ones in school, they should decide whether or not their parents/guardians should be told certain information. The notion of “privacy” and “space” is also a factor here as is the individual’s need for independence. Nine students spoke of parents being told things on a “need to know” basis only and that parents will be informed if the need for help arises. There is a thread running through these responses: the students are getting older and need more independence, they are the ones in school, the responsibility of their education and their actions at school is theirs, and if they need any help they will ask for it. In some respects, these respondents feel that involvement is okay as long as it does not infringe on the school life of the high school students.

Minimal Involvement

Some students surveyed (25 respondents) fall into the category of minimal involvement, they feel that too much involvement, even if controlled by the students, is not such a good thing. A small number of respondents (17.2%) indicated that parents and guardians should only know some of what goes on, things like marks and “the basics”. Six

of the students spoke of independence, being old enough to take care of themselves, and being let live their own lives. These people do not seem to have as much faith in the benefits of parental involvement though they would be willing to share a few pieces of information with their parents/guardians if asked to do so. One respondent felt that parents/guardians should be aware of what the students are learning but felt that some simply “don’t care”. This is a sad commentary on what some people feel about involving parents/guardians in their schooling and one has to wonder what has led to such a negative opinion.

Though five students indicated that the lower the level of involvement the better and parents should be told “very little” or “as little as possible”, only one student explicitly stated that no involvement is the best level of involvement. This is interesting because in question #5, 19 students said that they would like their parents/guardians not to be involved in their education at all yet only one student indicated this in the open-ended version of this question (#8). One can conclude that though it sounds better to want to do it all on your own, very few students actually wish to be left totally alone when it comes to their schooling.

Unclear Responses

There were four student responses that did not fit in to these categories. These students appear not to have understood the intent of the question and indicated specific information that parents/guardians might wish to know or things they might wish to be involved with in the education of their teens. They did not speak specifically about their preferred level of parental involvement and their responses did not have enough information to even speculate as to what this might be.

Summary

Based on the responses to this question, it appears that a majority of students are in favour of having parents/guardians involved in their high school education. Twenty-five responses point to the benefits of not having to do it all alone and in having someone to offer support and guidance when needed. The impact on privacy and the infringement on independence seem to be major factors that can sometimes lead students away from wishing to have too much parental involvement. As well, some students (four) seem to be quite negative about the notion of parental involvement and this may have its roots in some events that took place long before the beginning of high school or may even have nothing to do with any history. All in all, the positive responses to parental involvement far outweigh the negative ones.

9. How would you feel about your parents/guardians chaperoning at a school dance?

To better understand the connection between parental involvement and visible presence, the respondents were asked to express their views on having their parents/guardians chaperone a school dance. The variety of responses is quite extensive and some even border on being comical. For some students (24 respondents), the notion is quite acceptable and some of these (nine) even said they would rather enjoy the opportunity to have their parents/guardians spend the evening with them and their friends. Eighty-eight students opposed (some vehemently) the idea, stating that parents have no place at after school functions. A few students (ten) said that they did not care while four others indicated that they would not allow their parents/guardians to chaperone. Some interesting dynamics of the parent-teen relationship arose out of responses to this

question. These responses are illustrated below in *Figure 8 and Table 9*.

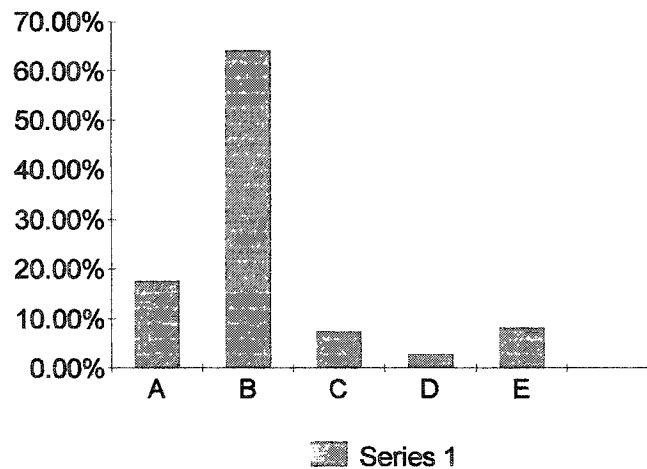
Figure 8

Feelings on Parents Chaperoning a Dance

A = 24 (17.5%)	- It Would Be Okay/ I Would Like It
B = 88 (64.2%)	- It Would Not Be Okay/ I Would Not Like It
C = 10 (7.3%)	- It Does Not Matter/ I Do Not Care
D = 4 (2.9%)	- I Would Not Allow Them to Chaperone
E = 11 (8.1%)	- Other Responses

Table 9

Feelings on Parents Chaperoning a Dance



It Would Be Okay/ I Would Like It

Twenty-four students (17.5% of those surveyed) felt it would be okay to have their parents/guardians chaperone a school dance. Six of the students said it would not bother them while nine others indicated that they would enjoy the experience. One student was concerned for their parents as “some of the stuff they would see would probably shock them.” Three other students spoke of not being ashamed of or embarrassed by their parents/guardians. Two students spoke of feeling safer if indeed their parents were there at

the dance and two others said it would be “cool”. One respondent said “I’d feel good, my mom and I would have fun.” It seems as though these students are comfortable with their parents/guardians and do not feel their presence at a dance would prohibit the students from having a good time.

It Would Not Be Okay/ I Would Not Like It

The number of students surveyed who would not be as positive about the prospect of having their parents/guardians chaperoning a school dance is considerably higher. Eighty-eight respondents (64.2%) felt that they would not be comfortable having their parents/guardians chaperone at a school dance. Thirty-two students simply said that they would not like it or that they would be uncomfortable (four) with this. Two people made excuses for not wishing to have their parents/guardians present such as that their parents would not fit in. Eleven respondents were more honest with their feelings and spoke of their parents embarrassing them in front of their friends. Some students feel that dances are more social activities than educational or school activities and thus parents have no place there (four respondents). Seven others spoke of this being their “time” and “territory” and parents simply do not belong. One student put it eloquently: “I would not want them to be there just because there are times when I want to be with my friends and then when I want to be with my family.” A number of students (six) said they would not attend a dance where their parents/guardians were chaperoning; one student said it would be “weird” while another said “that’s stupid”. The notion of an invasion of privacy and space is prevalent in these answers and it is clear that for these students, parental involvement in school does not extend to dances. The fact that people would opt not to attend the dance over attending while their parents are present speaks to the true feelings

these students have about this aspect of parental involvement in school life.

It Does Not Matter/ I Do Not Care

One category of interest in these responses is the “It doesn’t matter/I don’t care” category. Ten students (7.3% of those surveyed) do not have an opinion either way, it does not matter to them who chaperones the dances. Some of these are people who go out and have a good time wherever they are, regardless of who is present. Two of these students said it does not matter or make a difference to them and another said they would not “care as long as they [the parents] don’t bother me.” Four of these students stated that they do not attend dances on a regular basis so the presence of their parents/guardians would not matter much. Overall, the people in this category represent a small percentage of those surveyed and it appears that the dances are of some importance to most of the students in this survey.

I Would Not Allow Them to Chaperone/Other

Four students (2.9%) stated quite clearly that they would not permit their parents/guardians to chaperone a school dance. All four said they “wouldn’t let” them do this, one could argue that this offers an interesting commentary on the dynamics of power in the parent-teen relationship. Some other students (8.1% of those surveyed) gave responses that do not really fit into any of the above categories. Some of these were that the parents “would not do this”, they cannot because “they works nights”, and “mom would be okay but dad would embarrass me.” One student admitted that it would not be their place to say yes or no for their parents but that it would bother them if indeed their parents chaperoned. Another feels that they would never consider it because “the kids would drive them nuts”.

Summary

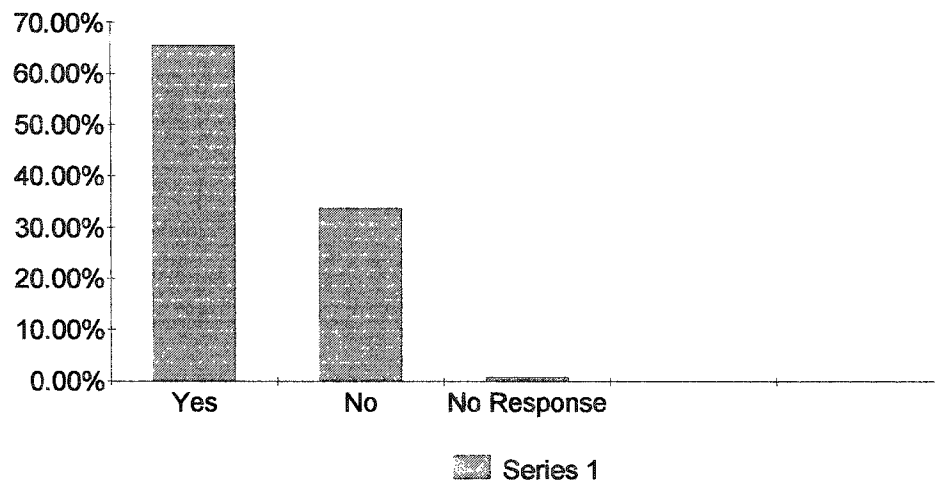
Overall, this question elicited the most unified responses and it is fairly safe to say that the majority of those surveyed would rather keep parents/guardians and school dances as two separate entities. Even students who stated that parents have a right to know everything that goes on at school and who believe that strong parental involvement is important at the high school did not really feel that parents have a place at the school dance. It appears that the social and the academic must be kept separate when discussing parental involvement, that one who agrees parents/guardians have a definite place in the school lives of the students in their care does not necessarily agree that this should include after school “social” activities.

10. Are there some things about their schooling that high school students may want to keep from parents/guardians?

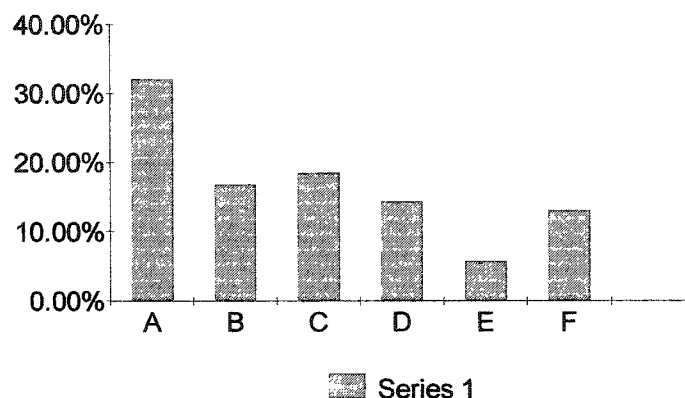
Figure 9

Should Some Things Be Hidden?

