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Family involvement strategies at the Meskwaki Settlement school

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Family involvement strategies at the Meskwaki Settlement school

Abstract

When parents become involved in the education of their child research shows positive results for parents and children. However, not all parents know how to be meaningfully involved, and those that are involved may not understand all that is happening in their child's education.

At the Meskwaki Settlement School being meaningfully involved is an important issue to parents. There is a past history of fear of education due to forced removal to boarding schools far from families and cultural ties. There is a need for parents to connect not only with their child in the school but also with the school in a culturally relevant way. The ultimate purpose of this project was to create a parent volunteer program in order to provide opportunities for the Meskwaki community to become more involved in the Meskwaki Settlement School.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES
AT THE MESKWAKI SETTLEMENT SCHOOL

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

Division of Literacy Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

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Abstract

When parents become involved in the education of their child research shows positive results for parents and children. However, not all parents know how to be meaningfully involved, and those that are involved may not understand all that is happening in their child's education. At the Meskwaki Settlement School being meaningfully involved is an important issue to parents. There is a past history of fear of education due to forced removal to boarding schools far from families and cultural ties. There is a need for parents to connect not only with their child in the school but also with the school in a culturally relevant way. The ultimate purpose of this project was to create a parent volunteer program in order to provide opportunities for the Meskwaki community to become more involved in the Meskwaki Settlement School.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Even though most studies over the past 30 years show a strong connection between parent involvement in school and increased student achievement, self-esteem, improved behavior, and better school attendance regardless of race, family involvement in U.S. schools remains sadly minimal (Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Mapp, 1997, 2003; Ramirez, 2001). The presence of parents at school gives support to school from the major stakeholder in children's lives (Flood, Lapp, Tinajero, & Nagel, 1995). When families are involved in their children's school, cultural awareness and sensitivity of other adults and children are expanded (Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez & Kayzar, 2002). In fact the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 recognized that parent involvement was important to a child's educational success, and the Act provided funds to help support this idea. So, if parental involvement was considered important in 1965 and remains important now, why is it so difficult to connect families and schools?

Some answers are clear. When parents and children are forced to share a space with others but not encouraged to share and support others' language and culture parent involvement declines. (Flood et al., 1995) When teachers' beliefs include many hidden assumptions and generalizations about the parents of their students or the culture of the families, the gap between teachers and parents widens creating a negative image of parent involvement (Davis & Yang, 2005; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Sometimes it takes only one negative experience to discourage a parent from becoming involved altogether. Many valid reasons exist for why parents feel they cannot be wholly involved in their

children's education. These can include a single parent working two jobs, both parents working, or babies at home. Some parents believe the education process is the responsibility of the teacher. Their belief is that the teachers know best, so there is no need to interfere. Many unspoken reasons also exist for why parents may be disengaged. These reasons range from not knowing the language to communicate with educators to resentment at the perceived disregard for cultural backgrounds (Flood et. al., 1995).

The definition of "parent involvement" varies, based on parents or educators' perspectives. A few parents believe that attending meetings, baking for fundraising, attending conferences or open house, and helping with homework is sufficient parent involvement (Ellis & Hughes, 2002; Smreker & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). This type of parent involvement is a good start and much needed in schools. However, since studies indicate that parent involvement progressively declines from early childhood to high school, it is clear that more in-depth types of involvement are needed (Rutherford & Billig, 1995; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). This research draws on the definition of parent involvement developed by Dr. Joyce Epstein (Epstein, 1995) and encompasses parenting, communicating, volunteering, providing support for learning at home, participating in decision making, and collaborating with the community.

