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SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

by
Cynthia E. Kates

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
Of
The Graduate School
At
Rowan University
April 2001

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved May 11, 2001

Abstract

Cynthia E. Kates

School-Family-Community
Partnership

2001

Dr. K. Sernak

MA in School Administration

The purpose of this project was to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of the school, family members, and local community agencies and organizations concerning the development of a school-family-community partnership. The project centered on a needs assessment for the West Avenue School in reference to parental and community involvement. The views of 15 teachers, 79 parents, and 3 community agencies were studied through questionnaires. Teachers expressed a desire for more parental involvement in their child's education, but would like no interference in the area of classroom management. Parents expressed an interest in taking a more active role in the overall operation of the school, and would like to receive training on how to help students at home. The community agencies also expressed an interest in participating by providing the school with valuable resources.

The study underscores parents' and community members desire for more voice in the school. Parents and community are eager for a forum in which to be heard and want a hand in the policies that affect the roles they play in the educational process. It is also identifies the climate of the school as a necessary ingredient to making the partnership effective.

Mini- Abstract

Cynthia E. Kates

**School-Family-Community Partnership
2001
Dr. K. Sernak
Master of Arts in School Administration**

The purpose of this project was to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of the school, family, and community concerning a school-family-community partnership.

The study underscores parents' and community members desire for more voice in the school, its policies and practices, and the school's need for shared responsibility between all parties.

Acknowledgements

This thesis was completed with the assistance and guidance of many people. I am forever indebted to all who have extended their generosity of time, spirit, motivation, and sense of humor.

I am grateful to my University advisor Dr. Kathy Sernak for her endless support and encouragement, and for setting me on the path to learn all that I could. I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Capasso who help me during my times of despair during my internship.

Many thanks to my Bridgeton Public Schools “family”, Dr. Geraldine O. Foster, Mr. Thomas C. Lane, IV, Mr. Everett, and my West Avenue School colleagues. A special thank you to my editor, Gloria Kates. My journey through this process was made easier by knowing you guys were always pulling for me.

Finally, I give thanks to my family to whom I am forever grateful, my father and mother, Alfred and Mary Bodden, and to the men in my life, my husband Charlie, and my sons, Kyle and Matt. It was your love, support and belief in me that made this all possible. You are truly my “rocks”.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

As whole school reform and reorganization movements gain momentum, it has become essential that strong partnerships among schools, families and community be developed. Collaboration between these major stakeholders is seen as the best way to improve the American educational system.

This partnership is an essential part of the school organization will impact the academic success and social- emotional development of our youth by providing parents with the necessary tools and information that will enable them to assist their children.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of faculty, parents, family members, and community agencies concerning the development of a school-family-community partnership. The West Avenue School in conjunction with the Krawiec- Goldsboro Parent Center sponsored the project.

The project sought to identify the areas in which the school could utilize parents, families, and community agencies and organizations as resources. Parents and community groups were asked to identify areas in which they would be most interested in assisting the school. In turn, the project engaged in the identification of areas of reciprocity among school, family, and community. Thereby, making our community as a whole better. This project was completed in support of the efforts of the whole school

reform model—Community for Learners: Adaptive Learning Environment Model—chosen by West Avenue School in order to meet the needs of our student population.

Definitions

In order to comprehend the magnitude of this study, definitions of terminology used to describe the partnership effort is essential. The intern relied upon the Temple University's Center for Research in Human Development and Education (1995) and the New Jersey Department of Education (1997) to provide the following definitions of key terms:

- Family--- any person or persons that has physical custody or guardianship of students attending the school.
- Community--- those person or persons with or without children attending schools (including, but not restricted to, local businesses, universities, religious, and fraternal organizations).
- Partnership--- an alliance of like-minded people with a common goal.
- Resources--- assets, either financial or human, that can be used for the achievement of a common goal.
- ALEM (Adaptive Learning Environments Model)--- an educational program implemented to ensure the learning success of each student through an adaptive educational and service delivery system that effectively responds to the diverse social and academic needs of individual students in regular learning environments.
- Reciprocity—an overlapping of responsibilities between partners.

- Whole School Reform--- an approach that can enable students to reach the goals of a thorough and efficient education (New Jersey Dep. Of Ed., 1997).

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on the development of a strong school-family and community partnership of West Avenue School stakeholders. The research findings are confined to this one school and may not be generalized to other schools within or outside of the Bridgeton Public Schools.

In addition, the parental and community perceptions of the West Avenue School could be viewed as another limitation. Negative experiences of either stakeholder could affect the outcome of the study, and the level of participation.

The successful implementation of this study required a tremendous amount of support from the Bridgeton Public Schools Administration and the West Avenue School Administration. Active and enthusiastic support of this endeavor was needed to foster positive parental and community involvement. The administration and faculty willingness to put in the necessary effort must also be viewed as a limiting factor.

Setting

The community of Bridgeton was established in 1686 by Richard Hancock (Your Guide to Bridgeton, 1999). Bridgeton began as a colonial settlement in Cumberland County, known as Cohansey Bridge in 1716. The name commemorated the first bridge built that provided access to Trenton and Cape May during the American Revolution. The current name, Bridgeton, came as a result of a bank printing error in 1816; it was cheaper to change the name of the town than to pay for reprinting of stationary (Your Guide to Bridgeton, p. 5).

Educational Setting

Bridgeton Public Schools were established in 1847(Buck, Chestnut, Joseph, & Sharp, 1986). According to Buck, et. al (1986), Bridgeton was one of twelve free public schools in the state of New Jersey. There were several primary schools constructed during this era, most of which are no longer in use.