89 yes	65.50%
46 no	33.80%
1 no response	0.70%

Table 10**Should Some Things Be Hidden?*****If so, what might some of these be?***

A majority of respondents feel that high school students may want to keep certain things from their parents/guardians. A number of the responses for this question fall into the category of academic issues (32.1% of those surveyed). The other categories in this section are discipline issues (16.7%), violence at school (18.5%), drug and alcohol issues (14.2%), peer issues/issues with friends (5.6%), and other issues (12.9%). There are some responses that fit into more than one category and a small portion of students offered more than one answer to the question and thus, the total number of responses for this question is 162 as opposed to the standard 136 that was seen in the other questions. These responses are represented in ***Table 11***.

Table 11**Things to Keep Hidden from Parents*****Scale***

A = academic issues

B = discipline issues

C = violence at school

D = drug and alcohol issues

E = peer issues/issues with friends

F = other issues

Academic Issues

According to those surveyed, the most common thing that students might keep from parents/guardians is a bad test or mark. Forty-two of the respondents (25.9%) had this as the main response, three others said one might keep marks in general hidden, and another five indicated that failing or doing poorly would be something to keep from parents/guardians. One of these students suggested that school marks are a student's business and it is up to them whether or not these are shared with parents/guardians. Another respondent said that one may wish to hide the fact that they have an assignment to do if they want to be allowed out on a particular night. The other students in this category suggested that not passing something in on time is an item to be kept from

parents/guardians. It appears that the potential for negative consequences that may come with parents/guardians finding out about these aspects of academic life can cause some students to be less than truthful.

Discipline Issues

Discipline issues account for 27 of the responses (16.7%). Such things as getting in trouble in class or at school are the most common areas of discipline that students may wish to keep hidden. Five respondents indicated that one may wish to conceal a school suspension while five others said that skipping and absences are things that students may want to keep to themselves. There are a number of high school students who smoke without the knowledge or consent of the home so the fact that they smoke and getting caught for smoking at school are often suppressed tidbits of information. Other things such as getting sent to the office, getting kicked out of class, and getting into fights were also mentioned as possible things high school students may wish to keep from parents/guardians. As with the academic issues mentioned above, most discipline interventions by the school carry with them further sanctions from the home and this may be why some students would want to hide this type of information from parents/guardians.

Violence at School

A number of students (30 respondents or 18.5%) indicated that high school students are likely to keep information regarding violence at school hidden from their parents/guardians. Twenty of the responses deal with fighting and conflicts between students. Two students stated that the fights never involve them so they have no reason to tell their parents/guardians while one student said that they would not tell if they got into a fight. Nine of the students surveyed stated that they would keep incidences of harassment,

bullying, and teasing from their parents/guardians. The reason for wanting to keep parents sheltered from this information is not directly stated but from other responses during the survey, some students have indicated that they do not like to have their parents/guardians worry about them and this type of knowledge may indeed cause added worry.

Drug and Alcohol Issues

Twenty-three respondents (14.2%) feel that drug and alcohol issues are ones that a student may wish to hide from parents/guardians. Two of the students indicated that it was their own use that students may want to hide but the majority wished to keep their parents/guardians in the dark about drug and alcohol use by students in general. From information gathered throughout the survey as a whole, it appears that the students would like to keep parents/guardians from asking too many questions about drugs and alcohol and the more the topic is mentioned to adults, the more the questions are asked. As with the above, students seem to want to spare their parents/guardians extra worry about the use of drugs and alcohol among teens.

Issues With Peers and Friends

Some students (nine respondents or 5.6%) would like issues with peers and friends kept out of the knowledge scope of their parents/guardians. Things such as arguments or problems with other students, relationships, and friendships appear to be too personal to be of concern to parents/guardians. Two respondents stated that students would likely hide it from home if their friends were in a fight or got in trouble at school while another agreed and added that this is considered a student's "personal life at school." One student said that if a person had a friend of whom the parents/guardians did not approve, they would likely keep this friendship hidden from home. It appears as though issues

concerning friends and peers are of a personal nature and may indeed be kept hidden from parents/guardians.

Other Issues

Along with the above responses, there were another 21 (13%) that did not quite fit into a category. These deal with issues such as rumours, gossip, and as two students put it, other “confidential” matters. One respondent stated that a student may wish to conceal the fact that they are pregnant. Another student indicated that the things that happen at school “are not always their business” and thus they do not need to be told everything. What happens at school is of concern to those involved and there is no need for parents/guardians to be informed of these details and events. Several of the students spoke of concealing trouble from parents, be it difficulties with teachers, in extracurricular activities, or trouble at school in general. One student simply felt that how they spend their time at school, both during school hours and after school, is their business and does not concern their parents/guardians. Another student said that some things “are different today than when the parents went to school” and thus must be kept from them. Perhaps this student feels that the parents just would not understand.

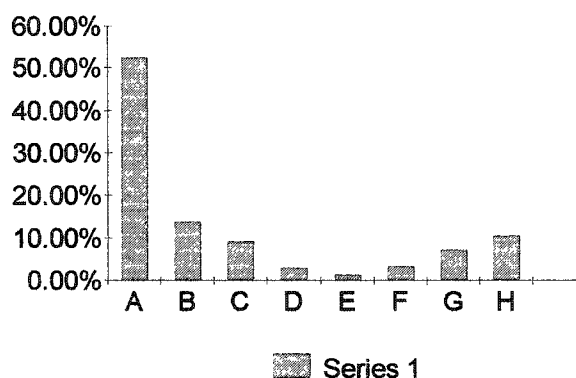
Summary

According to the students surveyed, there certainly appears to be a lot of information that parents/guardians should not be told or should not find out about. The reasons, both implicit and explicit, seem to be as varied as the pieces of kept information. Whatever the reasoning behind keeping parents/guardians unaware when it comes to some aspects of school life, the fact still remains that many students feel the need to hide some information. This may be a shock to some parents/guardians but it seems to be common knowledge

among these teens and they appear to be managing this information channeling quite well.

11. What are some things that high school students may like to share with their parents/guardians about their schooling?

When asked about the types of things that high school students might like to share with their parents/guardians, there were a lot of responses. Out of the 136 respondents, there were 241 responses, almost two per survey. It seems as though there are a lot of things that teens may want to share with the significant adults in their lives. A majority of these (126 or 52.3%) fit into a category called academic success/achievements/positives of the classroom. The other categories here are positive school events (33 or 13.7%), positive recognition/good behavior (22 or 9.1%), personal struggles/triumphs (seven or 2.9%), taking care of needs for school (three or 1.2%), negative events/occurrences (eight or 3.3%), information about teachers (17 or 7.1%), and other events/issues (25 or 10.4%). Many of these responses put the students into a positive light and would make parents/guardians proud to know such fine young people. There is quite a contrast between what these students would willingly share with and what they would purposefully keep from their parents/guardians. ***Table 12*** below shows the variety of responses to this question.

Table 12**Things to Share with Parents*****Scale***

A = academic success/achievement/positives of the classroom

B = positive school events

C = positive recognition/good behavior

D = personal struggles/triumphs

E = taking care of needs for school

F = negative events/occurrences

G = information about teachers

H = other events/issues

Academic Success/Achievements/Positives of the Classroom

Seventy-eight students explicitly stated that they would like to share good marks/grades with their parents/guardians. Others spoke of letting them know about marks in general (17 respondents), academic achievements (eight), good essays and tests (three), and basically that they are doing well academically. Some students said that they would willingly share things of interest that happen during the school day (three), how their day went (two), what they learned at school (one), interesting points from class (five), courses they are enjoying (three), making a school team (one), and fun things they have done in school (one). One student said that they would share how others are doing if it was to their advantage and another said that they would only share information about

“the good things that happen.” Academic success and positives that occur within the school are easy to share and many seem willing to do so.

Positive School Events

Thirty-three students spoke of sharing positive school events. Some of these include fun days (two respondents), activities (ten), assemblies (one), guest speakers (three), tryouts (one) and school dances (two). Others discussed telling parents/guardians about school plays (two), sporting events (one), and other extracurricular activities (two) so they will attend. Some respondents spoke of telling parents/guardians about “good days” (one) and “interesting events” (five). The common thread here seems to be ‘keep it positive’ and these responses certainly are positive.

Positive Recognition/Good Behavior

Another group of responses (9.1%) falls into the realm of positive recognition and good behavior. Students spoke of telling parents/guardians about awards they have received (four respondents), positive and special recognition (two), praise and compliments (two), and positive comments from teachers (two). Three students said that they would share the fact that they are doing well in school while one indicated they would tell their parents/guardians if they were receiving extra help, especially if they were struggling in a subject. Other positives that may be shared here are the courageous (one) and nice things (one) and good deeds that they do for others (one). One student summed it up well by saying that they tell their parents “anything that may make them react with gratitude.” Making a school team and winning something were also mentioned. These events are ones that make the students shine and it is little wonder that they want to share them with their parents/guardians.

Personal Struggles/Triumphs

A small number of students (seven or 2.9%) indicated that they would share information about personal struggles and triumphs. If they achieved something that took a lot of work or overcame a certain obstacle, this would be shared with parents/guardians. Some students said that they would let their parents/guardians know if they were struggling or having difficulty with a subject, that way the parents/guardians could help or arrange for a tutor. One student said that they would tell their parents if they were experiencing any sort of problems, that way the parents could help. The sharing discussed in these responses is a little different than the other sharing above but the involvement would still have a positive focus.

Taking Care of Needs For School

One category shared by only three responses (1.2%) is that of taking care of needs for school. One student spoke of needing to get their parents/guardians to sign a field trip permission form so this was a piece of shared information. Another needed lunch money and was willing to involve the parents/guardians in this aspect of school life. The other student needed money for a field trip and once again, the information about the upcoming event was shared. The involvement here was student initiated but it was also quite purposeful and the parental involvement was a necessity in order to achieve the specific end that each of these had in mind.