Rationale

In 1982, only 17 years after the Elementary and Secondary Act authorization, the Reagan Administration eliminated parental involvement as part of the Title I legislation. According to Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, (2007) this action changed the school and parent relationship altogether. Instead of an original ten pages of parent involvement mandates there was now only one requirement - that schools hold an annual meeting to

explain the Title I program. Serious parent involvement activity was reduced to “make and take” workshops. Parent advisory committees were wiped out virtually overnight, funding redirected, and a downward spiral in academic success began. Years later parent involvement would become associated with helping students with homework. In 1997 Congress, concerned with low test scores in reading across the nation, asked the Institute of Child Health and Human Development to form a panel to look into the effectiveness of a variety of reading strategies and approaches. The National Reading Panel was formed, and in 2000 they gave their report to Congress. In 2001, 19 years after President Regan eliminated parental involvement from Title 1, President Bush used this report as a basis to sign into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which is the new name of the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (NCLB, 2001). One of the six targeted areas of the NCLB was increasing parent involvement in schools (Mattingly et al. 2002). Thus, any school receiving Title I money was now required to spend part of that money on parent participation programs.

Now schools, armed with new legislation and a mandate to fund parent involvement programs, saw a need to develop quality meaningful parent involvement experiences. Educators know when families are meaningfully involved in school their children will perform better in academic and behavioral areas (Waldbart, Meyers, & Meyers, 2006). Planning quality parent involvement takes time so it is more efficient for educators to plan activities that will aide and enhance student learning. “To include 15 parents in a parent education program that causes them to spend more time reading with their children and less time watching television with them will have a more profound effect than a school chili supper attended by 100 parents” (Redding, 1991, p.1). Family

involvement programs are more likely to succeed if families and educators share a common belief that “the school environment should be open and helpful, communication between families and educators should be frequent and clear, and parents need to be treated as collaborators in their child’s educational process” (Carlson, 1991, p.10).

To provide further rationale for this project the next section is dedicated to a brief history of the Meskwaki Tribe located in Tama, IA. The Meskwaki have been involved in an ongoing struggle of cultural values versus educational needs since 1856.

Short History of Education and the Meskwaki Tribe

In 2001 the Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa, better known as the Meskwaki, realized a thirty year old dream. A new modern school was built to accommodate Pre-k through eighth grade under one roof. With all the new amenities and gadgets the population of the school grew from around 100 students to almost 200. Families were happy to have their children attend the new school building; unfortunately the increase in students did not carry over to increases in parental involvement. When the teachers began to investigate the reasons behind a continued decrease of parent involvement they looked back at the history of the Meskwaki tribe and its school to find answers.

Beginning as early as 1856 many persons in government and religion pursued the idea of a school for the Meskwaki with unsuccessful results. The Meskwaki did not believe that a white man’s education was needed for their children. In 1875 a new two story school building was built. It remained open until 1890 but had limited and inconsistent attendance. Over the next six years talk of forcing the tribe to send their children to school was debated (Keysor, 2002). In 1897 the new Indian Industrial School

was built just west and adjacent to the city of Toledo, IA. It included two dormitories, one for boys and one for girls, and would comfortably hold and educate 110 Meskwaki children. The school included many outbuildings such as a laundry, barn, and workshop in attempts to teach the Meskwaki various skills.

The school was set to open on September 1, 1898. Prior to this date, many in the government still wondered how they would entice the Meskwaki children to attend this new school. In 1895 Dr. Charles Eastman from Minnesota and fellow Native American was hired to speak to the Meskwaki (Keysor, 2002). Dr. Eastman was raised as a Woodland Sioux by his grandmother. His father who was thought to be dead but reappeared when he was 15 years old insisted he be educated as a white man. He was educated at Dartmouth and Boston University. He became a medical doctor and was the only physician available during the Wounded Knee Massacre. It was thought that someone who was Indian but educated as white men were would be able to convince Meskwaki families of the need to assimilate. Despite his background only a few Meskwaki came to hear the doctor.