More modern schools were constructed in the 1950's and 1960's to replace the centuries old facilities. These buildings are currently in use, having undergone major renovations and additions to accommodate the need for more classroom space.

Currently, Bridgeton Public Schools has an enrollment of approximately 4000 students in Pre- School through Grade 12(Willis, September 2000). As a result of Abbott funding, the pre- school is available to 3 and 4-year-old students on a half- day schedule. The Kindergarten program works on a full day schedule, and services both special needs and non- classified students. Today, there are five elementary schools, housing Kindergarten through 5th Grade. The Middle School services Grades 6 through 8, with the High School servicing Grades 9 through 12.

“Bridgeton Public Schools prides itself on its dedication to providing quality education, with policies on small class size, and technology driven curriculum. The district works fiercely to provide programs that will prepare our students for the 21st century”(Foster, September, 2000). Many progressive programs currently in place have been courtesy of additional resources provided by the state initiative that funds economically poor districts in order to provide equal educational opportunities resulting from the court case of Abbott v. Burke (1991).

The Bridgeton Public School district is a reflection of the community it serves. Bridgeton enjoys a diversified population in terms of ethnic and cultural background, occupation, and socio- economic levels. The ethnic makeup of the Bridgeton Public Schools and the community has changed greatly due to an influx of Hispanics in recent years. According to James Dunkins, Affirmative Action Officer for Bridgeton Public Schools (August 2000), the Hispanic population has become the fastest growing minority group in the district, with many migrant workers settling into the community. Demographic data provided by Mr. Dunkins indicates the racial distribution of the district as 61.9% African American, 19.8% Caucasian, and 17.1% Hispanic (Affirmative Action Survey, October 1999).

The Programs

West Avenue School houses Grades Kindergarten through 5 with a student population of 513. Students attending West Avenue School receive instruction in the standard core curriculum of English, Science, History, Language Arts, Health and Physical Education, Art, Music, and Computer Skills.

Students identified as requiring Basic Skills instruction receive supplemental instruction through Chapter 1 funds. West Avenue School also offers an instructional program for students identified as Gifted and Talented in the areas of Art, Music, and Physical Education. Those students identified as academically gifted participate in the GEMS program. Those students identified as possessing specific learning disabilities are serviced through the inclusive education program in grades 1 through 5.

The Staff

The administration of West Avenue School consists of one Principal and one interim Assistant Principal. Currently, the administration consists of one Caucasian female, and one African American male. Both have earned Master's Degrees, and the Interim once served as superintendent of Bridgeton Public Schools before retiring 8 years ago.

West Avenue School boasts a faculty of 86 members. Of this total, there are 52 certified teachers for grades Kindergarten through 5, including Special Education. There are 14 instructional aides that service both regular and special education classes (Lane, personal communication, October 2000). The faculty and staff averaged 12 years of service.

The school also houses a full Child Study Team, consisting of a Psychologist, one Learning Disability Teacher Consultant, and a Social Worker. A full-time speech correctionist is also on staff for all students identified as requiring service.

The demographics of the teachers, staff, and administration break down unequally by race and ethnicity. Less than 2% of the staff represents the Hispanic population, and 12% representing the African American population. The majority of these are non-certified staff serving as instructional assistants, cafeteria, and custodial staff (Lane, personal communication, October 2000).

THE STUDENTS

When the 2000- 2001 school year began, West Avenue School had 513 students enrolled. The racial distribution fell along the lines of 66% African American, 20% Caucasian and 14% Hispanic. The gender breakdown of the student population falls

along the line of 53% female and 47% male (Mattus, October 2000). Of the total student population, there are 70 students who are classified as eligible for special education.

Significance of the Study

The academic achievement of West Avenue School students has been complicated by many factors relating to the human condition of our society. Teachers are challenged to educate children who are living in poverty, suffering from abuse, with inadequate health care, not to mention homelessness. It has become necessary to address these issues as hindrances and recognize that the school cannot do it alone.

By bridging the gap between school, family and community, we can provide parents with information, training, and strategies that can have a positive impact on the academic success of our students. The school-family-community partnership can support and enhance the mission of the Bridgeton Public School district by equipping parents with the knowledge necessary to help improve student competence in the Core Curriculum Standards.

“The Bridgeton Public School District, in partnership with our entire community, is committed to educating all students and respecting their differences in a safe and supportive environment. We will encourage them to use their minds well so they are Prepared to be life-long learners, responsible citizens and Productive contributors to our rapidly changing society.”
(Bridgeton Public Schools, 1998).

Organization of the Study

This project was designed to explore the impact of providing parents with training and information that will assist them in helping students achieve the state standards.

Chapter 2 focuses on the synthesis of research material found during a comprehensive review of current literature. Chapter 3 describes the design of the study. This includes

descriptions of the methodology of the study. Areas to be covered in this chapter include descriptions of participants, instruments, materials, study design and procedures for data gathering and analysis. Chapter 4 presents the research findings of the study. Chapter 5 describes the conclusions and implications of the study. It will also address any areas in need of further study.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Educators have long recognized parental involvement in school as an important part of the academic success of students. With the emergence of the whole school reform movement, educators now acknowledge the need to take the initiative this level of involvement. In New Jersey, the call for reform was made clear by the court case *Abbott v. Burke*. Under the Abbott ruling, Bridgeton Public Schools must implement comprehensive whole school reform. The model chosen by the West Avenue School is Community for Learning.

