

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

When families are involved in their children's education in positive ways, children achieve higher grades and test scores, have better attendance at school, complete more homework, demonstrate more positive attitudes and behavior, graduate at higher rates, and have greater enrollment in higher education (Henderson & Berla 2004; Becher 1984 as cited in Strong families, strong schools, 1994, p. 4).

As alluded to in the above statement by Henderson et al., parental involvement in their child's education has been a critical factor in assuring student success in school. The present study has focused on promoting and encouraging parent involvement at Wapato Middle School (WMS) in an effort to provide a supportive learning environment for students.

In August 2005, Wapato Middle School administrators learned they did not meet annual yearly progress (AYP) and would enter a three year school improvement assistance program. As a result, Wapato Middle School (WMS) quickly formed a school improvement team consisting of administrators, selected staff, and one parent. The school improvement team (SIT) created four

improvement goals based on data analysis obtained from the Office of Superintendent Public Instruction's (OSPI) Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools, an educational audit as well as an Educational Effectiveness Survey (EES) taken in 2005. The four improvement goals chosen focused on improving mathematics and reading scores, the special education program and a supportive learning environment.

In all four improvement goals, strategies were developed and provided timelines. One common strategy in all four goals was to increase parental involvement in the school. Although, past efforts had been made by outside agencies such as the Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) and the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP) to help promote and encourage parent involvement in the school, both staff, parents and students understood that an organization created by staff and parents together would be a greater asset in promoting parent involvement. Specifically, under the supportive learning goal, plans and strategies were written in to establish a welcoming and interactive environment for parents to come and participate in their child's education.

According to the Educational Effectiveness Survey (EES) administered to 364 families in 2005, less than fifty percent of parents "knew of ways to be involved in their child's school" (EES, 2005, p. 12). Through the results of the survey and the recommendations from the educational audit, it was decided that

WMS would form a parent teacher organization (PTO) that would foster positive relationships between the school and families and provide the opportunities for parents to become involved in their child's education.

Statement of the Problem

Through the findings of the OSPI educational audit, the results of the 2005 EES survey and Wapato Middle School's failed attempt to reach annual yearly progress (AYP) in both mathematics and reading it was obvious that change needed to be made. Part of the solution was to further encourage and involve parents in the school improvement plan (SIP) as well as activities that involved and promoted their child's academic progress through the support of a parent teacher organization (PTO) and efforts made by the school improvement team (SIT). Wapato Middle School feared if WMS did not meet AYP at the end of their school improvement phase, then it would need to move into the "restructuring" phase required by the government.

Phrased as a question, the problem which represented the focus of the present study may be studied as follows: What kinds of learning activities were identified by the WMS PTO and incorporated into the school improvement plan (SIP) to assure a supportive learning environment through increased parental involvement?

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this action research project was to determine whether the efforts of the WMS PTO and SIT positively impacted the ways families became involved in their child's education at WMS. To accomplish this purpose, a review of selected literature was conducted, essential baseline data and information was obtained and analyzed, and related conclusions and recommendations were formulated.

Delimitations

The researcher gathered data from WMS administrators, teachers, PTO members and students. Data were obtained from teacher, student, and parent interviews, from the writer's (Amy Matsumoto) observations and personal experience with the SIT, and analysis of the EES conducted in 2005 and 2007. The research was conducted from August 2006 to May, 2007. The preponderance of research cited in the review of selected literature was current within the last 10 years.

Assumptions

The researcher, (Amy Matsumoto) believed that WMS families wanted to become more involved in opportunities to support their child's learning process. The researcher further assumed the staff of WMS and the SIT believed that by providing a welcoming environment and opportunities to collaborate among

school and families, students' would benefit from a learning environment that maximized parental involvement.

Hypothesis

Identification of selected learning activities by the WMS PTO and incorporated into the SIP will assure a supportive learning environment for students through increased parental involvement.

Significance of the Project

The present study focused on the need to address the fact that WMS did not meet AYP and as a result was required to implement a three year SIP. Accordingly, four improvement goals focused on improving mathematics and reading scores, the special education program, and an overall supportive learning environment. This was also the first year of operation for the WMS PTO, and the present research study could provide information necessary for evaluation progress needed to meet school improvement goals. A significant need also existed for administrators, counselors, teachers, parents and students at WMS to possess a deeper understanding of selected strategies and techniques for involving parents in the education of their children, and the benefits of such involvement.