Negative Events/Occurrences

A small number of respondents (eight or 3.3%) said that some students would be willing to share information of a negative nature. Two said that they would be okay with telling their parents/guardians about bad marks. Another student stated they would share

information about drug use among students as their parents feel “drugs is a huge issue” among teens. One student said that they would speak to their parents/guardians about bullying. Another respondent in this category indicated they would talk about “trouble with other students” and yet another said they would share information about “trouble with a friend”. The last two answers here deal with fights and being kicked out of school and both students stated they would share this with their parents/guardians. This category of responses shows that some students are willing to share both the good and the bad with their parents/guardians even if there are some negative ramifications involved with doing so.

Information About Teachers

There were 17 responses (7.1%) that dealt with telling parents/guardians information about teachers. Some of these spoke of how nice some teachers are (two responses) while two others said they would discuss with their parents/guardians teachers with poor teaching methods. The topic of trouble with a certain teacher is something that one student said they might discuss with a parent/guardian. One student said they would discuss teachers who give excessive work and another said they would speak of teachers who they feel are not prepared well enough to teach them. A student said they would tell about the great teachers and another of how they are getting along with their teachers and courses. Overall this category is divided into those who would speak well of their teachers and how they teach and those who would speak less than kindly about them. This is probably a safe topic to discuss with a parent/guardian as it places attention on individuals other than the student and still involves the parents/guardians in the discussion about school life.

Other Events/Issues

The other 25 responses (10.4%) did not fit easily into any specific category and thus have been labeled other events/issues. Four students said it is best not to tell them anything at all while two students would be happy sharing everything or almost everything about school life. One student felt it may be okay to share “funny or stupid things” with their parents/guardians and another thought gossip about other students may be shared. Plans to attend college were mentioned as a good topic as were the school’s atmosphere and physical aspects. One of the respondents says it is okay to talk about “the people who get drunk and do drugs in this school.” Values and opinions were also brought up as things to share as were the topics of homework and school work. Interestingly enough, one person wrote that high school students may wish to share information about “their social life in school” and another said how they spend their breaks would be a good conversation piece. Overall some of these are quite personal while others seem almost superficial and impersonal.

Summary

It appears that the high school students in this survey would be quite willing to share items of information that make them look good, are rather safe and impersonal, and that do not divulge too much information about the private side of their schooling. To a parent, the items that are offered up may certainly lend comfort but there seems to be a definite difference in depth between what is freely given and what is consciously withheld. The reasons for this appear to be varied and seem to differ from case to case but it is important to note that this does indeed appear to exist.

12. If you had bad news on a report card, how would your parents/guardians react?

The responses to this question ranged from parents/guardians being disappointed or having negative reactions and meting out punishments to offers of encouragement and support. Many students indicated that the people at home may not be particularly happy with bad news on a report card, but generally would take it as an opportunity to lend assistance. The positive reactions seem to embrace the needs of the struggling students while the negative ones tend to indicate a fear of letting parents/guardians down. Once again, there is a group of responses that do not really fit well into any one of the other categories and there are also some that fit quite well into two or more of the categories and thus there are 169 responses for this question.

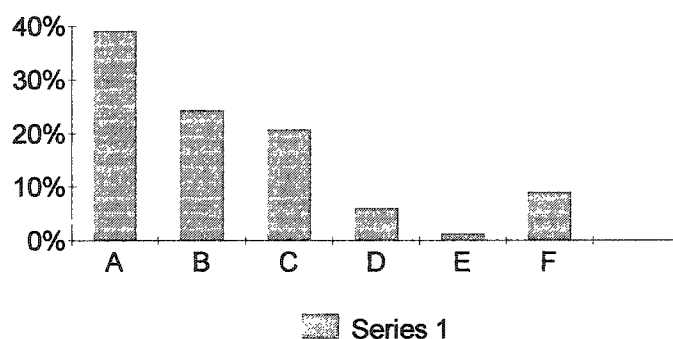
Figure 10

Reaction to a Poor Report

66	(39.0%)	Offer Encouragement/Support
41	(24.3%)	Disappointed
35	(20.7%)	Negative Reaction
10	(5.9%)	Punishment
2	(1.2%)	Blame Something/Someone
15	(8.9%)	Other Responses

Table 13

Reaction to a Poor Report



Offer Encouragement/ Support

Sixty-six responses (39%) indicated that the parents/guardians would offer encouragement or support if faced with bad news on their child's report card. Twelve of the responses in this category mentioned the words "disappointed" or "disappointment" but unlike the other ones that will be discussed under the heading "Disappointed", these talk about parents being disappointed but offering help or accepting the mark and its disappointment if the student tried their best. These students spoke of parents being let down by bad marks but stated that the parents/guardians would be understanding or show caring. The difference lies in the positive notion behind the encouragement; the parents/guardians are showing that they care but are serious about how the student does in school.

A number of the responses in this category mention the students trying harder "next time" or that trying harder this time would have netted better results. Approximately 27% of the responses here discuss the idea of trying harder and another several percent (roughly 13%) spoke of "getting it in gear" or trying to do better next time. Two of the respondents suggest that the disappointment and concern shown by parents would cause students to try harder in the future. Five others indicate that though the parents/guardians are expecting more from the students, they are willing to offer help and support and in doing so are encouraging the students to work harder.

Disappointed

The next most common group of responses was the "Disappointed" category with 41 answers (24.3%). Many surveys (14) simply indicated that the parents/guardians would be "disappointed" while another six spoke of parents being "very" or "badly" disappointed. A

few of these mentioned some encouraging words but the general sense of these responses was plain disappointment. One student indicated that the parental disappointment would stem from knowing that the student would punish themselves for the bad showing. Another student pointed out that doing poorly would be disappointing to the parents because it would indicate the student “did not handle...[their] responsibilities well.” This leads us back to the need for independence and control that was seen in responses to previous questions in this survey.

A number of the responses (11) seem to hinge on the notion that doing poorly in school usually indicates not working up to your potential but a few of the students said that things were “okay” as long as they were trying hard enough. Four of the respondents were clear in stating that their parents/guardians might be disappointed but would not overreact, get “mad” or “freak out” but another said that their parents/guardians “would be disappointed which is worse than mad.” Two of those surveyed said that their marks are always or usually good so the notion of a bad mark would indeed be a disappointing phenomenon to their parents/guardians. Most of the perceived disappointment that appears in these responses comes with acceptance of the circumstances at hand but the notion of trying harder in future is a clearly visible expectation on the part of the parents/guardians of these students (at least according to a number of the students in this survey).

Negative Reaction

A good portion of respondents (35 or 20.7% of those surveyed) indicated that their parents/guardians would have a negative reaction to a bad mark on a report card. Six students said that their parents would be mad and/or “yell” while others would display

“anger” (five) or “shock” (one) or “freak out” (three) at news of this nature. Four others said that the reaction would simply reflect the fact that their parents “would not be pleased”. For some of these students the reaction would be connected with a loss of privileges (two) or some other form of punishment (one). Two students spoke of being in for a series of “lectures” or a few weeks of “nagging”. The clear point in this is that the students feel their parents/guardians would be upset by the news and this would cause some form of negative reaction and consequences. Most of the responses in this category are similar in scope but the degree of negative reaction ranges from fairly mild to quite extreme.

Punishment

Ten surveys (5.9%) dealt with punishment as a response to a bad mark on a report card. Four students could anticipate a grounding (some for up to a full year) while five feel they would suffer the loss of a special privilege. One respondent stated that their “social life would end until they [the marks] got better” while another said that they would lose the privilege of playing sports. One student said that they would face “a grounding and a huge lecture all summer.” These reactions indicate a punitive consequence to bad marks and sound like they are feared by these respondents.

Try to Blame it on Something/ Someone

There were two responses (1.2%) that offered possible blame for the appearance of a bad mark on a report card. Both of these tried to blame it on a factor that was in the control of the student. One said that their mother would blame the bad mark on her daughter spending too much time with her boyfriend. This would be something that would be easily remedied by the mother. The other response placed the blame on the student not

passing their assignments in on time. Both of these responses are different from the rest because they lay blame on factors that can be altered for future reporting periods.

Other Responses

The other 15 responses (8.9%) were quite different from those mentioned above and thus fall into the “Other” category. Some indicated a perceived weaker level of concern on the part of the parents. Three students said that their parents/guardians would not really care while another discussed a possible double standard between expectations for themselves and their brother. One student said that their parents would be moved to becoming more involved in their school work if the marks dropped. Two students said that they really do not know what would happen as they have never been faced with this while three others said that the reaction would not be too bad, either the parents felt that the students were old enough to “take responsibility for their own actions” or that “they are used to it.” One student simply stated that their parents would not find out if they had a bad mark on a report card.

Summary

The volume of responses to this question is great. The respondents appear to have had little difficulty relating to this scenario or at least commenting on it. Most mention of parents/guardians was positive and supportive but some students indicated that a bad mark on a report card would be a big deal for their parents. The fear of repercussions from bad marks and the fact that most students did not want to disappoint their parents/guardians supports why so many respondents in question #10 (roughly 50) stated that students may wish to keep bad marks or marks in general hidden. Some students have indicated that it is easier to manage this information on their own than to try to explain the marks to their

parents and be made to “feel like crap” for it. It appears that in a number of instances, the passage of information to parents is controlled by the students.

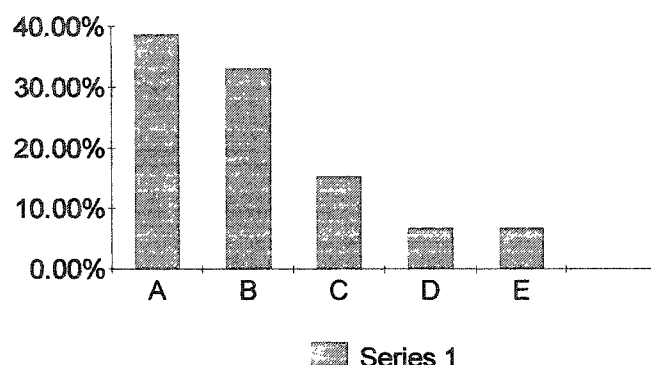
13. If they felt that they had to, how might high school students keep things from parents/guardians?