It was then decided that Indian agent Horace Rebok and School Superintendent Nellis would take local policemen with them to visit privately the Chief Push-E-To-Neke-Qua of the Meskwaki Tribe and his interpreter. The agent and superintendent proceeded to explain to the Chief that it would be a crime against the Meskwaki children not to send them to the new school. The Chief listened quietly and when they were done talking the Chief stood up and said, "My friend, the Musquakies have always been friends to the white people, but they will not accept your school. You may come and kill us, but we will not give you our children. I will say no more" (Keysor, 2002). Not to be

defeated on what he believed was a good opportunity for the Indians, Agent Rebok threatened the interpreter with a loss of his position if he could not coerce the Chief into submitting. After three months the Chief finally gave permission for the children of the Meskwaki to attend the Indian Industrial School. Despite the cooperation of the Chief the highest attendance the school ever saw was about 50 students by 1899 (Keysor, 2002).

To compound the Meskwaki's distrust and dislike for the school and white man's education there was an episode when two teenage girls of the tribe had been found to be causing problems amongst the tribe. Agent Rebok asked for them to be arrested by the police and brought to the school. One was the Chief's daughter, and he was extremely angry that his child was in the school. He went to the school and told the agent that he would consent to putting his daughter in jail for however many days the agent thought necessary but he would not consent to leave her at the school (Keysor, 2002). The agent, however, refused to release either girl. Over the course of the next few years Agent Rebok arrested and imprisoned on fraudulent charges those Meskwaki tribal members who spoke out against the school.

In 1901 Agent Rebok was replaced by Agent William G. Malin. The name changed but the tactics related to school attendance remained the same against the Meskwaki tribe. His first order of business was to obtain guardianship of 15 to 20 Meskwaki children so he could keep their school attendance consistent. The courts granted his request, and then he had the right to determine how long these children would stay at the school. There were attempts by children to run away, some successful, some not. Malin went to court to assert his rights to retain guardianship of the children that ran back to their parents. Fortunately for the Meskwaki people, the District court found in

favor of the Meskwaki stating that Malin could no longer retain guardianship over blood relations of the children.

In 1938 two schools on the Settlement were combined to create the Sac and Fox Day School. The Meskwaki began talking about building a new school with proper facilities in the 1950's. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) threatened to close it down in 1968. This school remained open until the new building was opened in 2001. Had the BIA been successful there would be no school on the Settlement. The government had in the late 1800's tried to destroy the cultural identity of the Meskwaki's by forcing them to use the English language and trying to assimilate them into the Western world. Because of this strategy of de-culturalization today's Meskwaki families are fighting a battle to keep their culture and language alive. This attempt and others have left a negative impression on the tribe of white education (Keysor, 2002).

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to find ways to meaningfully involve today's Meskwaki families in their children's education and the daily workings of the school. The school would like to become the centerpiece of the Meskwaki community and to bring a positive image to education by showcasing the language and culture. The Meskwaki tribe is facing some serious culture and language issues within the framework of the tribe. For example there is fear that within a few years this language could be lost without the involvement of all members of the Meskwaki community. Up until the mid-1970's, grandparents continued to live in the homes with their children and grandchildren. This gave them an opportunity to speak the language with the family thereby assuring them that it could be carried on. In the early seventies the Meskwaki Senior Apartments were

built, and the elders moved out from the homes. The language was no longer spoken fluently in these homes, and with each generation it continues to regress. During the 1970's and 1980's many Meskwaki families who were speaking fluent Meskwaki chose to speak more English around their children in hopes they would be able to integrate into Western cultures with little difficulty. This generation of children understands when their parents speak Meskwaki, however, they are not able to converse fluently in Meskwaki with them. Another problem with keeping the language and culture alive is due to the size of the Meskwaki tribe. The Meskwaki are a small tribe in comparison with tribes like the Sioux. Many Meskwaki have married outside the tribe and outside the Native American culture altogether. Although there has been a Meskwaki culture and language program in existence at the school since the early years of its life, participation of the tribe is key to the continuation of the language of the Meskwaki.

Importance

The outcomes from this project were used to help the Meskwaki Settlement School create a parent volunteer program. It was intended that increasing parent volunteers in the school would have a direct effect on building a strong Meskwaki language and culture program. This in turn could strengthen the school academically as well. Building partnerships with all facets of the tribe using Dr. Joyce Epstein's framework of the six types of parent involvement also contributed to the creation of unity within the tribe.