The Community for Learning program and its instructional component have been implemented in more than 200 schools in 22 states. Evaluations have been conducted by program staff and by external reviewers (cf. Wang, 1992; Far West Laboratory, 1980; Laboratory for Student Success, 1997). The overall results on program implementation indicate that CFL can be effectively implemented in a variety of classroom settings. Findings from internal and external evaluations of the Community for Learning program being implemented show well-documented positive changes. The CFL research base reveals that a high degree of implementation of CFL can be achieved at a variety of school sites that differ in geographic and demographic characteristics. CFL teachers, when compared with those not using the program, scored significantly higher on the critical dimensions of effective classroom practices. A high degree of program

implementation was related to positive program outcomes (Brookhart, Casile, & McCown, 1996; Laboratory for Student Success, 1997).

Survey results indicate that CFL teacher' perceptions about their ability to provide for student diversity improved with the implementation of the CFL program. CFL teachers were also observed to have increased the use of instructional materials that are responsive to students' differing ability levels and interests and that encourage collaborative and small-group instruction. Other findings include positive classroom process changes such as reduced teacher time spent on whole-class instruction concomitant with increased one-on-one and small-group instruction. Teachers also spent more time interacting with students for instructional rather than managerial purposes (Wang & Zollers, 1990; Laboratory for Student Success, 1997).

An overall pattern of positive change in student achievement was observed when CFL students were compared with non-CFL students. Achievement scores also suggest that students who participated in the program for a longer period of time performed better than their counterparts who had less time in CFL classes. Students in the program show higher achievement scores and more positive attitudes towards self and school than comparison students, as well as positive classroom behavioral changes (Brookhart, Casile, & McCown, 1996, 1997; Oates, Flores, & Weishew, 1997; Wang & Zollers, 1990). Furthermore, test results of CFL students have compared favorably with district and national norms for students from similar economic and cultural backgrounds (Laboratory for Student Success, 1997).

Data from schools where CFL is implemented as an inclusive program also indicate a consistent pattern of positive student outcomes. Integration of special

education students in regular classrooms has resulted in increased recommendations for decertification out of special education (Wang, Birch, 1984; Wang & Zollers, 1990).

Key findings in student outcomes include positive attitudinal and academic achievement changes. In addition to higher achievement compared to students in self-contained special education classes, special education students in CFL classrooms rate themselves as equal to general education students in terms of social competence and self-esteem; students in the comparison non- CFL classrooms rate themselves as lower than the general education students in their classes in terms of their overall ratings of self. Program students consistently show increased time on task and greater amounts of instructional interaction with teachers (Wang & Walberg, 1983; Wang, 1985; Wang & Zollers, 1990).

The CFL program is based on research that shows the influence that school, family, and community have on student learning and educational resilience. Multiple environments in addition to schools affect student learning. The program attempts to bring together and coordinate practices that link families and communities to student learning with an emphasis on shared responsibilities. In this partnership, the school and home share responsibility for the learning experience of their children. When the school develops and implements strategies for promoting school-family-community partnerships, the result is improved learning for all students and strengthened schools, families and communities.

A review of current literature reveals a number of positive relationships between parental involvement and student achievement. Throughout history, family has always played an important role in the academic performance of children. According to Comer and Hayes (1991), parental participation in the education of a child was essential for effective teaching and learning. Comer and Hayes (1991) characterized schools as providing children with opportunities for positive interactions with adults and other school aged children that transfers to their home life and other environments. They identify three general ways to foster parental involvement:

1. Participation in school activities and events
2. Volunteering in classrooms and school programs
3. Participation in parent groups (Comer and Hayes, 1991).

Stevenson and Baker (1987) found a positive relationship between parental involvement and student performance in the early grades. In this study, parental involvement was characterized by volunteering at schools, attending school functions such as open house and parent conferences, and taking an active role in helping students at home. The benefits of parental involvement include higher test scores and grades, better attendance, more positive attitudes and behaviors, higher rates of graduation, and an increase in enrollment in higher education for students. Fehrman, Keith, and Reemers (1989) conducted a study measuring how often and to what extent parents are involved in the daily lives of high school seniors which resulted in higher grades for students

In contrast, several researchers have found little or no relation between parental involvement and student academic performance. Dwyer and Hecht (1992) found very

low levels of parental involvement and student performance may be “inversely related or unrelated”. They believed that low levels of involvement may be the results of parents who felt their involvement was unnecessary because the students were doing well or who viewed the school as having primary responsible for the education of their children. Another study conducted by White, Taylor, and Moss (1992) concluded that there was no concrete evidence that parental involvement in early intervention strategies resulted in gains in student achievement.

It has become apparent that the partnership between school and home should be extended to include the larger community. The challenges and circumstances of life outside of school have impacted the ability of the student to achieve. Poverty, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness—these are just a few of the many social ills that students and teachers must contend with on a daily basis. Research has found that these conditions can be directly related to low academic achievement, impaired cognitive functioning, and the poor behavioral and emotional well being of today’s student (Furstenberg, Eccles, Elder, Cook, and Sameroff, 1997).

Schools alone cannot address these educational barriers. Schools are attempting to reach out to the community in an effort to respond to the emotional, physical, and social needs of the student.

An article written by Lefevre (1996) indicated the importance of establishing collaborative relationships between schools, home and community. Community includes religious, fraternal, health, and social services organizations, and local businesses. A partnership with selected community organizations and agencies promote the sharing of information and resources that are helpful to students and families. Community groups,

cultural organizations, volunteer organizations, businesses, senior groups, and religious organizations can be used to provide cultural, recreational, and extracurricular opportunities that can enrich a child's life. Community partnerships can also help schools address family concerns. Community organizations can provide childcare, after school programs, assistance with homework, and parenting education programs. Often the living conditions of families are so severe that they must be addressed before parents can devote time and energy to school concerns. Partnerships with community agencies can make health and social services, like medical care and counseling, available to students and families through the school.