There was no shortage of information or suggestions as to how a high school student might keep their parents/guardians uninformed about aspects of their school lives. Out of the 136 respondents, this question received 197 responses. These ranged from quite passive methods such as failing to mention something to actually lying or purposefully intercepting correspondence from the school. It appears that some people have given this a lot of thought and are quite systematic in their approach while others have been moved to indulge in these efforts occasionally, when the need is pressing. *Figure 11* and *Table 14* below illuminate some of the various methods that may be employed to keep parents/guardians uninformed about some aspects of school life.

Figure 11

How to Keep Things From Parents

76	(38.6%)	Avoid Telling Them What You Don't Want them to Know
65	(33.0%)	Do Not Make Papers, Tests, Etc. Available
30	(15.2%)	Lie/Do Not Tell the Whole Truth
13	(6.6%)	Intercept Correspondence from School
13	(6.6%)	Other Responses

Table 14**How to Keep Things from Parents*****Scale***

A = avoid telling parents what you do not want them to know

B = do not make papers, tests, etc. available to parents

C = lie/do not tell the whole truth

D = intercept correspondence from the school

E = other responses

Do Not Make Papers, Tests, Notes, Available for Parents

Thirty-three percent or 65 respondents said that an easy way to keep information from parents/guardians is by not making the information available to them. If you do not want your parents/guardians to see a poor test result, do not show them the test. There were 20 responses that used the word “hide” and another 11 students who indicated that leaving things at school was one way to control parental access to them. Some of the things respondents spoke of hiding or keeping from parents were such things as report cards, notes from school, marks, tests, assignments, projects, and the like. It appears that for seven respondents in this category this applies to all correspondence while for the majority of others (28) it is only for instances of negative news. Thirteen students spoke of throwing report cards/tests out while others spoke of ripping (three) or burning (three) notes and tests. One student summed things up well: “Poor tests, letters and report cards

don't make it home so most times parents do not find out." The control of information between the school and the home appears to be something that can be managed by high school students if they so desire.

Lie/ Do Not Tell the Whole Truth

Another way for high school students to keep information and events from parents/guardians is by lying or failing to tell the whole truth when asked about some aspect of their schooling. Thirty of the responses (15.2%) discussed the notion of lying or not revealing all of the information. Twenty-one students explicitly stated that lying was a way to keep things from parents. Three other respondents spoke of covering up for things or not telling the whole truth. One student indicated that you could avoid telling the truth by responding that things are the "same as usual" while another felt that parents would believe you if you told them that you did "good" but "forgot it at school." Another way is to say that the "teacher hasn't corrected their tests yet" says one student. One respondent said that a student could deny the existence of the test or report while another said that you should "never tell them how you are doing in school and lie if they ask". This method of controlling information seems to have a number of implications and it may beg the question "who is telling the truth and how can we tell?"

Intercept Correspondence Between the School and Home

Correspondence between the school and home is a way for one entity to keep the other informed. Some respondents (13 or 6.6%) indicated that high school students may want to control the flow of information home by intercepting correspondence. Newsletters, letters, and information generated at the school and intended for parents may actually stay with the students if they are the messengers. This is what five of the students surveyed said

while another six respondents said that they could keep correspondence from parents/guardians by checking the mail before their parents got a chance to check. Three students spoke of intercepting telephone calls from the school, telling “the principal your parents aren’t home” or staying home to “answer the phone when the school calls so your parents won’t answer the phone and find out.” This area of control appears to be more active than others and seems to be working on a conscious level while others may simply happen by chance.

Avoid Telling Them What You Do Not Want Them to Know

A large portion of those surveyed (38.6% or 76 respondents) said that one way to avoid having parents/guardians find out what you do not want them to know is simply to keep the information to yourself. If you do not talk about a test that is coming up and you do poorly, your parents/guardians are not likely to ask about it. If you do well, sharing this information is a nice surprise. Most of the responses in this category (almost all of them in some manner or other) simply advise “just don’t tell them.” Fifteen respondents say that you should “not say anything” or “don’t talk to them about school” and one says to avoid conversation altogether. If parents do not think of asking or know when to ask about tests, assignments, and reports, it is less likely that they will ask about them. This method of keeping information from parents is more passive than others and indeed has greater popularity than the more aggressive means of control like those mentioned above.

Other Responses

The final category, Other Responses, accounts for 6.6% or 13 of the responses. These are comprised of an array of statements ranging from pretending to be sick and staying home and making a variety of excuses as a means of keeping information from parents to

blaming others for poor marks. One student said that you could always go and “live with your grandparents” to avoid dealing with your parents. Another student said that you could send your parents “to something else to avoid going to parent-teacher interviews.” A suggestion of changing your marks to appear more favourable was also made. Only one respondent specifically stated that they would not keep things from their parents. These final responses range from quite passive to rather deliberate and indicate a wide spectrum of ways to control the flow of information.

Summary

The responses to this question indicate that a large array of tactics could be employed at various times by high school students wishing to keep information from their parents/guardians. Some of these operate in the passive realm and involve students not sharing school information with parents/guardians. The idea appears to be that if you do not share information, parents will be less likely to ask specifics about day-to-day school life. Other respondents indicated that students may be inclined to take a more active role in keeping information out of the hands of parents if the students feel that the circumstances warrant it. Some would go to extremes to intercept mail and telephone calls regarding negative information from school if it meant avoiding conflict. Others suggested that low marks could be changed to avoid questions about school work. From the responses here it appears that high school students can control the quantity and content of information passed from the school to the home.

14. How might communication between the school and parents/guardians be improved at the high school level?

Many of those surveyed (127 responses out of 150 or 84.7%) felt that communication

between the school and the parents/guardians could be improved. Ninety-five respondents indicated that the school should initiate more contact with the home while 17 others felt that the parents/guardians could do more to improve communication. Five responses suggested that the media is an underutilized method of reaching parents while ten others believed that no improvement in communication was necessary. Three respondents felt that things would improve if parental involvement in education were made mandatory. Once again, there were some responses (25) that were hard to categorize and ended up in the “Other” category. As well, there were some surveys that offered more than one response for this question. Below, *Figure 12* and *Table 15* illustrate these responses.

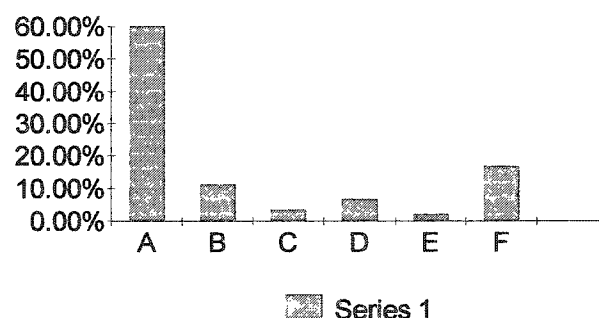
Figure 12

Ways to Improve Communication

90	(60.0%)	A	Better/More School Initiated Contact
17	(11.3%)	B	More Contact Initiated By Parents
5	(3.3%)	C	Better Use of Media as Information Source
10	(6.7%)	D	No Improvement Necessary/Cannot
3	(2.0%)	E	Make Involvement Mandatory
25	(16.7%)	F	Other Responses

Table 15

Ways to Improve Communication



Better/ More School Initiated Contact

A majority of the answers to this question (60% or 90 responses) advocate for better or more school initiated contact with parents/guardians. Twenty-three of the surveys discussed more frequent telephone contact. Some suggested instances of where the school would call are: when students are absent from school, experiencing difficulty in a subject, or if the teacher had some concern that they would like to bring up with the parents/guardians. Other responses called for more meetings between parents and teachers (eight responses), more personal one-on-one interviews (13), more PTA or Parent Council meetings (three), and more general information nights for parents (three). Nine surveys stressed the importance of getting the parents into the school and getting them more involved in school life. The idea of mailing/faxing newsletters, using the Internet and e-mail to keep in contact with parents, and making sure that announcements get to parents were also mentioned. The responses indicated a number of ways that communication between the school and the home could be improved and many of these simply expand on existing practices. Newsletters, telephone calls, interviews, and the like are mentioned several times; these are existing practices in this school that the respondents feel need to happen more frequently. These students seem to have similar ideas in relation to this question.

More Contact Initiated By Parents

Some of the surveys suggested that the parents are responsible for improving communication with the school. Seventeen respondents (11.3%) feel that parents must initiate more contact and improve the lines of communication. According to the survey, parents can improve communication with the school and become more familiar with their

child by visiting the school more often, asking their children more questions about school, talking to teachers more frequently, coming to parent-teacher interviews more often, attending school events and functions, and having more one-on-one time with their child. The partnering is stressed by one student who says “they could talk and actually go to meetings together” while another points out that a parent or guardian’s level of involvement is totally up to them. Nonetheless the majority of responses in this category show a potential of positive outcomes when parents/guardians initiate greater contact and move to improve communication with the school.

Better Use of the Media as An Information Source

The idea of better publication of information pertaining to school was suggested in five responses. These spoke of using the various media such as newspaper and radio to advertise upcoming meetings (PTA, parent-teacher interviews, and information nights) and special events. Mention was made of the positive impact that the school’s weekly newspaper piece and other coverage has and how informing it can be. These suggestions are also dealing with enhancing existing practice at the school.

No Improvement Necessary/ Cannot Improve

Ten of the answers to the survey (6.7%) dealt with not wanting or not being able to improve communication between the home and the school. Some suggest that things are fine the way they are, that they should not be improved. The belief here seems to be that things are working now so do not try to fix what is not broken. One student wrote that “miscommunication is inevitable” so do not waste your time while another respondent indicated that there is “no need for greater communication.” The message among these people is clear and one can only speculate as to why they feel this way and how it factors

into the responses for question #13 dealing with keeping parents/guardians uninformed.

Make Involvement Mandatory

A small number of respondents (three or 2%) suggested that communication could be improved if parental involvement in education were made mandatory. One survey states that making parent-teacher interview attendance compulsory would force communication and thus make it easier. Another says that we must “tell parents they have to get involved with their child’s school or the kids can’t go to school” and then they will communicate more and increase their involvement. This seems extreme and one must question if forced involvement and communication would really benefit the students and the school as a whole.