Terminology

The *NCLB* signed in 2002 is a law intended to help schools improve by focusing on accountability for results, scientific education methods, or choices for parents with

some flexibility for states and communities. One aspect of the law is increased *parental involvement*. An involved parent is aware of and involved in their children's lives at home and at school. The traditional *paradigm* or model has parents attending conferences and open houses as the primary means of involvement. Dr. Joyce Epstein's framework expanded types of parent involvement to the following six areas to help schools develop strong family programs. (a) *parenting*, assisting families with parenting skills, family support, and understanding of child and adolescent development.; (b) *communicating*, creating ways to share information between school and home; (c) *decision making*, the cognitive process of reaching a decision; (d) collaborating with the *community*, the public residing around the school; (e) *volunteering*, recruitment, training, activities and schedules to involve families as volunteers in the school setting; and (f) *learning at home*, involving families with their children in academic learning activities at home. Dr. Epstein deems building *community partnerships*, relationships with members of the community, as most important.

Chapter 2

Methodology

This chapter describes the evolution of the Meskwaki Settlement School Parent Involvement Team Project and the time, effort, and resources given by them to create a successful parent involvement program. Their efforts to put into place the program as well as educate the surrounding communities as to the positive aspects of the Meskwaki Settlement School are documented here. I began this project as a way to start a parent involvement committee at our school, which spans from our three-year-old program through 12th grade. In the past two years the subject came up, and many people expressed an interest at being part of such a committee; however the time, commitment, and leadership needed was unavailable. At the time of the design of this project the Meskwaki Settlement School was just months away from opening the new high school addition. School administrators and teachers knew that in order for that age of student to be successful more parent involvement was needed. At the elementary level parent involvement was not an issue. Many classrooms from the three-year-old program to the fifth grade were hosting parent involvement activities each quarter with great participation and results.

My ultimate goal with this project was not to just increase parent involvement at the secondary level, but to also put into action a volunteer program whereby parents and other community members would be a regular part of the school environment from something as minor as helping teachers with grading papers or making copies, to regularly conversing with students in the Meskwaki language. Continued existence of this

tribal language is a high priority in this school community. Unfortunately, due to policies governed by the Bureau of Indian Education, there is a rigorous background check that must take place before anyone can become a regular volunteer, and this was not a drawing card to the school's goal of increased parent involvement. So the question became how to inspire families to want to become more involved in the school.

Procedures

After reading *From Beyond The Bake Sale: The Essential Guide To Family-School Partnerships* (Henderson et al., 2007), I began formulating my plan on motivating my fellow teachers to join me in creating a parent involvement committee that would lead to a school wide volunteer program. After reading through numerous articles I knew we would have to start small with non-threatening activities such as the one described in Illsley and Redford's (2005) *Drop in for Coffee*. We would also need to start out with a teacher-centered committee with plans to move towards a parent controlled one

I first talked with my administrator, Mr. S. about my research from the masters program as well as my goal to put in to place a parent volunteer program. Mr. S. informed me that in the past there had been a parent involvement team that met once with the idea of parent volunteers. It faltered, at the time, due to weather related issues, cultural issues, and lack of time for administration to be involved. Mr. S. was in favor of turning the program over to me for development and implementation. He suggested I talk with school secretary Mrs. W. as she had been present at the meetings and the initial planning session. Mrs. W. was still interested in being involved with the team and in fact having her on board is a positive arrangement as she was the first person most parents would likely see upon entering the school or talk to when calling.

I then began putting together a Power Point presentation with information on current parent involvement practices, history of the United States government legislation on parent involvement, and a history of the Meskwaki tribe and its relationship to education. (See Appendix A). Included on the Power Point was a timeline of the start of the committee all the way through to implementation of the volunteer program. It was hoped that such a timeline would help the committee be focused on the ultimate goal.