Schmoker (1996) analyzed the keys to continuous school improvement and found the key component was the effective use of teamwork. McIntosh and Shipman (1996) cited collaboration as a powerful tool for bringing about positive change. The benefits of collaboration are overwhelming when conducted properly. By establishing a partnership between school, home and community, a wealth of services and resources, which can have a positive influence on at risk children, can be provided (Wang, Haertal and Walberg, 1995).

Tyack (1992) reports that as early as 1890, people were advocating the provision of medical and dental care, lunches, summer programs and recreational activities in American schools. During the 1940's and 1950's, schools and communities collaborated in order to fund healthcare and school lunch programs presently in place across the country (Tyack, 1992). Government support of community health, social service centers, and agencies continue to provide much needed service to families and children today.

Schools must be proactive in bringing services to students in order to improve the quality of life for the students in addition to impacting on their academic achievement. It is imperative that the school-family-community partnership establishes a sense of ownership and pride in order to develop the cohesiveness necessary for success in implementing change in the education system that will assist students in achieving national and state core curriculum standards. By implementing a partnership approach, schools afford families and community members greater opportunities to determine options for school involvement, to participate in a wide range of involvement activities, and to assume key roles and responsibilities in school reform efforts. Schools must be willing to involve parents, families, and the community at deeper levels and to support their participation.

Support for parental and community involvement begins with school administrators. The administrator's willingness to recruit parents and community members for school tasks, to acknowledge the viewpoints, and to share decision-making provides a good foundation for a strong school-family-community partnership. Williams and Chaking (1989) describe administrative support as activities that include provision of funds, materials, space, and equipment used in promoting family and community involvement, and people designated to carry out the programs.

School administrators must be vigilant in providing their staff members with professional development in family and community involvement. This is a critical part of effective partnerships. Staff members must develop the necessary skills for working with families and the community. Balles and Moles (1994) believed school districts should take the lead in offering teachers professional development on collaborating with parents

and community members, learning about family dynamics and nontraditional family structures, improving communication between home and school, reducing barriers to family involvement, and understanding diverse cultures.

Chapter 3

The Design of the Study

The Bridgeton Public Schools had concluded that in order to better serve their students, family and community involvement was necessary. The district regarded their relationship as a partnership in which school, family, and community shared responsibility for student learning. Each individual school was challenged to provide the necessary foundation to foster collaboration between the parties. The purpose of the study was to assess the existing practices in order to improve the school- family- community partnership.

Several tasks were required in order to begin the development process. These tasks included conducting a needs assessment for the West Avenue School in reference to parental and community involvement, enlisting school personnel, family and community members as participants in the process, devising strategies in order to improve the current practices, and cultivating family and community support for the partnership and its endeavors. From the intern's perspective, the most important aspect of the process gaining support from school personnel, family and community members. The overall consensus was that this had been tried time and again, only to be left with the status quo. The intern determined the ultimate difference would be that the school acting on its own initiative to improve its relationship with families and the community organizations. This initiative served as the factor that would strengthen the bonds between the parties.

Structure of the Study

Working under the auspices of the Bridgeton Public Schools District Consulting Panel and the West Avenue School's School Management Team, a committee was established. The committee included two teacher representatives from grades Kindergarten through 5th, the Community for Learning facilitator, one support staff representative, two community representatives, two parent representatives and the school principal. The members of the committee volunteered their services based upon fliers and letters sent out detailing the school-family-community partnership initiative.

The committee's initial meeting provided the members with the opportunity to discuss the district's goal to develop a comprehensive school-family-community partnership for each school. The group took part in activities stressing the importance of effective communication, and group decision- making strategies. The members were also involved in various team building exercises and role playing activities in order to encourage commitment and ownership. Committee members were encouraged to bring their own expertise, perspectives, and experiences to the project. The committee was presented with the following tasks:

- Conduct a needs assessment
- Develop goal statement for West Avenue School partnership initiative
- Identify strategies to meet the goals
- Develop implementation plans
- Develop an on- going evaluation plan for partnership initiative.

Each member, not including the principal, was able to choose the task area they would participate in order to encourage the distribution of the workloads. The principal was asked to act as a non- participant observer, and to give input into the feasibility of the suggestions proposed.

The committee was scheduled to meet twice a month beginning in October. The meetings were used to study school-family-community partnership, discuss efforts to involve family and community members, and to devise strategies for improving current practices.

Sample

The participants included in the study were school personnel, family and community members and organizations of the West Avenue School. The scope of the study encompassed family members of all students attending West Avenue School in grades Kindergarten through 5th, school personnel, and area community organizations and agencies.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

The subcommittee devoted to the needs assessment was assigned the job of determining the current level of satisfaction of school personnel, family members and community members with the opportunities for involvement. The needs assessment took the form of a questionnaire, to be completed by parents and guardians. Parents of first and fourth grade students were chosen to participate in the survey. The intern chose these particular grade levels because it would provide a broad perspective from the points of view of children new to the West Avenue School learning environment and that of those who have been in the school for the last five years. Faculty and community members

completed a separate survey to gain their unique perspectives on the state of the collaboration between school, family and community. Ten area community organizations and agencies were sent surveys to be completed. The organizations were chosen based on their emphasis on community service projects and dedication to helping area youth. The intern and members of the needs assessment sub-committee designed three instruments.