Procedure

Procedures employed in the present study evolved in several stages. The investigator (Amy Matsumoto) first sought and obtained permission to undertake the study from Mr. Kelly Garza, WMS principal. During 2006 and 2007, the

investigator compared data from the 2005 and 2007 EES. Input from SIT members, teacher observations and student and parent structured interviews were gathered throughout the 2006 and 2007 school years.

Definition of Terms

Significant terms used in the context of the present study have been defined as follows:

action research. Any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching-learning environment, to gather information about the ways in which their particular schools operate, the teachers teach, and the students learn.

annual yearly progress. The academic progress that each school makes on an annual basis to fulfill Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) standards.

educational audit. A needs assessment /educational completed jointly by the School Improvement Team, school district, OSPI, and a team of peer educators and experts.

nine characteristics of high-performing schools. Refers to the key research components found by OSPI to be credible as to what a school needs to improve and to become a high-performing school.

parents. Includes a legal guardian or other person standing in *loco parentis* (e.g. a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child is living, or with a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare).

parent involvement. Refers to participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school related activities.

restructuring. This term referred to the major reorganization of a school's governance arrangement by a local educational agency.

school improvement assistance program. The mission of the (SIA) program was to help build capacity for schools and districts to improve student achievement through the use of the continuous school improvement model.

school improvement facilitator. A facilitator assigned to work with OSPI, the school district, school, and a School Improvement Team to develop a school improvement plan.

school improvement team. A team consisting of selected staff, administrators, district office staff, and parents to develop a school improvement plan.

Acronyms

AYP. Annual Yearly Progress

ELL. English Language Learners

EES. Educational Effectiveness Survey

ESD. Educational Service District

ESEA. Elementary and Secondary Education Act

GEAR UP. Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs

LEA. Local Educational Agencies

NCLB. No Child Left Behind

PIRC. Parent Information Resource Center

PTA. Parent Teacher Association

PTO. Parent Teacher Organization

SEA. State Educational Agencies

SES. Socioeconomic Status

SIAP. School Improvement Assistance Program

SIF. School Improvement Facilitator

SIP. School Improvement Plan

SIT. School Improvement Team.

WASL. Washington Assessment of Student Learning

WMS. Wapato Middle School

WSD. Wapato School District

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

The review of literature and research summarized in Chapter 2 was organized to address:

1. Transformation of American Families and their Involvement in Schools.
2. No Child Left Behind and School Improvement.
3. The Importance of Involving Families in Education and Strategies for NCLB Parental Involvement.
4. Summary.

Data current primarily within the last 10 years were identified through an on-line computerized literature search of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), the internet, and Proquest. A hand-search of selected research materials was also conducted.

Transformation of American Families and their Involvement in Schools

Parent involvement in schools has always been an important issue in public education. However, in the past decade the need for parents to become even more profoundly involved in their child's education has increased dramatically. Parents have typically been requested to volunteer in the classroom, and to host bake sales to raise money and to expand their collaborative roles with

schools regarding curriculum, developing two way communication regarding student progress and enlisting in parenting classes. (Parental Involvement: Title 1, Part A, 2004). This effort to increase parent involvement in educational decision-making was based on the fact that a direct lack of parental involvement has factored in causing low achievement among students of color and poverty. Since, the implementation of No Child Left Behind and state and local school improvement programs, the demand for more collaborative efforts to support family involvement has increased (Office of Superintendent Instruction, 2002).

According to McLaughlin, educators clearly understood how parent involvement has always been a crucial component of a child's education. The question was, to what extent should they be involved? Parent involvement had begun to evolve in the early 1940's and 1950's. During this period, duties of parents typically consisted of PTA meetings, fundraising, reviewing and signing report cards, as well as homework monitoring. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory acknowledged that "with the 1980s, the 'accountability movement' gained strength, and parental involvement became more of an issue" (¶11). Historically, many families believed they sent their children to school to be taught, and that was the end of their responsibility (Allington and Cunningham, 2004). The question needing to be addressed was, if parent involvement was important, then why wasn't more of it happening?