Other Responses

The number of responses that did not fit in with the other categories for this question was large. Twenty-five answers (16.7%) did not really fit in and some of these, upon closer inspection, are quite telling. Two surveys pointed out that greater communication could begin with their parents learning the school’s telephone number, a possible indication that the parents are not too involved. Another student says that we must “keep them out”, parents have no place in the school. Seven of the respondents stated that they are at a loss, they do not really know how we can improve communication and unfortunately another says they simply “don’t care” if or how communication can be improved. The remaining responses do not really fit the question and discuss such things as more frequent attendance at church, spy cams, and computers for everyone.

Summary

The list of suggestions for improving communication that was generated by this

question is large and, for the most part, positive. A number of the points that are raised are already operating at the school and the respondents are suggesting more frequent or better use of these if communication is to be improved between the school and the parents/guardians. The majority of these improvements put the onus on the school to provide better communication and contact and seem to suggest using methods that some responses to other questions have exposed to be ineffective means of communication. On the one hand, some of the respondents are saying that these methods are part of what keep their parents/guardians uninformed or in the dark while on the other hand, they are saying that they are useful in improving communication. Maybe these are effective communication tools but the students have found ways to keep them manageable.

Additional Comments

There were a few additional comments included in the surveys and they certainly add commentary to what has arisen out of the previous 14 questions. One student says that their mom gets into their “work too much” and they feel that they can handle it on their own. The need for independence came out in another comment that stated “what the schools need is to have students handle their own problems instead of having to rely on mommy or daddy to fix them - it will teach a lot of people maturity and independence.” The need for independence with this individual is obvious. One other student praised the level of involvement of their parents and said “they care deeply”. Two other comments suggest that we need to listen more to what the students have to say and try to be open-minded with them. These comments allow us to see how some respondents feel about this topic.

Chapter Five

Findings

Introduction

The survey instrument used in this research study has uncovered a rich body of data. As seen in Chapter 4, *Analysis*, there are a number of instances where teenage students exert some control over the level of involvement of their parents/guardians in the teen's high school education. As well, there are some things that the students willingly volunteer to share with the adults in their lives while keeping certain other things hidden from home. Some of the information that has emerged lends itself to further discussion and this will be the basis of this chapter. Along with the discussion of the emergent themes will be a look at the interview data as it relates to the survey data from the previous chapter. These interviews help to further illuminate some of the information that came out of the survey analysis.

When looking for themes and patterns in the survey data, certain key words come to mind. The students speak of wanting "independence" but needing "support" and finding a balance between the two is at play here. Another point that arises is the control of parental access to information from the school and about the students' school life. This ties in with the theme dealing with teen privacy and the desire to manage their school lives independently. Communication between the parents and teens is also important here as it is something that is partly within the control of the teens and thus is negotiated by parents and teens. Some of those surveyed noted that there were some things that could be shared with parents/guardians and some things that should not be shared. The withholding of information about school is both active and passive and has many different degrees and

reasons behind it and this is also an interesting theme. Many of these themes overlap and the data from one question often flows readily into other discussions and thus some of the information below appears in more than one theme.

Emergent Themes

Wanting Independence While Needing Support

The idea of independence arose throughout the responses to the open ended questions. Some of those surveyed spoke of needing help when they were younger but now being “able to do my work on my own” or being “more mature in handling my own school work.” Two students spoke of getting “older and more independent” while three others said that they no longer need parental help. Their message is loud and clear: these students are getting older and need to be left to “handle” their schooling themselves. They may have once been in need of help but now are “old enough to take care of ourselves.” One student wants their parents to allow them to be “independent because at university they [parents] aren’t there to remind you.”

This desire for independence can give the impression that teenage students do not want any parental contact when it comes to their schooling but as we can see, this is not the case for a majority of the students surveyed. As noted in the previous chapter, over 66% of respondents believe that parents/guardians should have strong to moderate involvement in the educational lives of the teens in their care (survey question #8). One student says that “parents should be involved to help and motivate their children to stay in school and get an education” and another states that parents should be aware and must “check for problems.” There are five surveys that speak of parents being aware so they can help when needed. The sentiment is best summed up in this statement from one respondent: “The

parents should know enough so that they can intervene if the student is heading into a negative situation.” There are other surveys that echo this idea and it is as though the students want the freedom and independence of doing it all on their own while at the same time enjoying the comfort and protection of parental involvement and support.

There is certainly one area upon which a majority (64.2%) of respondents could agree. It may be okay to involve parents/guardians in academics and some extracurricular activities but the school dances “are meant for us and having them there I ... would not be able to have fun.” The response to the idea of having parents or guardians chaperoning a school dance was a resounding “NO” and a number of reasons were given. As noted above, 32 students simply stated that they would “not like it” and many others explained why it would not be okay. Eleven respondents were concerned that they might be embarrassed by their parents and another four felt that they would feel uncomfortable with this idea. From this we can conclude that academic interference by parents/guardians is far more acceptable than interference into social situations such as school dances.

Independence is important to these students, especially when it comes to situations dealing with time spent with their friends and parental support is not sought as often here.

Control of Parental Access to Information From and About School

According to these surveys, high school students wishing to keep secret from parents/guardians certain information about their school lives can do so in a number of ways. Over 58% of respondents admitted to consciously keeping information about their schooling from their parents/guardians (survey question #6). In question #7, almost 53% said they had consciously hidden a negative mark or school happening from home. 65.5% of respondents in question #10 said that they knew of things students may want to keep

from parents/guardians and these include things dealing with academics, discipline, violence, drugs, and issues with friends. There were many suggestions of what teenage students may want to keep more private and away from parents/guardians.

The most common method of keeping parents/guardians uninformed about aspects of school life was by simply not offering the information to them. According to the surveys, the two most common ways students might keep things from parents are by avoiding telling them what you do not want them to know (76 responses or 38.6%) and by not making papers, tests, notes available for parents (65 responses or 33%). Not sharing information and not talking about school at all led parents to ask fewer questions about school and what goes on there. If parents/guardians do wish to see things from school some of the more common ways of making tests, reports, notes, etc. unavailable are not bringing the objects home, hiding them, ripping them up, burning them, and throwing them out. A smaller portion of respondents (6.6%) spoke of intercepting correspondence as a means of keeping parents unaware. These students spoke of going “to the mail to get school letters before parents” and staying home to “answer the phone when the school calls so your parents won’t answer the phone and find out.” The newsletters mentioned in question #1 made it home most times in 40% of the cases but the more potentially damaging correspondence spoken of here appears to get intercepted or “misplaced” more often.

Parents and guardians may feel that they have a lot of access to information regarding school and what goes on there. They are privy to printed material in the form of newspaper articles and columns and may even be in that 40% who receive newsletters through their sons and daughters. Report cards and graded materials may also be made

available to them. It is easy to see where they would feel quite comfortable in their wealth of knowledge but listening to the students paints a different story. The students believe that they have control over what information is accessible to the parents/guardians. Many teens take this for granted yet there are a number of adults who may be shocked to learn that they are only receiving information that is filtered by their teen.

Teen Privacy and Communication With Parents/Guardians

With growing up and becoming independent comes the desire for some privacy and space. When asked what level of parental involvement they would like to see, one student said parents/guardians “should be involved but still give the student privacy and space.” When asked how they would feel about having their parents/guardians chaperoning at a dance, one student said “I would hate that because I would feel like they were intruding [on the] privacy of my social life.” Another respondent said “I would not like my mother or father at a dance as I believe this is my space and I should be free from the embarrassment of having my mother do the ‘funky chicken.’” Two other students referred to school dances as times to be with friends and not with family. Once again, information regarding the social time surrounding school and school activities is not usually open to parents/guardians.

The survey question dealing with how students might keep things from parents and guardians centres around the notion of privacy and information protection. It appears that some teenage students go to great lengths in order to protect this privacy and valued personal information. Hiding information, intercepting correspondence, lying, avoiding talk of school, avoiding parental contact, deceit, changing marks, and blaming others are all methods of choice among teens wishing to protect the sanctity of their privacy. The

choices available to teenage students seem to be endless and are often dependent on what the situation requires. Once again, this is information common to these students but likely foreign to the parents and guardians on the receiving end of this relationship.

As these students grow older and prepare for their futures, it appears that they have more going on in their lives that does not directly concern their parents. The parents may not even know enough about certain topics that are important to their sons/daughters to even think about asking questions or knowing which questions to ask. One student says that it is best if you “don’t talk to them at all”, this way they can never find out “what you don’t want them to know.” This may be a bit extreme but is likely happening more often than we would like to think. This communication gap keeps some parents unaware of information that may be helpful or useful in working with their teens but it also protects the privacy of the teenage students involved.

Things That May Be Shared and Those That Cannot Be Shared

There are a number of things that teenage students might like to keep from their parents and guardians but there are an equal number of things that they would be more than happy to share with them. Question #11 of the survey asked what the respondents felt high school students might like to share with parents/guardians and there were a number of responses. Some of these include academic success and achievements (52.3%), positive school events (13.7%) and good behavior/recognition (9.1%). Things like “making the honour role”, good marks, interesting classroom topics, awards, guest speakers, events, making a team, positive comments and compliments, and things of this nature are readily shared with parents and guardians. These topics are positive and cast the students in a good light.

The items that the students might wish to keep from parents/guardians have been listed above and include poor academic performance, getting in trouble, violence at school, drug and alcohol issues, and issues dealing with friends. These pieces of information are less positive than those that students would willingly share and may bring with them negative consequences. Knowledge of this information may also cause a rift between the students and their parents/guardians, placing further strain on an already delicate relationship. This is likely why some students may wish to keep their parents/guardians uninformed about some things regarding their school lives.

Given the choice between sharing something that would elicit praise or something that would result in punishment or rejection, it is not hard to see why some students choose to share only the positives. The notion of the active process of “lying” versus the passive act of “just not telling them” is at play here. If you ask a person if they have ever lied to their parents about something that happened at school, they may say they have not done this. If you ask the same person if they have ever consciously withheld a negative mark or event of their school lives from their parents, they may answer that they have. They may have participated in passive deception but not have actively lied to their parents and thus do not feel that they have done anything wrong or deceitful. It could be argued that this is a question of semantics but the reality is that both leave parents unaware of information pertaining to their teenage students. All in all there is a definite distinction between what is readily shared with parents/guardians and what is less likely to be shared and these seem to be divided in terms of bringing positive and negative results from parents and guardians.