The parent questionnaire was designed using a closed-ended question format. The questionnaires were distributed in the lobby during Parent Conference week. The participants were asked to complete and send the questionnaire back with their child's report card. The questionnaire consisted of ten items assessing parental perceptions concerning their level of comfort in dealing with the West Avenue School and its personnel.

The questionnaire distributed to the faculty consisted of three closed-ended questions and two open-ended questions. The results of this questionnaire would help determine the areas in which faculty members would like parents and community members involved, and any areas of concern to be addressed by the committee. Questionnaires were returned to a designated in-box in the faculty lounge.

The community survey was designed to elicit the views of area businesses, agencies, and organizations regarding volunteering and working in partnership with the school. The questionnaire sought to identify areas in which they, the local businesses, organizations, and agencies, could help improve the educational environment of West Avenue School. These surveys were mailed with return self-addressed stamped envelopes.

The results of these questionnaires would become the basis for the implementation of practices that would help to make the partnership more effective.

Data Analysis Plan

Reviewing the research questions and coding answers according to response, helped the intern to analyze the responses ascertained by the needs assessment tools. The next phase had the intern categorize the responses across questions to discover prevalent themes, attitudes and perceptions on how to improve the current school- family- community partnership.

Chapter 4

Presentation of the Research Findings

Fifteen teachers who were assigned to West Avenue School during the 2000-2001 school year completed a survey, which was designed by the researcher to gather information on various aspects of the school-family-community partnership. Of the fifteen teachers who completed the survey, 1 was from grade Kindergarten, 2 from grade five, 2 from grade one, 2 from grade four, 3 from grade three, and 5 from related arts. The teachers' responses reflected their opinions of the current state of parent and community involvement, and also looked at areas that could be improved.

Survey questions were designed to gain insight into the perceptions and opinions of teachers regarding the use of parent and community volunteers in the classroom. When asked to indicate whether parents or family members volunteer in the classroom, all fifteen teachers responded "no". The next survey question asked if they would consider using parent or community volunteers in their class. Thirteen respondents answered yes and two answered no. The two respondents answering no were asked to give a reason explaining why parents or community volunteers were not used. One teacher felt that using parent or community volunteers would interfere with her classroom management. The other respondent did not give a reason, and left the space blank.

Teachers were also asked to indicate areas in which they could use assistance from a predetermined list. The following areas were indicated as areas needing assistance: 8 would like to have volunteers help with support tasks (gathering resources,

set up of learning centers, displays or experiments), 6 would like someone to listen to a child read, 3 would like help in coaching children in spelling words or math facts, 4 with practicing vocabulary, 7 would like volunteers to help supervise celebrations or field trips, 10 indicated a need for volunteers to mentor at risk students, and 15 would like clerical assistance for clerical duties, like lunch count, making copies, collecting homework, etc. A summary of this data is contained in Table 1.

In addition, the teachers were asked to indicate the areas the school management team needs to address. All the teachers surveyed that agreed that the discipline policy needed to be addressed by the school management team. Three faculty members responded indicating that the school management team should address the school climate/ staff morale.

Finally, the teachers were asked to indicate methods they found to be effective for communicating with parents and the community concerning the school, its programs, and our students. While all the teachers surveyed indicated that they didn't currently communicate with the community, seven indicated that we should use the local media, including newspaper, Cable Access channel 2, and the local radio station. In communicating with parents, 10 teachers found telephone calls to be effective, but limiting due to the large number of families without telephone service, and the advent of Caller ID (they believe some parents will not answer when they see the school is calling). Two teachers indicated that home visits had been the most effective method they have used. Three teachers did not respond at all.

Table 1

AREAS IN WHICH TEACHERS INDICATE NEED FOR VOLUNTEERS

<u>AREAS</u>	<u>RESPONSES</u>
Support Tasks	8
One-to-One Teaching	
listening to a child read	6
coaching in spelling or math facts	3
practice vocabulary	4
other: _____	0
Small Group Teaching	
supervise celebrations of field trips	7
help with school programs and assemblies	0
mentoring at risk students	10
other: Clerical assistance	15

In order to get feedback from the parents, a parent survey was also designed and distributed by the researcher. The parent survey was distributed to families of students in grades 1 and 4 during the school year 2000- 2001. Of the 160 surveys distributed, only 79 were returned. The surveys returned represented 45 from first grade families and 34 from the fourth grade families. The surveys reflected the perceptions and opinions of the parents and/or guardians of West Avenue School students regarding the areas of need in improving parent involvement.

Parents were asked to indicate the source from which they received information about the school from a predetermined list. Of the 79 respondents, 43 indicated that they got their information from the children. Thirty-six respondents related that they got their information from the school calendar under the heading of “other”. One respondent suggested that West Avenue School utilize the Cable Channel 2 (public access channel) like the Bridgeton Middle School.

In reference to attending workshops or in-services that would help parents help students at home, all of the 79 respondents responded affirmatively. The next question asked parents to indicate the types of workshops, from a predetermined list, that would help them to assist their children at home. The respondents indicated that they would like to participate in the following workshops: 70 for “helping with homework”, 74 for “improving math skills”, 15 for “English as a Second Language”, 13 for building parenting skills, 8 for “conflict resolution”, 69 for “testing programs”, 9 for “improving self- esteem”, 9 for “saying NO to drugs”, and 8 for “science fair projects”. The respondents were also asked for their opinion on where these workshops should be held. Of the 79 respondents, 73 indicated that they would like to see the workshops held at

school, and 6 would like to see them held at a community center or neighborhood facility. The survey also asked for the best time to hold the workshops in order to accommodate their schedules. Seventy indicated that they be held on a weeknight, 5 during the day, and 4 on a Saturday.