In the next section the review of the related literature will give strength to the idea that parent involvement in school is beneficial to children, educators, community, and school alike.

Review of Related Literature

Introduction

Beginning in the early 1990's Dr. Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships and the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University, made it her life focus to study parental involvement. She concluded that, "Students who succeed in school are almost always supported by their families, while other students struggle without support from home" (Epstein, Jansorn & Rodriguez, 2004, p. 19).

Research (National Middle School Association, 2002) supports the hypothesis that parental involvement can lead to improved student educational performance, foster better classroom behavior, and create an understanding of the relationship between school, student, and home (Barrera & Warner, 2006; Eccles & Howard, 1996; Guskey, Ellender, & Wang, 2006; Padgett, 2006). Yet, schools struggle to develop effective parent involvement programs despite overwhelming support for improved parent

involvement. In a recent MetLife survey on the importance of parental involvement 71% of principals and 59% of teachers declared it was a high priority, but also expressed frustration with the results of parental involvement in their schools (Padgett, 2006).

Padgett suggested, however, that one of the answers to the question of how we can best involve families and communities can be linked to four themes: creating formal policy, identifying barriers that prevent involvement, assessment of programs, and involving the community. These will be discussed in relationship to Dr. Epstein's six types of parental involvement.

Definition and View of Parent Involvement

At the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships Epstein (1995) created a framework of six types of parent involvement that can be used as a guide to assist schools in building strong family and community partnerships. The framework is built around parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Dr. Epstein's framework will be used to define *parent involvement* as being aware and involved in schoolwork, understanding the connection between parenting skills and student success, and consistent communication with schools about student progress.

The *traditional paradigm* of parent involvement in education, which is defined as home-based learning such as helping a child with homework, has families of low socioeconomic status participating in their child's education less often than those parents of higher or middle class status (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). It assumes that families of low socioeconomic status are not made up of the traditional two parent families and do not place education as top priority; rather the idea of financial security of the family

would take precedence. This view does not take into account the reality that many children in school today, regardless of socioeconomic status, may not come from a two parent home; they may spend time with other relatives, such as grandparents, who take on the responsibility of involvement when the parent is unable to.

This traditional paradigm does not allow for the overlapping of spheres of influence, which include the extended family, school, and community (Epstein, 1995). When educators say they are unable to do their job without the help of students' families and the support of the community and when families say they need to know what is happening at school in order to help their child, this is referred to as overlapping spheres of influence.

Unfortunately there are still teachers and families who take a negative stance based on outdated educational beliefs. For example, teachers use the excuse that if the family would only do its job, they could do their jobs. Families take the opposite view of having raised the child to school age that it's now up to the trained educator to educate them. Epstein asserted that these excuses lead to a theory of separate spheres of influence where no one wins, and the child loses most of all. Epstein's (1995) first theory points to a more positive image of family involvement and she has conducted research to create programs along these lines. The ideal is to create an effective family/school partnership. The keys to such a partnership that were utilized in this project, required a solid framework such as the six types of parent involvement as proposed by Dr. Epstein and her colleagues (Epstein, 1995). In the next section these six types will be discussed with more detail and examples of what other schools have created for each type will be provided.

Parenting

The NMSA (2002) agrees with Dr. Epstein's definition of parenting and uses it here to define *parenting* as providing assistance to parents to help them understand their children, acquire parenting skills, and set home conditions to support learning at all grade levels. Parents are their child's first teacher; unfortunately not all parents have the necessary knowledge or skills to be the first teacher, and some of what they may have taught their children is not always appropriate. In today's society, however, it becomes increasingly clear that being a parent is much more difficult, and understanding our children a much more complex issue than before (Boult, 2006). Many school districts have tried to help families become better parents by adopting programs such as Healthy Start or Family and Child Education (FACE). These programs utilize components such as parenting classes or workshops to help families increase their confidence in their own parenting. Parenting classes have been shown to effectively produce information and support for parents to build their self-confidence in parenting their child, help them to send their children to school ready to learn, and provide learning strategies to use as their children move from one developmental phase to another (Epstein, 1995).