Elias and Schwab (2004) found parents spent less time than ever with their children. With this said, it was understood that parents were even less likely to fully participate in their child's education. Educators assumed parents did not purposefully wish to spend less time with their children or to become less involved in their education. Rather, families were simply not physically, economically, and/or linguistically able to become involved.

Throughout history, "the household was the principal welfare institution of society" (Coleman, 1987 p. 33). In the last thirty years, negative transformations to households have been observed. Statistics from the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center demonstrated how in the last thirty four years, "children being raised with two married parents had decreased from eighty five percent in 1970 to sixty five percent in 2004" (§ 2). The statistics indicated that, "the proportion of children growing up in single-parent households has more than doubled in recent decades, especially among mother-only households, which have increased from eleven percent in 1970 to twenty three percent in 2004" (§ 2). With more single parent families raising children, it was understood that one parent families would not only struggle to complete household duties, but also fail to devote enough time to their children's education (Finney, 1993).

The lack of time parents spent with their children was linked to other circumstances that affected both family life and schools as well. In 2005, Child Trends DataBank demonstrated an increase in the percentage of children living

with families in poverty. Poverty was an issue that affected all involved, including schools as well. As stated by Dahl and Lochner (2005):

Aside from physical and mental health, poverty in childhood and adolescence is associated with a higher risk for negative cognitive and academic outcomes, including decreased cognitive abilities and development, less school attendance, lower reading and math test scores, increased distractibility, and higher rates of grade failure and early high school dropout (¶ 4).

Nichols (2006) explained how parents must work to prevent child poverty, however in doing so parents inadvertently increased the lack of time parents spent with their children. Allington and Cummingham contended that although these parents were not actively involved at school events they were still considered supportive parents. Walberg, (1984) stated that “what families do to help their children learn is more important to their academic success than how well-off the family is,” (p. 6).

What was to happen if schools could not communicate with their parents linguistically or culturally? In America today, families of children educated in public schools came from more diverse families. Fix and Passel (2003), found in U.S. Immigration—Trends & Implications for Schools, one in five students in grades K-12 are children of immigrants. These authorities also noted that five percent of students in U.S. schools were Limited English Proficient (LEP), and

eighty percent of these students lived in families where all parents themselves were also LEP. Fix and Passel also linked immigrant families to higher levels of poverty and lower levels of formal education. Accordingly, schools faced an even greater challenge to help LEP students make adequate yearly progress and effectively engage students' parents in the learning process.

No Child Left Behind and School Improvement

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was passed into law in 2001 and mandated high standards for all students based on the principle that families, educators, and communities could work together to improve teaching and learning (Parental Involvement: Title 1, Part A, 2004). New school provisions emanating from this Act were designed to ensure that parents had the information needed to make well-informed choices for their children, more effectively share responsibility with their children's schools, and help those schools develop effective and successful academic programs. Parents were to not only provide support at home for their children, but to also become an integral part of the decision-making process at school. These mandates were based on research which provided convincing evidence that parent involvement influenced the achievement of high academic standards and to help close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students.

Title 1, Part A of NCLB also required State Educational Agencies (SEA) and Local Educational Agencies (LEA) to implement strategies in their SIP to

involve parents in their children’s education. Provisions found in the Parental Involvement Component of NCLB required good practices for schools to engage families in helping educate their children. One such practice provided by NCLB supported the notion that “communication is the foundation of effective parental involvement” (p. 4). Also included in the Title 1 Part A Parental Involvement Component was the provision that “schools must provide information to parents and students in an understandable and uniform format” (p. 4). This suggested that to the extent practicable, schools needed to provide information in a language that was understood by families and students either orally or in written format. This practice was also encouraged at the SEA and LEA levels.

Improved communication and increased parental involvement were being written as important goals in SIP at the SEA and LEA levels. An exemplary model of a SEA’s efforts to improve parental involvement was Washington State’s Office of Superintendent Public Instruction implementation of the nine characteristics of high-performing schools. The OSPI reviewed over twenty recent research studies that examined common characteristics of high performing schools. Resulting data analysis determined which of these characteristics helped schools dramatically improve standardized test scores. Of the nine characteristics of high performing schools, the ninth focused on “high levels of family and community involvement” (p. 94), and coincided with the numerous provisions

contained in Title 1, Part A of the Parental Involvement Component, (Office of Superintendent Public Instruction, 2002).