Summary of Emergent Themes

As stated earlier, there are a number of places where the data discussed in one thematic

area is applicable to another theme. The teenage students in this survey desire some independence but still seek the support and approval of the significant adults in their lives. There must be a balance between what the students want and what they need in order to negotiate their way through high school and their teenage years. There are some things that require adult assistance but a number of others that do not really concern the parents/guardians. This leads into the notion of privacy and the need for space among teenage students. In the name of privacy and independence, some students withhold information from the adults in their lives. This is done in varying degrees and can be divided into active and passive deceit. Though there are things that a teenage student may wish to hide from parents/guardians, there are a number of events that they may wish to share with them. These can be divided into positive and negative and how readily they are shared is usually determined by their potential outcome. The level of involvement of parents/guardians in school and the amount and types of information they receive is, in some instances, partially controlled by the teenage students that are affected by this involvement.

Interview Data Summary/Connections with Survey Data

Along with the surveys I conducted personal interviews with students who had filled out surveys and had more to add on the subject. These interviews were to act as a means of triangulation of data but there were only four interviews and all were quite similarly positive, it would not be safe to say that they are representative of a sample larger than themselves. The fact that they wanted to speak more on the subject indicates an interest in this area and for their efforts and interest, their interviews are important to this study. The information housed in the four interviews conducted appears to be consistent in content

and direction with the analysis of the survey data. The responses to the interview questions allowed the respondents to add more depth to their answers and thus serve an important role in this study. The questions asked in the interviews were of the same vein as the survey questions so the responses were similar. The only significant difference here is that the questions are of a personal nature and ask about “your parents/guardians” instead of simply parents/guardians as most of the survey questions did.

The first question of the interview dealt with the level of involvement that the interviewee felt parents should have in their education. The four responses were different from each other but similar to ones put forth in the survey responses. One person spoke of parents being involved “enough that they can help the student along as much as possible.” Another argued that parents/guardians should not be too involved because “high school is where you are supposed to be learning how to work by yourself on your own ... where you learn independence.” Another student revealed that parents should be fairly involved because the more they know and the deeper their involvement, the greater their concern “about the students and what they’re doing” will be. The fourth student stated that the level of parental involvement “doesn’t really matter ... as long as I know I’m passing.” As in the surveys, some interviewees felt that parental involvement is necessary but it must be balanced with the need for independence when dealing with high school aged students.

The next question dealt with a similar topic but asked about the ways the students would like to have their parents/guardians involved in their schooling. One student said that it is nice to have academic help from parents/guardians when it is needed but parents/guardians should allow students to do it on their own. Another response said that

“not everyone wants to see their parents walking around the school ... but going to PTA meetings [would cause] more connection” between parents and schools. Another student would like to see parents/guardians involved in extracurricular activities by encouraging participation in them, not offering any opinion as to whether they are good or bad or trying to stop students from doing them but making the option available and desirable. The final interview spoke of parental support of schools and their activities and functions. This respondent feels that parents should get involved in fundraising efforts and “help the school out a bit.” As with the surveys, the array of responses seems to indicate that parental involvement has some benefits and uses and there is a need for parents in the high school system even if it is “arms length involvement” determined by the needs of the students.

When asked about the areas of high school life where parents should not be involved, the responses were quite varied. One student indicated that if a student is “excelling” in one area, too much parental involvement may drive “the student away from the parents” and might lead the students to not want any help later on. This student goes on to say that parents should “stay out ... when they are not needed”, when the student is doing well.

Course selection is an area where one respondent would rather not have parental involvement, because it is the student’s choice and not that of the parents. The future will belong to the student and thus so should the selection of the courses to get them there.

The next interview dealt with the notion that concern is great but involvement should be lessened. The final response pointed out that if something happens in school and the school chooses to handle it internally, parents do not need to be informed. If the principal requests that the parents be involved this is fine but if not, the involvement of parents “just

makes things harder.” There are areas where these respondents do not want their parents/guardians involved and this is consistent with the responses to similar questions in the surveys.

When asked how students shape the role of parents/guardians in the high school, some of the interviewees seemed a little unsure. The notion of the parental role in education at the high school level being a support one came through again, students should be able to go to parents for help when they need it. If things are going well, parents should not be involved. Another student said that parents should step back and let the students make the decisions but not go too far in case the students step out of bounds and need help. This respondent went on to say that some students tend to take on too much so parents “need to be there to say that you are doing too much or you’re not doing enough” but they should not “push you into too much.” Another respondent says that it should be up to the parents how involved they want to become and that students should not be the ones deciding this. These responses did not really get too heavily into the matter of who controls the level of parental involvement.

The next question dealt with the ways in which parents/guardians are uninformed or misinformed about what goes on at the high school. The responses revealed some information about how times have changed and “parents know how they were at that age and ... students are actually doing a lot more at a younger age.” They go on to say that parents do not know what to expect. The next interviewee indicated that parents are not really informed “of anything that goes on at high school unless the school posts something in a newspaper or on the radio or calls home because most students don’t bring home announcement sheets or anything to their parents.” A solution was raised in the next

interview when the respondent said that there are not enough newsletters going home to inform parents of school events. This interviewee states that parents “need to be somewhat involved in the school’s activities so they know what’s going on in the school.” The fourth respondent sums it up well in that “there are kids who just go to school and they don’t take home those letters and stuff to their parents” and when events start to happen parents think “why didn’t the school send me home a letter?” The responses to this question are in keeping with the responses given in the survey, some parents are less informed about what goes on at school than they may realize.

The reasoning behind teenage students keeping their parents/guardians uninformed about certain aspects of their schooling is addressed in the next interview question. One student indicated that some things happen that have nothing to do with them or their education so they simply do not bother to share these facts with home. One example that the person gave is information about fights: this does not pertain to them and if parents were told, they may worry unnecessarily. This person also said that parents sometimes make too big a deal over marks and “take these marks too seriously ... which makes it a lot harder for the student to do their work.” Parents need to “back off and give support more than punishment because usually students will punish themselves far worse.”

Another interviewee said that if a student is not doing well in school, they may wish to keep this from their parents “so they can continue slacking off.” They went on to say that if a student is “an overachiever they might not want to tell their parents” as a means of avoiding unnecessary praise. Another respondent had a similar thought in that if a student got into a fight and was on the brink of being expelled or losing their credit they might be able to avoid any negative ramifications from home if “they just don’t tell them.” Keeping

parents/guardians uninformed might be a means of avoiding further negative consequences in this case. The final response indicated that some people might be “ashamed of their parents” or might not get along with them and thus might want their parents/guardians to be distant from their school lives. There seems to be a number of reasons teenage students might want to keep their parents/guardians uninformed about some parts of their school lives and this is similar to what emerged out of the survey data.

Summary of Interview/Survey Data Connections

The interviews expanded on what the surveys revealed. There appears to be consistency between the two sources of data, survey and interview, and thus the interviews serve to support the survey data results. Those who were able to complete the survey, go away and return to do an interview more than a week later had time to reflect and think ahead but the survey responses would not be fresh in their minds so the connections that emerge out of the two sources would not likely to be a direct result of each other.

Conclusion

There are a number of themes that emerge out of both the survey data and that from the interviews. Much of these are similar and show a need for independence within a supportive framework. The teenage students here want their parents/guardians there when it suits the teens but the adults should “back off” when they are not needed. The parents/guardians, according to the respondents, should give space but keep a watchful eye in case they need to intervene and “rescue” the teenager. The notion that parents are often unaware of the full situation is clearly visible in this data and the responses lead us to conclude that the teenage students have a role to play in keeping the adults uninformed.

The students are getting older and it is natural that they would be looking for more independence. The interesting part of all of this is how they achieve this independence without having the adults know that some things are being kept from them.

Chapter Six

Discussion of Research Results

Introduction

This study focused on the role that teenage students play in shaping the relationships between their parents/guardians and the school in one high school in Western Prince Edward Island. The research questions were:

1. What roles, if any, do teenagers play in fostering or hampering strong relationships between parents/guardians and the high school?
2. How might children help shape parent-high school relationships?
3. Are teens the missing piece of the puzzle, what might aid in helping build stronger parent-school relationships?

Surveys and interviews were the sources of data. Students in grades 10-12 were randomly chosen for the survey and any wishing to discuss the topic of parental involvement further once they had completed the survey were asked to complete a one-on-one interview. Four of the 136 survey respondents consented to an interview. Both the surveys and the interviews examined student attitudes toward parental involvement in high school and ways parental involvement can be managed by the students. The data from both sources were also compared.

In this chapter, the results of the surveys and interviews are further discussed. As well, limitations of the study, implications for this high school and education in general, and suggestions for further study are presented.

High School Students and Parental Involvement

At the outset of this research, I wanted to ask high school students what they believed their role to be in shaping the relationship that their parents/guardians had with the high

school. The possibility existed that they perceived no personal contribution to this role. Were this the case, the findings of this study would have been considerably different. I was not convinced that things such as parents being unaware of much that went on at school happened merely out of coincidence and when I surveyed and interviewed students about this, I found that the students were more knowledgeable about their role than I thought. Many may not have actually verbalized this knowledge or thought specifically about being in control of the flow of information from the school to their parents, but the data indicates that the practice of channeling what parents were made aware of was obvious to a majority of those surveyed. The students do have a role in shaping parent-high school relationships and if we are to strengthen these relationships, we must begin with the students and their needs.

The data collected in this study show that there are benefits and drawbacks to having parents involved in the high school. A majority of the students appear to see the benefits to involvement such as support and guidance but this is pitted against the need for independence among teenage students. Parents who are well-informed can offer better help when it is needed and are less likely to be caught off guard by surprises such as poor marks. If parents know what is happening in the school lives of their teens, the relationship between the parents and the teen is less likely to be severely strained by the bad news than if the news is a total shock to the parents. This appears to have a cost associated with it as the more the parents are involved and informed, the less room there is for independence, space, and privacy for the teen. Less involvement often leads to less parental pressure to change or work harder. If parents/guardians are not aware of a negative event, they are not likely to be concerned about it and to get involved. Though this is the case, the

surveys show that there is a definite need on the part of some of these students to see that their parents and guardians are concerned and do care.