In addition, respondents were asked if they would be interested in participating in small coffee discussion with school administrator at the school. Sixty-three responded affirmatively, with 16 respondents indicating “no”. When asked to indicate the best time to hold these discussions, 33 indicated morning, 12 for the afternoon, and 13 for the evening.

This survey also asked parents to rate a series of statements dealing with their overall perception of the school, policies, and personnel. Each statement was followed by “yes”, “no”, and “needs improvement”. The survey indicated that the school needs improvement in the areas of hospitality, communication with principal, being informed about what child is doing in school, articulation of policies. This data is summarized in Table 2.

Additionally, respondents were asked to indicate the areas they would like to volunteer. Thirty- four respondents indicated they would like to volunteer for clerical assistance, and in the classroom. Fifteen respondents indicated that they would like to participate on the school management team, and 19 would participate in a career day. No respondents indicated a desire to organize a school event.

Finally, surveyed parents were asked to identify the resources and services they would like to see made available for their use at West Avenue School. Seventy- six parents would like to see a “homework hotline” established, 79 would like to see “after

school enrichment programs”, and 12 parents would like to see a “parent resource center” established.

Table 2

PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE SCHOOL, ITS POLICIES, AND ITS PERSONNEL

STATEMENTS	YES	NO	NI
I am greeted friendly and courteous	0	2	77
I can talk openly with principal.	15	5	59
I can talk openly with teachers.	34	40	5
I am well informed about what my child is doing at school.	0	0	79
I feel the policies regarding behavior, attendance, and academics are communicated clearly.	0	0	79
I feel special efforts are made to involve parents involve parents in the educational process and content.	0	0	79

This study also sought to elicit the perception of area community organizations and local businesses concerning their participation in the school-family-community partnership. Ten area organizations and businesses were sent surveys to be completed. Each survey included a self-addressed stamped envelope. However, only three were sent back to the researcher. It should be noted that the researcher contacted the community groups and businesses that did not respond by telephone. When contacted, each respondent was given a three-day extension for returning the survey. Unfortunately, the other seven surveys were never received.

The survey asked the respondent to briefly describe the type of business or organization. One respondent was described as a fraternal organization that emphasizes community service. Another survey indicated that they were a social service organization designed to improve the community. The third survey reported that they were a community health organization that served the citizens of Cumberland County.

Each respondent was asked if they currently used parents or students as volunteers in their community activity or projects. Two respondents indicated affirmatively and one indicated that they did not. However, when asked if they would consider using parents and/or students, the one negative respondent indicated that they would.

When asked to select areas in which volunteers were needed, respondents selected from activities from a predetermined list. The respondent indicated the following: 3 needed "speakers", and 3 for "help with annual events".

In order to determine the role the business or organization would be able to provide the school, the respondents were asked to select from a list of services they could provide. All three respondents indicated they would provide material and supplies and

volunteers. The respondents also selected “other” and indicated alternative forms of help. One respondent offered use of their facilities for school use, and one offered to provide financial assistance for students centered activities (i.e. musical instruments, summer camps, field trips, etc.).

When asked to select areas they would be interested in assisting, all three respondents selected participation on the school management team, the parent community resource center, and career day. Two respondents related that they would be interested in providing family support and helping to organize school events.

The survey also provided the respondents with the opportunity to offer their perceptions of issues that the school should address. The following are actual responses:

Respondent 1: “Our organization believes that the school should address the area of character and/ or values education. Children in our community, and our country for that matter, are lacking the moral values that would eliminate the violence we are seeing in our schools and neighborhoods.”

Respondent 2: “The school should address the lack of parental involvement in the child’s education. Young, undereducated, and misguided parents today are raising many of the children in school. The school must attempt to focus the parents on the importance of education for themselves and their children.”

Respondent 3: “The community and the schools should be working together to address the lack of after school activities for the children of Bridgeton. Our children are roaming the streets unsupervised and getting involved with gangs and drugs because they have nothing positive to keep them off the streets. We should all be working together to get more recreation programs established to give children a positive outlet.”

Finally, the respondents were asked what methods could be used to improve school-community communication. The following are actual responses received:

Respondent 1: "The use of a newsletter, sent out to community members, businesses, and organizations detailing what is happening in the schools would be a great tool."

Respondent 2: "The need for a community liaison is greatly needed. One contact person could be used to keep community members, including local business and social service organizations apprised of what special activities or areas of needs exist would be beneficial to establishing a bond between school and the community. We might not always read the newspaper, or get the latest flier, but we will always respond to personal correspondence, emails, or telephone calls requesting our assistance."

Respondent 3: "We need to communicate, communicate, communicate. The need for dialogue is great. We would all benefit. Any kind of communication would be better than what currently exists between school and community. We are more than ready and willing to help if we know there is a need."

What does this mean?

The integration of information gleaned from the surveys completed by faculty, family, and community led the researcher to identify several issues that were pertinent to the establishment of a school-family-community partnership.

Faculty surveys reported that parent and community volunteers were not currently present in the school. Nonetheless, faculty members agreed they would welcome the help if offered in several areas including, but not limited to, clerical duties, tutoring, and mentoring. Additionally, faculty responses indicated a need for better communication

methods to be utilized to keep families and the community at large informed about the schools, its programs, and activities. Faculty members also pointed to the need for the school management team to address the overall school climate, current discipline policy and staff morale.