Of course no program is without its problems, and one of the potential problems of parenting programs include lack of available materials to supply families with information when encountering the complexities of parenting. Also along these lines is finding someone qualified to moderate a meeting; someone who has the patience and experience of parenting to share wisdom and ideas. Another area to consider is that parents are often resistant to the information being provided to help them, believing the program may be interfering in their lives. Much of the information that is available is

received only by parents who attend meetings; so there is an increased need to find ways to reach more parents. It's important for schools then to build relationships with families in order to partner with them, create a community of trust, and a need to continue learning together (Davis, 2000).

Documented here are examples of parenting programs that have demonstrated success in reaching the families. For example school #82 ECC in Buffalo, New York, set up an adults only math tutoring class to teach parents how to help their children with math homework (NNPS, 2002). A program at Sherman Elementary School in Eau Claire, Wisconsin invited families into the school three times a year. They started out with dinner in the cafeteria and then parents went to the library for parent education workshops while the students play in the gym (NNPS, 2002). At the Chicago Child-Parent Centers health and nutrition classes were held as well as life skills development to accompany their preschool classes. It is their hope that parents will feel good about school the more involved they become (Warner, 2002).

Communicating

Communication between school and family, whether it is about the struggles a child has in academics, behavior issues, or (and especially) their successes, is the foundation for a strong partnership (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The activities of the school need to focus on keeping families informed of meetings, report cards, conferences, and school events. Having early school/ family communication in place as soon as children start school guarantees that problems may be solved more easily, and children can make greater strides toward academic and social success (Barrera & Warner, 2006). Of course not all notes and memos will make it home, and trying to

involve parents in the design of communication can be challenging. Not all parents feel comfortable imparting their ideas to those they believe more educated. A variety of mechanisms for communication are necessary.

The most common forms of communication are the parent-teacher conferences in which most schools engage, open houses, back to school nights, home visits or parent newsletters. (McIntyre, Kyle, Moore, Sweazy, & Greer, 2001). Although the parent-teacher conference is a communication tool it tends to be one-sided with the teacher presenting all information and the parent sitting quietly listening. Parents can feel overwhelmed at the amount of information presented at the meeting as well as feeling uneducated to respond. Open houses and back to school nights are also good forms of communication. Current programs, such as Head Start, use home visits to communicate with parents. One important reaction to note about this form of communication is that not all families want educators in their homes. For some it is a point of pride that educators not see the home, as the family may not live in the best conditions (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006). This can be solved by meeting with a parent or parents in a neutral location outside the school and the home. In some cases logistics, safety, or even policy issues make it difficult to conduct home visits. At Wing Luke Elementary School in Seattle Washington (NNPS, 2002) they have the added communication challenges in their elementary school because the students there speak more than 15 different native languages. Because math is such a common denominator in the schools curriculum, the school planned four Family Cultural Math Nights. Newsletters and memos went out and families were grouped according to language spoken with either a teacher or native speaker as facilitator. When they met at the math night they had the opportunity to learn

about the math curriculum as well as speak with other families in their own languages (NNPS, 2002).

West Hertel Academy #94 holds a “Bring Your Parent to School Day” in order to familiarize the families with the children’s school, routines, and curriculum (NNPS, 2002). At New Community Schools in North Perth, Scotland the schools designed ‘drop-ins’ as a way of communicating with parents. They were titled as *Drop in for Coffee* and gave parents an opportunity to talk with a teacher about concerns or questions. The success of *Drop In For Coffee* groups led to the development of a program called *Coffee Plus*, which was a program that focused on personal development and other activities such as arts and crafts, healthy cooking, and inviting teachers in to talk about school issues such as moving on to secondary school (Illsley and Redford, 2005). This program evolved into the even more education based *Coffee Too* that provided parents opportunities to obtain educational certificates through Perth College. And finally there was *Coffee Extra* that involved parents in the future of their school and in taking part in fund raising events for the school as well (Illsley and Redford, 2005).