The reasons for wanting or feeling the need to withhold information from parents are many and various and these are often situational. If a student wants to avoid conflict over a bad mark or an assignment that is due, they may be inclined to hide this information. This may only happen on rare occasions and may be contingent with avoiding having privileges revoked on a given day such as the night of a dance. The most common thread in the discussion of why students withhold information from parents/guardians is the need to avoid negative consequences. There may be certain school-related punishments for negative behavior that will be furthered if parents become aware of what went on at school. This leads some students to deception, either active such as lying, or passive such as failing to mention something that happened during their school day.

Other reasons for keeping things from parents deal with protecting them from information that may trouble or worry them unnecessarily. Some students want to protect their parents from the harsh realities of high school and teenage life so they will keep hidden from them information regarding violence, bullying, alcohol and drugs. Others feel that if parents are made aware of these issues, they will become more involved and this will jeopardize their privacy and independence. If parents do not feel the need to worry they are likely not going to worry and will remain uninvolved in this aspect of the teen's life.

There are many methods of keeping parents unaware of what goes on at school. Some students will neglect to bring correspondence home if they are the messengers while others will intercept information passing from the school to the home by screening the mail and

telephone calls. Some students actively hide or destroy potentially damaging information such as discipline letters or poor tests/report cards while others simply do not draw attention to their existence. There are some survey respondents who discuss lying as a means of keeping information hidden while some others suggest keeping all information concerning school out of the hands of parents and guardians as a means of avoiding any questions about school. As stated earlier, many of the reasons for keeping information from parents are situational and thus, so are the methods of accomplishing this.

As children grow up, they tend to want to break away from the dependency of childhood. To have teenage students who want to go through high school making many of the decisions and choices on their own is not unnatural. This need for independence is clear through the responses to the survey and interview questions. When students do poorly and the parents are informed, this independence can be placed in jeopardy. If parents and guardians are not informed of the indiscretion, there is more chance that the independence, space, freedom and privacy of teenage lives will remain untouched. This, along with the desire to escape looking like they cannot deal with their independence, are reasons for keeping parents unaware of certain aspects of their school lives. As well, when the news is good, the parents are often readily informed of this. They are given enough of the positive information to feel that they are a part of their teen's schooling and likely do not think to look for the negatives. In giving some independence to their teenagers, parents are accepting what they are told and not looking beyond.

The data collected in these surveys and interviews are conclusive, teenage students do have a role in shaping the relationships that their parents and guardians have with the school. These students do control parental access to information through a variety of

active and passive means. The parents are aware of some information (usually mostly positive) through what they read, see, and are told by their teens and seem, for the most part, content with this. What appears to be a naturally occurring development, the breaking away from parents by teenagers, is actually working as a means of keeping parents and guardians uninformed about certain aspects of high school life. The students know the keys to improved parental involvement yet they are not moving to increase the presence of parents and guardians within their school lives.

Limitations of this Study

This was a qualitative research study that provided important data for the high school being studied. The findings are quite specific to this school and may not be generalized to all high schools in Prince Edward Island and beyond but there are some aspects of the findings that may prove useful to other situations. It may be that parents in urban areas are more inclined to delve further into the educational lives of their children than parents in this rural area are apt to do but this has not been looked at here and would only be speculation were it stated. Most parents hold this rural school in high regard and tend not to question the practices of its staff; the idea among parents is that if the school has a concern, they will call. In an urban setting, where the school and its staff are less well-known and trusted, the parents are more likely to ask questions and thus the students may not be as able to keep their parents uninformed. As well, the findings are not relevant to elementary or middle schools as such because students in these schools are less likely to be as active in keeping information from parents/guardians. The differences between these levels of schools are significant and thus, this research cannot be generalized to elementary and middle school situations on Prince Edward Island or elsewhere.

There were only four interviews conducted and this is also a limitation. I was willing to interview all who came forward but no others wished to do so. The data collected from these four interviews were fairly consistent with what arose out of the surveys and thus can be considered useful. These respondents were represented in both the surveys and the interviews but there was a time lapse between the surveys and the interviews that would make it difficult for one set of responses to have a great impact on the other. As well, the interviews did not cover all of the specific items that were on the survey and this could be considered a limitation.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this research study provide insight into the role teenage students play in shaping parental relationships with this high school. The methods and reasons offered by these survey respondents may be interesting and useful to some people outside of this particular setting even if the school or situation is different from the one studied here.

Implications for this High School and Education in General

As a result of this research, it is evident that teenage students do play a role in shaping the relationship that their parents or guardians have with this high school. It seems as though the students are aware of the power they possess or can exert on this relationship yet adults seem unaware of this. There are a number of people who may be interested in these results and this study may change existing practices at the school.

The parents who feel comfortable in their knowledge about what is going on at the school certainly may find the results disturbing. Once they realize just how uninformed they may be they may begin to look more deeply into what is going on and become more heavily involved in their teen's education. They may also ask more questions and offer

more support so the relationship between the students and their parents may strengthen as a result. If the parents see just how much is out of their scope of knowledge, they may become more active in the school and in the education of their teens and in turn, this will help to strengthen the school as a whole.

Teachers and administrators who rely on students to convey messages to the home may think twice about this service and its effectiveness. If 60% of the newsletters do not make it home regularly, is it a good use of time, energy, and paper? Maybe there is a better way to communicate this information and it may be housed in the suggestions made by the students (question #14). If parents and guardians are left unaware of much of what goes on at school and their awareness of this information will improve student behavior, teachers may want to make more frequent contact with some parents. The surveys and interviews indicate an unwillingness on the part of the students to have their parents or guardians become aware of the negative events. If the teachers and administrators are made aware of the fact that the students still worry about their parents finding out about things that happen, the phone calls to parents may look like a worthy investment of time.

The students may want to change existing practices once their parents and teachers become aware of what has been going on at this school. It may cause them to be more creative in their pursuit of methods of keeping things away from parents or it may cause them to work more readily with their parents and guardians. Either way it will impact on their school lives.

Through the responses to survey and interview questions, the students shared their interpretation of the situation at this school and this data may open a few eyes both with people associated with this school and with others. I believe that the results will evoke

change of some kind and thus this research will have at least some educational implications at this school and beyond. As well, this work will contribute to scholarly research on high schools because it starts with the students and follows their roles in the process of information management and the flow of communication between the school and the home. If these findings are listened to at all, it will have some sort of impact on how things operate at this school and may cause others to examine their practices and their own situations. A written appraisal of the situation is now in existence.

Suggestions for Further Study

This research study answered a number of questions dealing with the role of teens in shaping parental involvement at one high school in rural Prince Edward Island. What is happening at other high schools and at the intermediate level must also be studied. There is a possibility that a number of parallels exist between other schools at these two levels (intermediate and high school) and the school studied in this research. What is happening here may very well be happening elsewhere and this needs to be viewed.

Another important area that arose out of this research was the possible connection between academic success and parental involvement. The research here did not look at this but I could not help but wonder what the academic success was of those who felt that their parents did not care either way? Is there a relationship between parental involvement and academic success? If a student feels that their parents/guardians do not care, does this affect how the student feels about their education? This would be a good study to conduct in this particular rural setting but may also be interesting to do in another setting.

Researcher's Reflections

The findings that arise out of this research study point to communication problems that

exist between the school and parents/guardians when it comes to high school students and their education. Through doing this research I have realized that parents are quite misinformed about how much information they really have and the school is misinformed about the effectiveness of current means of communicating with parents. Parents seem contented in what they do know and can find out and the people at the school seem happy with the existing practices but things can be a lot better and more effective. Improved communication should lead to more parental involvement and this is a key to school improvement and cannot be taken lightly. The time for change and improved communication with parents and guardians has arrived for this high school.

To change part of the existing model of communication may net some benefit but the changes and improvements needed to create effective communication between the school and home are far larger. This high school currently operates on a factory model that is quite depersonalized. No one person at the school is responsible for keeping up with what a student is doing and keeping parents informed of how the student is getting along in school. Teachers see upwards of 100 students in the run of a day and could not possibly contact the homes of all of their students even on a weekly basis. The homeroom teachers know a little about what each student in their homeroom is doing but do not have the time to meet with each teacher to see how these students are progressing. The subject expertise unique to high schools may have some benefits but it certainly has its drawbacks. At the elementary school level, the classroom teacher is responsible for a large portion of the education that a child receives and communication with the home is usually quite extensive and comprehensive. This luxury is not available at the high school level.

We must really ask ourselves what the objectives are for public education. Are we

trying to create well-rounded students who are able to get along with others and in society or are we aiming for a group of individuals who possess subject expertise in a number of areas? If one teacher taught all or most subjects to a group of high school students, the communication with home would be easier and more meaningful. If one teacher taught a group of students for most of the day, the issues and needs of particular students would be easier to identify and address. This has been lost through subject specialization and semestering. Are the students really benefiting from these methods or are these simply management strategies aimed at running high schools efficiently and cost-effectively?

Another area that must be addressed is the nature of communication between the school and home. If students are expected to deliver negative or potentially damaging communication to the home, who can blame them for choosing not to do so? If all that goes home is negative, who would bother to look for correspondence from the school? If parents feel that report cards and marks are summative and thus permanent, they may feel powerless in affecting change. If you feel that what comes home to you is final, you may feel that there is nothing that you can do to help your child. We must look at offering formative evaluation that points to what can be done to help the student improve. If parents and guardians feel that they can make a difference by becoming involved, they are more apt to do so.

There are various types of communication available to schools but the array used is limited. We see in the student responses that it is easy to intercept traditional communication (letters, telephone calls, etc.) yet the school employs the same methods over and over. We may be better served to look for personal contact with parents, either by having them come to the school more often or having them acknowledge receipt of a

communication. What we are using now seems like a waste of energy since it is so ineffective.