According to the feedback received from parents and guardians, the area of home-school communication was in need of improvement. Parents reported that their primary source of information regarding the school, its programs, and policies was the children. The parent responses also indicated an interest in participating in workshops that would help them in improving their child's academic performance, social and emotional development. In addition, parents indicated a desire to create a forum in which they could openly discuss their issues and concerns with the principal. The responses also pointed out several areas needing improvement. The areas identified included the hospitality of the school, communication methods between teachers, principal and the family, school policies and programs of instructions. The surveys also identified the areas in which parents were interested in volunteering. Finally, the parent responses identified a need for the school to provide resources and services that would help the children.

Data gleaned from the community survey identified three area organizations committed to providing West Avenue School with a wide range of resources that would be valuable to the school and the families served. The resources included volunteers, provision of social services and financial support used to provide enrichment opportunities. The responses also gave the researcher an indication of the wealth of other resources in the community yet untapped.

In Chapter 5, a discussion of the conclusions and implications suggested by this study will expand these findings. The implications of this study on the organization will be examined. The next chapter outlined areas needing further study.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

The major purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes and perceptions of school personnel, family and community members concerning the establishment of a school-family-community partnership. The theoretical structure for this partnership was discussed in the literature review contained in Chapter 2. The research findings related to attitudes and perceptions of the key stakeholders in the partnership were presented in Chapter 4.

The results of the study suggested that school personnel, although in favor of utilizing family and community members as volunteers, have not actively sought the assistance. The results also indicated that communication between the parties should be improved. Results of the family and community surveys concurred with the need for better means of communication. Additionally, the family and community studies uncovered the desire of both parties to become more involved in a wide array of activities in order to help students to develop the skills and character traits to be productive citizens.

The findings of this study have some implications for the development of the school-family-community partnership. First, the school management team should be encouraged to create an action team, consisting of school personnel, parents, families, and caregivers and community members. The mission of the action team is to form an effective partnership. The action team would be responsible for the development and adoption of a school-family-community partnership policy. This policy would demonstrate the school's willingness and desire to work in partnership with parents,

families, and the community in order for students to benefit. Students would benefit from this partnership policy through improved achievement, more positive attitudes and behavior, improved self-esteem and better attendance.

The findings also suggested that the action team plan to identify strategies that foster family and community involvement, the implementation of programs that support the school-family-community partnership and to identify the next steps for school improvement. These strategies might include informal school-family-community gatherings, workshops and opportunities for families and community members to share their skills and experiences with students as part of the classroom activities. When developing these strategies, the action team should be considered with making sure that they are appropriate for the school setting and are meaningful and valuable to all constituents. The strategies should examine the possibility of redefining the school as the learning center of the community.

Finally, the action team should encourage professional development activities for school personnel on communication, utilization of volunteers, and cultural diversity that frame the school setting.

The action team should also be vigorous in reaching out to community groups (such as serviced organizations, churches and religious groups), social service agencies, and businesses in providing and integrating their services for the students and their families. The school could become a place where students and their families could find services and information that could improve their educational, recreational, and social lives. By providing these services at a neutral site, students and families would feel more at ease seeking the help they require.

The research study suggested several areas for further study to be completed. One area is the need to investigate the possibility offering programs that provide parents with the opportunity to continue or enhance their education or career opportunities. The school should be encouraged to offer literacy classes, GED programs, certification programs for employment, and career counseling.

The research study allowed the researcher to recognize the need for continuous evaluation of the partnership approach. The efforts of the partnership should be regularly assessed in order to learn what practices are productive, to improve those that are not, and to determine evidence of success. Only through this ongoing process, can the partnership grow stronger.

The research study also highlighted the need to address the discipline policy and the areas of school climate and staff morale. It is imperative that further study be conducted in these areas to identify the underlying reasons for the increase in discipline problems. Discipline has always been a hot button topic when discussing school improvement. In order for any type of school improvement to occur, the students must be able to demonstrate the ability to conduct themselves in a manner that would promote learning. A review of the current state of the discipline policy would help to identify areas where family and community member volunteers may be able to assist the school personnel. The mentoring of at risk students, as outlined in the research on school-family-community partnership, may be one way to address the prevalence of behavior and disciplinary problems the school is currently experiencing.

The area of school climate and staff morale is also essential to the improvement of school. By examining the climate and the culture of the school, the school management

team would be able to identify and make changes in programs that would make improvements on how the school personnel react to the changes. In order to improve the school, it is essential that the school personnel be content with the changes being made. It would be wise to ensure that staff morale is increased in order to have them feel more secure in their present positions. The creation of the school-family-partnership was originally grounded on the basis of developing a “family” atmosphere where all feel valued.

Finally, further study should be conducted to determine the feasibility of allowing the use of the building for educational, recreational, and social activities. Schools are often centrally located and considered neutral territory. Making the building available to residents would encourage families and community members to learn about the educational programs offered by the school and make them more likely to become advocates for the school. The creation of parent-community resource center should be examined. This center would be a place designated in the school for use by parents and community members. The center would be equipped with information and materials that cover school-related topics, parenting issues, and community interests.

Through the completion of this research study, the intern has had the opportunity to grow professionally in the area of leadership. The intern was afforded the opportunity to apply human relations skills through effective interaction with school personnel, administration, families, and community members. The intern gained a great deal of experience in analyzing and solving problems using appropriate decision-making techniques. During this study, the intern also was able to utilize team-building skills that were essential to the review of the current state of family and community involvement.