Volunteering

Dr. Epstein defined *volunteering* as involvement at and for the school by parents and community members (Epstein, 1995). This involvement can occur in school by assisting teachers, students, administrators, and acting as coaches, or chaperones. Volunteers can help with school programs to facilitate children’s progress at school, home, or in the community. For example, at the Barnum School in Taunton, Massachusetts the school recruited high school, parent, and community volunteers as “big buddies” to be paired with a prekindergarten “little buddy” who had difficulties

learning important readiness skills (NNPS, 2002). At Woodson South Elementary School in South Chicago the Read-to-Me program was created to provide an opportunity for parents to work in the school monitoring students in reading (Warner, 2002).

Volunteering can also involve being part of an audience at assemblies, performances or other events.

Two of the biggest challenges in relation to volunteering is recruiting and creating flexible scheduling for the volunteers. One of the barriers to recruiting volunteers is the strict regulations some schools must set in order to have regularly scheduled volunteers. Many schools, such as Bureau of Indian Education schools, must have regular volunteers undergo extensive background checks. At the Meskwaki Settlement School this has been one of the reasons parents have not volunteered in the classroom. To undergo a background check the applicant must fill out many forms about him or herself and family members and send fingerprints. Some parents find this to be too much work. Others worry that a bad check charge on their record might keep them out of the school. One way the Meskwaki Settlement School has helped parents who do not want to become a regular volunteer is to allow them to drop in and volunteer to shelve books in the library or make copies for the teachers (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

Another recruitment barrier can be when the types of volunteering or the program itself is unclear. Before recruiting volunteers for a school it is crucial to know the needs of the staff and the program policies. It is also important to survey parents to find out right at the start their schedules, their age preferences, skills, and talents. It would be inappropriate to ask a parent to volunteer in a kindergarten classroom if they are only comfortable with older students. Asking a parent to volunteer to help with sewing would

be futile if they have no interest or background in sewing. Of course, if parents do not feel welcome in the school they certainly will not volunteer.

Learning at home

Often the first topic most parents think of when talking about *learning at home* is children's homework. Learning at home means much more than homework. It also refers to how families encourage and guide children, and when doing homework it encompasses the activities and discussion shared. What it really relates to is perceptions (Epstein, 1995). What is the school's perception of the duties of student and parent, and what are the parent's perceptions of the school's duties to their child. The school and the family must work together to define the term learning at home. And while learning at home has much to do with homework and finding ways to make homework meaningful and involve student and parent, learning also relates to curriculum.

Parents need to know what their children are being taught before they can become completely involved in the learning process. Strategies for clear communication between teachers and parents need to be developed to compensate for children's tendencies toward not discussing homework requirements with parents (Davis, 2000). The results of communication and meaningful activities can mean higher test scores, increased self-confidence as a learner, and the knowledge that the parent and teacher are in sync with each other as to what is expected (Barrera, 2006).

At Col. E. Brooke Lee Middle School in Silver Springs, Maryland the school staff was disheartened by students low reading test scores on tests. The school formed study groups to study the impact of poverty on literacy development and planned a variety of activities to combat the problem. They held library card drives, participated in the Book

It! incentive program, and provided a chance for the students to attend a baseball game if they met their reading goal (NNPS, 2002). These activities paved the way for parents to obtain more books and to develop regular reading habits with their children.

Other ways to enhance learning at home is to have family math, reading, or science nights to give parents ideas on how to make learning fun at home. Some schools offer a library of games families can check out. Other schools have a homework hotline for families to utilize in the event they don't understand the homework. Some teachers have established take home book libraries for students to use or literacy learning kits that are based around a book theme (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006).