Under the SEAs and LEAs, schools were also to receive “support and disseminations of effective parental involvement practices” (Parental Involvement: Title 1, Part A, p. 8). In Washington State, once schools were identified as needing to enter school improvement in collaboration with the School Improvement Team (SIT), school district, OSPI, and a team of peer educators and experts, the school’s strengths and challenges were identified and recommendations for improvement were then formulated by the SIT based on the Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools (<http://www.k12.wa.us/SchoolImprovement/overview.aspx>).

In 2005, Wapato Middle School (WMS), located in Eastern Washington, developed their own SIT in collaboration with all stakeholders as required by OSPI’s guidelines. One of the four SIT goals adopted for WMS specifically focused on increasing parental involvement and establishing a welcoming and interactive environment for parents to come and participate in their child’s education. Wapato Middle School focused on strategies designed to increase parental involvement based on: NCLB mandates; recommendations from the Educational Audit; results from EES; and criteria cited in the ninth characteristic of high performing schools requiring a high level of parent and community

involvement. Subsequently, one of the first steps taken by WMS was to develop a PTO as an essential part of SIP. (WMS School Improvement Plan, 2005).

The Importance of Involving Families in Education and Strategies for NCLB

Parental Involvement

As quoted in Guideline A-4 of the Parental Involvement Component of Title 1, Part A, “when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school longer, and like school more” (p. 4). The notion that NCLB fundamentally supported increased parental involvement in schools was illustrated in Parental Involvement: Title 1, Part A. Guideline A-12 recommended that SEA and/ or LEA use funds from other Federal programs for activities related to parental involvement. No longer was a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) the sole financial support of parent/school activities. In fact, numerous Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRC) were now established across the country. These Centers provided comprehensive training, information, and support for parents, SEA’s and LEA’s involved in carrying out parental education and family involvement programs. Other programs in collaboration with PIRC were also seen as important in providing parents opportunities to become actively engaged in school related activities and increased student achievement.

Elias and Schwab (2004) confirmed the combination of parental education and school activities supporting family and parent involvement programs

produced positive results. These authorities stated, “parental involvement in parenting is the foundation of effective parental involvement in the schools-and of student success” (p. 41). In a study conducted by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), many of the schools observed provided activities and programs that highlighted educational events and training for both parents and students.

Burr School, located in an urban area of Hartford, Connecticut met AYP targets in reading and mathematics in the 2004-2005 school year, credited much of their success to increased efforts made to welcome parents to their school (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2007). One activity provided was a monthly program to encourage family literacy for both parents and children, including speakers, workshops, and refreshments. To meet the needs of their working parents, this school decided to provide babysitting and experimented with offering incentives such as gift certificates and food baskets.

In Vancouver, Washington, Educational Service District (ESD) 112 developed a Parents and Teachers program that allowed staff members to visit homes of families with children aged five and younger. This program was designed to provide information for parents about child development and parenting that was tailored to each family. Jackie Brock, an ESD Family Support Specialist concluded: “First impressions are important. If you can engage parents

early, schools stand a better chance of keeping them engaged” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2007, p. 12).

In efforts to bridge cultural and linguistic differences, many schools involved in the CCSSO study demonstrated positive strategies that reached their multilingual and multicultural families. The Highline Public School District located in Seattle, Washington, developed a program titled, “Para Los Niño’s” in partnership with a community organization. In this program, parents were provided English Language Learning (ELL) classes two days per week, while early learning activities were provided for the children. In successful parent programs, schools accomplished more in involving parents when community members were partners as well.

Based on 2004-05 test results, Mount View Elementary School in Seattle, Washington, also met AYP targets in reading and mathematics. Similar to most schools involved in these studies, over 70 percent of Mount View Elementary School students were eligible for the federal free and reduced lunch program, and ethnic diversity was high with 31 percent of the student body comprised of ELL students. In this school, efforts were made to involve parents both in and outside the school. One unique strategy this school offered for families was for school staff members to meet with groups of non English speaking families at locations outside the school. These meetings were translated by school-home liaisons to

help solicit input from parents on the school's inclusiveness and welcome (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2007).

Research provided in the CCSSO indicated parent involvement positively impacted "the academic achievement of all students, with stronger effects on young children and those living in low-income neighborhoods" (p. 15). Schools identified in this study were known as Ready School states and were celebrated for their efforts to offer parents access to information and support for their child's education. These schools were also recognized for their efforts to address the needs of low-income families and those with culturally and linguistically diverse populations (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2007).