After having done this research I would recommend a few changes for this school if they hope to improve communication with parents and guardians. They may not have thought improvement necessary but after reading about the current state of communication, I would hope that they are planning to improve the communication model that currently exists in their school. The recommendations that I am making are:

1. Make your reporting and evaluation more formative with recommendations for student improvement.
2. Have parents respond to any communication that goes home from the school (to make sure it got there).
3. Have each teacher responsible for the education and progress of a group of students throughout their time at the school (less subject specialization and more contact between one specific teacher and a group of students). Make the group manageable (20-25 students) and have the expectation that the teacher contact the home early on in the year and frequently throughout the year, not just when problems arise. Encourage open dialogue between the home and the school as well. Since the students and teacher will be together for a large portion of three years, they will get to know each other well and this will help to identify and strengthen areas of weakness for students.
4. Have greater opportunity for parents/guardians to communicate with the school and the staff (invite parents/guardians into the school more often and encourage them to call, more opportunity for parents and students to meet with teachers, etc.).
5. Less use of the students as a vehicle of communication (more use of Internet, calls to parents at work or when they are home, better advertising of involvement opportunities, more onus on teachers to make contact -- every student has a parent-teacher interview either in person or by telephone, etc.).

If this school (and others for that matter) employed some of these new communication strategies, the communication with parents/guardians and the school would improve. The recommendations made here are not difficult to carry out and the results will be more

opportunity and better educational opportunities for all. The need for change in this situation is obvious and would be well worth the extra effort. A little extra work now could save much wasted effort in days to come. All too often we look at changing curriculum and textbooks as a means of improving the educational system. Maybe it is time to look elsewhere for the answers. Parents and students are change agents and must no longer feel powerless in affecting change. If evaluation becomes more formative, there will be more chance for parental input and students and schools will benefit. By nature, our high schools are not set up to foster and encourage parental involvement and the changes needed are systemic ones. They may be too difficult to employ fully but they must happen to some degree if we are to make improvements in the relationships parents have with the high school.

Conclusion

Parental involvement in education can take a number of shapes and has many benefits. The more involved the parents are, the more aware they will be of what is going on in the lives of their teenagers. This brings with it both positives and negatives; it creates a support network for the student but also allows for limited privacy and independence. The teenage students seem to want independence and support at the same time and are managing to get this through controlling the information that passes between the school and the home. The parents are told enough to curb their curiosities but know very little of the day-to-day information about the school lives of their teens. By being given some information that is mainly positive, most parents are simply contented and do not ask for much more detail. The level of involvement of parents/guardians at this high school and the flow of information they receive from the school can both be controlled by the

students, often without the knowledge of the adults involved. The students tend to control the whole relationship while allowing the adults token input.

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Appendix A

Parental Involvement at the High School Level: A Survey

1. How often do parents receive school newsletters? ☐ always ☐ most of the time
☐ sometimes ☐ rarely ☐ never

2. When parent-teacher interviews occur, how often do your parents/guardians attend?
☐ always ☐ most of the time ☐ sometimes ☐ rarely ☐ never

3. On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being not involved at all and 5 being heavily involved, how would you rate the level of involvement your parents/guardians have in your education?
(circle one) 1 2 3 4 5

4. Has this level of involvement changed over the years that you have been in school?
Please explain.

5. Using the same scale as in question 3 (1 being not involved and 5 being heavily involved), how involved would you like your parents/guardians to be in your education at this point? (circle one) 1 2 3 4 5

6. Have you ever consciously kept information about your school work from your parents/guardians? ☐ yes ☐ no

7. Have you ever consciously hidden a negative mark or school happening from your parents/guardians? ☐ yes ☐ no

8. Describe the level of involvement that you believe parents/guardians of high school students should have in the education of the teens in their care (how much should they know about what goes on at school)?

9. How would you feel about your parents/guardians chaperoning at a school dance?

Parental Involvement at the High School Level: A Survey

10. Are there some things about their schooling that high school students may want to keep from parents/guardians? ____yes ____no
If so, what might some of these be?
11. What are some things that high school students may like to share with their parents/guardians about their schooling?
12. If you had bad news on a report card, how would your parents/guardians react?
13. If they felt that they had to, how might high school students keep things from parents/guardians?
14. How might communication between the school and parents/guardians be improved at the high school level?

Additional Comments:

**** If you would like to discuss this topic further or would consider being interviewed about your thoughts surrounding parental involvement in high schools and your role in this relationship, please see Mr. Murphy or drop a note in his mailbox. Thank you very much for your input in this. Your thoughts and ideas are of great value and your time and effort are greatly appreciated.**

*Appendix B**Interview Questions*

- 1a. How involved should your parents/guardians be in your education?
- 1b. In what ways would you like your parents/guardians to be involved in your schooling?
- 1c. What are some areas of school life in which they should not be involved?
2. How do teenage students shape the role of parents in high school?
- 3a. In what ways are some parents/guardians uninformed or misinformed about what goes on at the high school?
- 3b. Why might some teenage students keep their parents/guardians uninformed about certain aspects of their schooling?
4. Is there anything you would like to add about the topic of parental involvement in the educational lives of high school students?

Thank you for your time and input. I appreciate the support that you have shown to my research project. I will transcribe this interview and give it back to you to read over in case there is anything you wish to add. If you want to add any further comments please do so before the end of June as then we can ensure that these comments are included in the study. The data and findings will be available for viewing early on in the next school year.

Appendix C

Letter of Introduction for Research

Creating the Parent-Free Zone:
How Teenage Students Influence Their Parents'/Guardians' Relation to Their High
Schools

Ms. Sonia Osborne
Superintendent
Western School Board
Summerside, PE

P.O. Box 15
St. Louis, PE
C0B 1Z0
May 21, 2003

Dear Ms. Osborne,

The purpose of this letter is to introduce myself and to ask you to please consider the possibility of allowing me to conduct research within the Western School Board. I am currently a teaching vice-principal at Westisle Composite High School and am working on a Master of Education in Leadership and Learning from UPEI.

The study I am planning will focus on the potential reasons that parents/guardians appear to be less involved in the education of their children once these students reach the high school level. The research will investigate the possibility that teenage students exercise some level of control over this involvement of the home in education.

This is a qualitative study. I would like permission to survey 50 Westisle students at each grade level (10, 11, and 12) for a total of 150 students. The survey will take less than 20 minutes to complete and, with your consent, will be conducted in two English classes at each grade level (one academic and one general). I believe that the English classes will be best as this most accurately delineates the grade level of high school students. For any students wishing to discuss the topic of parental involvement further, the provision is there to conduct an interview. These students will be interviewed outside of the school day in order to minimize the possibility of disruption of learning.

I plan to have the surveys and interviews completed prior to the end of this school year (late May or early June 2003). The data will be stored in a secure location and will be accessed by the researcher only. The identities of those involved will remain anonymous as the surveys will have no names and the interview data will be coded without link to the identities of respondents. Prior to volunteering for this research, the students and their parents/guardians will be required to sign a consent form (attached). The results of the research will be available to the participants in early 2004. The data will be kept locked in a safe and will be destroyed two years after the acceptance of my thesis.

I would enjoy the opportunity to speak with you on this research topic and will contact you in May to discuss this further. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,
Charles Murphy

Appendix D

**Voluntary Consent Form
to Participate in a Research Survey**

You have been asked to voluntarily participate in a survey conducted by Charles Murphy dealing with parental involvement in education at the high school level. This survey and its results are part of a Masters thesis for UPEI. All of your responses will remain anonymous and confidential to the limit allowed by law. The purpose of this research is to look at the level of involvement of the home in high school education as it appears to you at this time. The actual surveys will be seen only by the researcher, Mr. Charles Murphy, and will not be linked back to you. The data from this survey and the survey papers themselves will be locked up and secure. The survey will take no more than 20 minutes to complete. Your answers may be quite important for this school and how we operate on a daily basis. Participation in this survey is optional and you may discontinue the survey at any time without any penalty. You may also skip those questions that you do not wish to answer. If you have further questions about this survey or about the research, please feel free to ask me over the next few days. Once the data is collected for this research, I will make the findings available to you. This is likely to happen in late 2003 or early 2004.

I, _____ have read and understood the above information and agree to complete this survey dealing with parental involvement in education at the high school level. I am aware that my participation in this study is voluntary and I do not have to complete this survey. I know that I can stop at any time I wish and I do not have to answer any specific questions that I do not want to answer. I understand that the information will be kept confidential. I may keep a copy of the consent form and can contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at _____ or by e-mail at _____ if I have any concerns about the ethics of this research.

(participant)

(date)

(parent/guardian)

(date)

Appendix E

Voluntary Consent Form to Participate in Interviews

You have volunteered to participate in an interview/focus group conducted by Charles Murphy dealing with parental involvement in education at the high school level. This research and its results are part of a Masters thesis for UPEI. All of your responses will remain anonymous and confidential to the limit allowed by law. The purpose of this research is to look at the level of involvement of the home in high school education as it appears to you at this time. The actual interview tapes will be heard only by the researcher, Mr. Charles Murphy and will not be linked back to you. The data from these interviews/focus groups will be locked up and secure. The interviews/focus group sessions will be roughly 30 minutes in length. Your answers may be quite important for this school and how we operate on a daily basis. Participation in this research is optional and you may discontinue the interview/session at any time without any penalty. As well, if you do not feel comfortable or do not wish to answer specific questions during the interview/focus group session, this is your right. If you have further questions about this survey or about the research, please feel free to ask me over the next few days. Once the data is collected for this research, I will make the findings available to you. This is likely to happen in late 2003 or early 2004.

I, _____ have read and understood the above information and agree to complete this interview/focus group session dealing with parental involvement in education at the high school level. I am aware that my participation in this study is voluntary and I do not have to complete this session. I know that I can stop at any time I wish and I do not have to answer any specific questions that I do not want to answer. I understand that the information will be kept confidential. I may keep a copy of the consent form and can contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at _____ ' or by e-mail _____ if I have any concerns about the ethics of this research.

(participant)

(date)

(parent/guardian)

(date)

*Appendix F***Member Checking Letter**

Dear Participant,

Thank you once again for your participation in the interview regarding parental involvement in high school education. One of the things that interviewers do is send a copy of the written transcript of the interview back to the interview participant to make sure that your thoughts and words appear as you would wish them to appear. This is done for your benefit as no one else knows that the responses are yours. You may want to add something that you have since thought of or you may wish to change some aspect of your response. This is your opportunity to speak to the interview and any suggested adjustments will be incorporated into my research paper.

I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope for you to return the transcript with any changes or additions. If I do not hear back from you by July 21, 2003, I will assume that you are satisfied with the written transcript and have nothing further to add. Please do not feel that you must change your wording or add anything, I just wanted you to have the opportunity to do so. Thank you again for your support of this research.

Sincerely,

Charles Murphy