Additionally, the communication skills of the intern have grown by being required to communicate with individuals and groups in a positive manner. The intern was forced to improve active listening skills in order to respond appropriately to the ideas and opinions of others. The intern has also realized professional growth by identifying existing and potential support of resources to enhance the school-family-community partnership.

By applying effective strategies for assessing programs and utilizing the practical applications of organizational theory, the intern facilitated the development of the action team responsible for the development of the partnership. This partnership will help to eliminate the barriers between school, home, and community. The organizational changes because of this partnership will promote a new concept of the school. By transforming the school, the partnership will create a school that is positive, welcoming, and responsive to the needs of the students, parents, families, and the community.

In summary, the conclusion to be drawn from this study is that schools can no longer operate in isolation. The new vision of school improvement compels everyone to be active participants in the creation of conception of the relationship between the school, its families, and the community. Parents, family and community members can no longer be excluded from the process of school improvement. Without the help of families and the community, schools cannot enact the fundamental changes necessary. Whole-hearted support is necessary from the entire school community—parents, citizens, businesses, service organizations and agencies.

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Appendix A
Research Instruments

FACULTY SURVEY

Dear Faculty Member:

As part of my thesis on school-family-community partnerships, I am developing ways to encourage family and community support for our school. The information you provide will help me to understand your perceptions on how this best can be accomplished. Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey and return it to my mailbox. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Cynthia Kates

1. Do you currently have parents or people from the community who volunteer in your classroom or for special activities?

_____yes _____no

2. Would you *consider* using parents or people from the community as volunteers in your classroom?

_____yes _____no

If you answered no, why not?

3. What are your current areas of needs (assistance or materials)?

_____books and magazine	_____art supplies
_____visual aids	_____other
_____volunteers as class support	_____help with school programs
_____mentoring at risk students	_____other _____

4. What areas do you feel the School Management Team needs to address?

5. What methods have you found effective for improving school-home-community communications?

PARENT SURVEY

Dear Parents or Guardian:

I need your help to develop and strengthen the school-family-community partnership. Parent involvement is fun, informative, and most of all, it helps our children to perform better in school. Please fill out and return this survey to your child's teacher. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,
Mrs. Kates
West Avenue School

1. From what sources do you get most of your information about school? Check one:

<input type="checkbox"/> newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/> friends
<input type="checkbox"/> children	<input type="checkbox"/> newspaper
<input type="checkbox"/> teachers	<input type="checkbox"/> television
<input type="checkbox"/> principal	<input type="checkbox"/> other _____

2. Would you be interested in attending a class or workshop on how parents can help their children learn at home?

☐ yes ☐ no

3. If you checked yes, please indicate below the types of workshops you would like to participate in to help you help your children?

<input type="checkbox"/> helping with homework	<input type="checkbox"/> improving reading skills
<input type="checkbox"/> improving math skills	<input type="checkbox"/> testing programs
<input type="checkbox"/> English as a second language	<input type="checkbox"/> improving child's self esteem
<input type="checkbox"/> building your parenting skills	<input type="checkbox"/> saying NO drugs
<input type="checkbox"/> conflict resolution	<input type="checkbox"/> science fair projects

4. Where would you like these workshops held?

☐ in the school ☐ in a community center

5. When would you like these meeting scheduled?

<input type="checkbox"/> on a week night	<input type="checkbox"/> before school
<input type="checkbox"/> during the weekday	<input type="checkbox"/> on a Saturday

6. Would you be interested in participating in small group coffee discussion hour at school?

☐ yes ☐ no
Best Time: ☐ morning ☐ afternoon ☐ evening

7. Do you agree with the following statements?

I am greeted in a friendly and courteous manner when I visit the school?

_____yes _____no _____needs improvement

I can talk openly with my child's principal.

_____yes _____no _____needs improvement

I can talk openly with my child's teacher.

_____yes _____no _____needs improvement

I am well informed by the school or teachers about what my child is doing at school.

_____yes _____no _____needs improvement

I feel the policies regarding behavior, attendance, and academics are communicated clearly.

_____yes _____no _____needs improvement

I feel special efforts are made to involve parents in the educational process and content.

_____yes _____no _____needs improvement

8. Would you like to volunteer in the following areas?

Clerical assistance _____yes _____no

Helping in your child's class _____yes _____no

Organizing a school event _____yes _____no

Participating on the school management team _____yes _____no

Participating in career day _____yes _____no

9. Check the kinds of resources and services you would like to see made available at the school.

_____homework hotline _____after school enrichment programs

_____parent resource center _____parent support groups

_____other _____

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Dear Community Member:

As part of my Masters' thesis on school-family-community partnerships, I am developing ways to encourage family and community support for our schools. The information you provide will help me to better serve our entire school community. Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey and return it in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Cynthia Kates
West Avenue School

1. Describe you the type of business or community group _____

2. Do you currently have parents or students volunteering in your community projects or for other activities?

_____ Yes _____ No

3. Would you consider using parent and/or student volunteers in your projects?

_____ Yes _____ No

If no, why not? _____

4. What are your current needs for volunteers?

_____ Clerical assistance _____ annual events
_____ Speakers _____ telephone work
_____ Computer assistance _____ other _____

5. What type of support could your business or group provide to our school?

_____ Materials/supplies _____ volunteers _____ others

6. In what areas would your business or group be most interesting in assisting?

_____ participating on school management team _____ organize school events
_____ family support _____ career day
_____ parent-community resource center _____ other _____

7. What community issues or areas do you feel the school can address?

8. What methods would you recommend to improve community-school communications?

Optional:

Name _____ **Title** _____

Business or Community Group _____

Best time to contact _____ **Phone** _____

Biographical Data

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