Sullivan (2006) credited PTA's and PTO's for their efforts at parental involvement in schooling. The national PTA is a "formal membership organization headquartered in Chicago with a 105-year history of working for children" (p. 1). The PTO, a much newer program was also recognized as important in involving parents and families in school activities and providing parent education programs. Although differentiated by affiliation or independence, both programs have worked to provide training for families, helpful homework tips, volunteers for school events, and active websites filled with information for families regarding all areas of education.

Summary

The review of selected literature presented in Chapter 2 supported the following research themes:

1. Recent transformation of the American family resulting from increased diversity, poverty, and special language needs, and high divorce rate in families has created a dramatic need for creatively involving parents/families in a supportive learning environment.

2. The NCLB Act mandated high standards for all students based on the principle that families, educators, and communities needed to work cooperatively to improve teaching and learning.

3. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to perform better in school and to like school more.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

The purpose of this action research project was to determine whether the efforts of the WMS PTO and SIT positively impacted the ways families became involved in their child's education at WMS. To accomplish this purpose, a review of selected literature was conducted, essential baseline data and information was obtained and analyzed, and related conclusions and recommendations were formulated.

Chapter 3 contains a description of the methodology used in the study. Additionally, the researcher included details concerning participants, instruments, design, procedure, treatment of the data and summary.

Methodology

The researcher used an action research methodology involving a systematic inquiry. Basic steps included in the action research process were: (1) identifying an area of focus, (2) data collection, (3) data analysis and interpretation, and (4) action planning.

Participants

Participants involved in the study included five Wapato Middle School (WMS) SIT members, three PTO officers, two PTO members, and five WMS

students whose parents were also interviewed during the 2006 and 2007 school year.

Instruments

Information used in the study included anecdotal records, informal observations, prior records and interviews. Action research information and data utilized in the present study were obtained from teacher, student, and parent interviews, from the writer's observations and personal experiences with the SIT, and from analysis of the Educational Effective Survey (EES) conducted in 2005-2007.

Design

Based on information obtained through the interview process detailed above, the investigator's observations, EES data, and related information derived from the review of selected literature cited in Chapter 2, the following strategies were adopted to maximize parental involvement in the WMS learning environment:

1. A PTO at WMS was established and PTO officers and 1 teacher liaison were selected.
2. An Educational Effectiveness Survey (EES) was provided to families, students and teachers regarding the stakeholders' perceptions of high performing schools in both 2005 and 2007.

3. References to increasing parental involvement in school were written into the WMS SIP under all four goals; (i.e., improving mathematics and reading scores, developing a more effective special education program and providing a supportive learning environment).
4. Monthly PTO meetings were scheduled and a variety of school-related evening classes were provided for families (e.g., WASL Info Night, Computer Orientation Class, Homework and Study Tips, Family Literacy and Math Night).
5. Two teacher/parent conferences were held in the fall of 2006 and winter of 2007. Parents were provided special note cards used to direct specific questions to teachers in both Spanish and English, concerning their child's academic progress, etc. PTO stakeholders set up booths for families regarding various community resources available, including information about the Heritage University GED program for adults and young teens.
6. During spring 2007 parent/teacher conferences, PTO stakeholders distributed WASL information to parents in both Spanish and English to educate parents concerning WASL themes and how to help prepare their children.
7. Trimester-based parent-to-parent newsletters in both Spanish and English were sent home to families regarding school activities, helpful parenting

tips, opportunities for parent involvement/volunteering, and important WASL dates.

8. PTO stakeholders experimented with various ways to send information to parents throughout the year in both Spanish and English (e.g., newsletters, activity invitations, informational packets, making phone call to parents).
9. PTO stakeholders and SIT members sponsored raffles and provided incentives throughout the year to encourage attendance of WMS families at school functions.
10. A community-based Craft Fair was sponsored by the PTO stakeholders and participating WMS families in November 2006.
11. Two WASL Parent Information Nights were provided for WMS families by PTO stakeholders and teachers from all three grade levels in both Spanish and English.
12. An introduction to Computers class and a computer survey was provided for WMS families by the PTO in both Spanish and English.
13. A Family Math Night was provided for WMS families, and sponsored by the Math department, School Improvement Team (SIT), and PTO.
14. A Family Literacy Night was held for WMS families, sponsored by the Reading Department, School Improvement Team, and the PTO.
15. An end of the year barbeque was provided for WMS families and incoming 5th grade parents/children by the PTO.

Procedure

Procedures employed in the present study evolved in several stages:

1. In September 2006, the investigator sought and obtained permission to undertake the study from Mr. Kelly Garza, WMS principal.
2. At the opening of the 2006-2007 school year, the WMS PTO was organized and these groups of stakeholders worked with the investigator to research and finalize the activities selected to maximize parental involvement in the WMS learning environment.
3. Throughout the 2006-2007 school year, the investigator compared data from the 2005 and 2007 Educational Effectiveness Survey (EES).
4. Input from SIT members, teacher observations, and student and parent structured interviews was solicited on an ongoing basis.
5. During summer 2007, data analysis was completed and related conclusions and recommendations were formulated.

Treatment of the Data

Implementation of the strategies designed to maximize parental involvement in the WMS learning environment was an ongoing process throughout the 2006-2007 school year. To interpret the results of these efforts, Educational Effectiveness Survey (EES) data from October 2005 were then compared with those of May, 2007. Finally, information obtained from structured interviews provided an important source which to draw information from.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a description of the research methodology employed in the study, participants, instruments used, research design, and procedure utilized.

Details concerning treatment of the data obtained were also presented.

Chapter 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

This action research project sought to determine whether the efforts of the WMS PTO and SIT positively impacted the ways families became involved in their child's education at WMS. To accomplish this purpose, a review of selected literature was conducted, essential baseline data and information was obtained and analyzed, and related conclusions and recommendations were formulated. Chapter 4 contains a description of the environment, hypothesis, and results of the study.

Description of the Environment

This action research project was conducted at Wapato Middle School located in Wapato, Washington. The project was based on evaluating and researching specific strategies incorporated by the WMS PTO and SIT to effectively encourage parental involvement and to provide a supportive learning environment for students. Wapato Middle School was a Title 1 school characterized by issues related to poverty, cultural and language barriers, unstable family situations, and failure to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) set by the State. There was an evident lack of family support and a disconnect between school and families. The WMS PTO worked vigorously throughout the 2006 and

2007 school year to provide a welcoming environment filled with opportunities and knowledge for parents to become involved in their child's academic life.

Hypothesis

Identification of selected learning activities by the WMS PTO and incorporated into the SIP will assure a supportive learning environment for students through increased parental involvement.

Results of the Study

Primary findings produced for the present study have been organized below in Table 1. Results from the EES taken in October, 2005 and May, 2007 were as follows:

Statement #1: From October, 2005, to May, 2007, parents' responses to "This school believes and expects that all students can meet state standards," diminished from 72% to 72%. Statement #2: From October, 2005, to May, 2007, parents' responses to "This school communicates with me about my child's progress," improved from 68% to 71%. Statement #3: From October, 2005, to May, 2007, parents' responses to "This school communicates effectively to all families" improved from 68% to 70%. Statement #4: From October, 2005, to May, 2007, parents' responses to "I feel welcome to visit this school at any time," diminished from 77% to 74%. Statement #5: From October, 2005, to May, 2007, parents' responses to "I know many ways that I can be involved in this school," improved from 48% to 57%.

Table 1

Educational Effectiveness Survey Comparison: Summary of Parent's Perceptions

October, 2005 and May, 2007

Statements responded to in survey	October, 2005	May, 2007
1. This school believes and expects that all students can meet state standards	72%	71%
2. This school communicates with me about my child's progress	68%	71%
3. This school communicates effectively to all families	68%	70%
4. I feel welcome to visit this school at any time	77%	74%
5. I know many ways that I can be involved in this school	48%	57%

* Percentage of parents that responded to the statement to be Almost Always or Often True

Table 2 has provided a summary of monthly parental attendance recorded at each WMS PTO school event from September 2006 – June 2007. As indicated in the Table, the number of parents in attendance at various school events ranged from 8-250. School events less well attended included; helpful homework and study tips, (8); how to read WASL test results and planning for Craft Fair, (10); school and community resources, etc., (14); Selection of PTO officers, (15); WASL Information Night for families, (28); and introduction to computers for families, (35). School events where the number of parents in attendance was significantly higher included: PTO meeting in collaboration with SIT-Family Literacy Night, (150); PTO meeting in collaboration with SIT, (120); and PTO meeting: End of the year barbeque, (250).

Table 2

Monthly Parental Attendance Recorded at Each WMS PTO School Event

September, 2006 through June, 2007

Month	School Event	Number of Parents in Attendance
September, 2006	First PTO meeting and selection of PTO officers	15
October, 2006	PTO meeting: Helpful homework and study tips for students and parents and questions to ask during parent/teacher conferences	8
November, 2006	PTO meeting: How to read WASL test results and planning for Craft Fair	10
January, 2007	PTO meeting: School and Community Resources: GEAR UP, 21 st Century, After School Tutoring, PIRC	14
February, 2007	PTO meeting: WASL Info Night for Families	28
March 30, 2007	PTO meeting: Introduction to computers and programs; Word, EXCEL, Power Point and helpful websites for families to use at home	35
April, 2007	PTO meeting in collaboration with SIT: Family Literacy Night	150
May, 2007	PTO meeting in collaboration with SIT: Family Math Night	120
June, 2007	PTO meeting: End of the year family barbeque and 5 th grade family orientation	250

An interview/questionnaire sheet (Appendix) was used to interview 5 SIT members, 5 PTO members and 5 students. Combined/common responses were as follows:

Interview Question #1: “What opportunities are provided for parents to be involved at WMS?”

Responses:

- PTO meetings/activities.
- Teacher/Parent/Student Conferences.
- Sporting events.
- Student recognition/reward assemblies.

Interview Question #2: “How often does communication take place between parents/teacher/students?”

Responses:

- 3-5 times per trimester.
- On a need-to-need basis.

Interview Question #3: “What do you believe are effective strategies in communicating with parents and families?”

Responses:

- Providing advance notice and day before reminder notices.
- Translating all materials sent home to families.
- Providing positive contacts and comments to families.

Interview Question #4: “What opportunities have you seen provided for parents this year that were different than last year?”

Responses:

- PTO meetings/activities/classes.
- WASL Information Night for Families.
- Family Literacy and Math Family Night.
- End of the year barbeque for families.

Interview Question #6: “What do you believe are our school’s challenges in involving parents/families in our school?”

Responses:

- Effective communication.
- Language barriers.
- Not being sensitive to diverse family needs (e.g. work schedule, finding babysitting, issues of poverty, etc.).

Interview Question #7: “What do you believe are our school’s strengths in involving parents/families in our school?”

Responses:

- PTO.
- Holding family events/activities.
- Back to school orientation night.

Interview Question #5 asked respondents to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5

“How would you rate our school’s efforts in providing a welcoming environment for parents/families?” Results were as follows:

- 4 out of 5 students assigned a rating of 4.
- 4 out of 5 teachers assigned a rating of 3.
- 3 out of 5 parents assigned a rating of 3.

Interview Question #8 asked respondents to rank order of importance, “The opportunities/activities you feel we should be offering.” The activities consistently rated high for the interviewed 5 students were: Hosting monthly family literacy events, providing daycare at school events, and parenting classes for parents. The activities consistently rated high for the interviewed 5 SIT members were: parenting classes for families/parents, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for parents, and hosting monthly family literacy nights. The activities consistently rated high for the interviewed 5 PTO members were: providing a parent resource room at WMS, parenting classes for parents/families, and ESL classes for parents.

Findings

An analysis of data presented in Table 1 indicated some improvement was made concerning parents’ perceptions regarding key characteristics of WMS, as follows:

Statement #2: From October, 2005, to May, 2007, parents’ responses to “This school communicates with me about my child’s progress,” improved from

68% to 71%. Statement #3: From October, 2005, to May, 2007, parents' responses to "This school communicates effectively to all families" improved from 68% to 70%. Statement #5: From October, 2005, to May, 2007, parents' responses to "I know many ways that I can be involved in this school," improved from 48% to 57%.

One may conclude from interpretation of data presented in Table 2 that parents preferred to attend school events more suitable for the whole family where games, entertainment and food was provided.

An analysis of interview responses elicited from participating students, SIT members, and PTO officers provided these significant findings:

- The PTO has become a powerful resource for parents.
- Hosting academic-based family events for all to participate in have been effective.
- Communication between parents/teachers/students needs to be more effective and consistent.
- Language barriers between school and families continue to be an issue for WMS.
- Evident attempts to provide a welcoming environment for families has been made, but a stronger effort needs to be made.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided details concerning a description of the environment, hypothesis, results of the study and findings. Data presented in Tables 1 and 2, along with interview responses elicited from participating students, teachers and parents, consistently supported the researcher's hypothesis (i.e., Identification of selected learning activities by the WMS PTO and incorporated into the SIP will assure a supportive learning environment for students through increased parental involvement). Accordingly, the following kinds of learning activities, when incorporated in the SIP, assured a supportive learning environment through increased parental involvement:

- Establishing and implementing a WMS PTO.
- Hosting academic-based family events for all family members to participate in.
- Providing community and school-related resources for parents to utilize for their own improvement and/or for their child's academic growth.
- Assuring that all school-related documents were translated (e.g., newsletters, progress reports, school calendars, letters home to parents).
- Utilizing various creative strategies to consistently communicate with parents (e.g., positive phone calls home, postcards, email, reader board).

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this action research project was to determine whether the efforts of the WMS PTO and SIT positively impacted the ways families became involved in their child's education at WMS. To accomplish this purpose, a review of selected literature was conducted, essential baseline data and information was obtained and analyzed, and related conclusions and recommendations were formulated.

Conclusions

Based on a review of selected literature and major findings produced from the present study, the following conclusions were reached:

1. Recent transformation of the American family resulting from increased diversity, poverty, and special language needs, and high divorce rate in families has created a dramatic need for creatively involving parents/families in a supportive learning environment.

2. The NCLB Act mandated high standards for all students based on the principle that families, educators, and communities needed to work cooperatively to improve teaching and learning.

3. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to perform better in school and to like school more.

4. Identification of selected learning activities by the WMS PTO and incorporated into the SIP assured a supportive learning environment for students through increased parental involvement.

Recommendations

As a result of the conclusions cited above, the following recommendations have been suggested.

1. To address the recent transformation of the American family, educators need to be well informed of and trained in how to deal with issues of diversity, poverty, and special language needs.

2. To support the practice of the NCLB Act mandating high standards for all students, all states should implement consistent curricular, instructional and family-based learning programs based on the principle that families, educators, and communities need to work cooperatively to improve teaching and learning.

3. To help children perform better in school and to like school more, schools, families, and community groups should work together to support learning.

4. To assure a supportive learning environment for students through increased parental involvement, the following selected learning activities should be incorporated into the school improvement plan:

- Establishing and implementing a WMS PTO.
- Hosting academic-based family events for all family members to participate in.
- Providing community and school-related resources for parents to utilize for their own improvement and/or for their child's academic growth.
- Assuring that all school-related documents were translated.
- Utilizing various creative strategies to communicate with parents.

5. Educators seeking information related to increasing parental involvement in schools may wish to utilize strategies implemented in the present study or, they may wish to undertake further research more suited to their unique needs.

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APPENDIX

Efforts to Improve Parental Involvement at Wapato Middle School

Interview/Questionnaire Sheet

Efforts to Improve Parental Involvement at Wapato Middle School

Interview/Questionnaire

1. What opportunities are provided for parents to be involved at WMS?
2. How often does communication take place between parents/teachers/students?
3. What do you believe are effective strategies in communicating with parents and families?
4. What opportunities have you seen provided for parents this year that were different than last year?
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how would you rate our school's efforts in providing a welcoming environment for parents/families?
6. What do you believe are our school's challenges in involving parents/families in our school?
7. What do you believe are our school's strengths in involving parents/families in our school?
8. Below is a list of activities/opportunities provided to parents/families from schools in Washington and other States that have worked hard to involve parents/families in their schools. Looking at the list below, please rank in order of importance, the opportunities/activities you feel we should be offering, please list them below as well.
 - ___ English as a Second Language classes for parents
 - ___ GED classes for parents at the school
 - ___ Computer classes for parents
 - ___ Parenting classes for families/parents
 - ___ Holding various PTO meetings out in the community
 - ___ Hosting monthly family literacy events
 - ___ Extending Parent/Teacher Conferences until 8 p.m.