Decision making

The fifth type of parent involvement in Epstein's framework, *decision making*, is defined as activities designed to solicit the voice of parents in decisions about school policies and practices (NMSA, 2002). This voice could be established by PTA/PTO membership, advisory council participation, or school-site management teams. The challenges to find leaders from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups can be overwhelming. Often parents do not believe or think they are knowledgeable enough to participate in the decision making and want to leave it up to "experts." Many schools are turning to creative means to encourage parents to get involved in the decision making process. In Milwaukee, Wisconsin the group known as Parents Plus provided a free ticket for every family member to a Disney on Ice show if they filled out a survey on school needs. This was to help a small elementary school create their own Action Team for Partnerships. The school received almost a 100% response and gave a strong start to its parent involvement program (NNPS, 2006). The Springfield chapter of Parents for Public

Schools seeks to get parents “a seat at the table” at important decision making meetings.

Members of this committee sit on many education committees and publish a newsletter of current events in the area (Warner, 2002).

Collaborating with the community

The final type of involvement for parents is *collaborating with the community*.

This involves finding resources and services for families, students and the school from the community surrounding the school. Collaboration also means the school provides services to the community. Of course, like anything else there are challenges to collaborating with the community such as who has the responsibility, who provides the funds, and what are the goals that will benefit both the community organization and the school. Building partnerships with businesses, agencies, cultural groups, and health services is not usually a problem for schools (Boult, 2006; Ferguson, 2005; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001). These types of community members are often eager to lend a hand to promote their services and to offer brochures and small tokens to be given out to students and families. Many of these community collaborations become the centerpiece for social studies themes and guidance lessons in getting along and promoting peace and problem solving (Swick, 2006).

Community partnerships can be categorized as student-centered, family-centered, school-centered, and community-centered (NNPS, 2002).

For families the benefits of such collaboration are that they learn about services in the community and may utilize them (Boult, 2006, Henderson et al, 2007). Families are able to interact with other families in using the services, and many contribute back to the community because of their experiences. Schools have the benefit of using community

resources to develop and deliver curriculum and instruction and as a way to encourage students to get involved and give back to the community. One such successful collaboration occurred at Frederick Law Olmsted School #53/56 in Buffalo, New York. The After-School Enrichment Program partnered with several community businesses to provide cooking classes, yoga, dance, and crafts for 12 weeks. Many parents volunteered their time and talents to this program. Another successful collaboration happened in Irmo, South Carolina at Ballentine Elementary School. Each month they celebrated a different character trait. In October, the theme was “cooperation,” and the school collected over 1700 pounds of food for the Harvest Hope Food Bank (NNPS, 2002)

Evaluation and recommendations

In 2000 the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, part of the U.S. Department of Education, asked the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory’s National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools to do an annual review of current research on family and community partnerships. In 2002 Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp of the Center published *A New Wave of Evidence The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. In concluding their report nine recommendations were given on building effective partnerships:

1. Recognize that all parents, regardless of income, education level, or cultural background, are involved in their children’s learning and want their children to do well in school.
2. Create programs that will support families to guide their children’s learning, from preschool through high school.

3. Work with families to build their social and political connections.
4. Develop the capacity of school staff to work with families and community members.
5. Link family and community engagement efforts to student learning.
6. Focus efforts to engage families and community members in developing trusting and respectful relationships.
7. Build strong connections between schools and community organizations.
8. Design and conduct research that is more rigorous and focused, and that uses more culturally sensitive and empowering definitions of parent involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

These recommendations provide a strong foundation for building a framework of parent involvement programs and also serve as a guide for evaluating the effectiveness of these programs. The *Evidence* publications have been in existence beginning in 1980. The publications continue to show the positive impact of parental involvement in children's education twenty-nine years later. (Guskey, Ellender, & Wang, 2006).

At the beginning of this literature review I emphasized that the keys to a successful parent school partnership consisted of welcoming, honoring, and connecting with families. In evaluating parent involvement programs it is necessary to ask the question, "Does this program welcome, honor, and connect with all families?" There are many ways to obtain this answer when evaluating current or past programs. One way is by using a survey or questionnaire with all families in the school whether or not they are involved in the programs offered. Surveys can be in the form of a note sent to all families or random telephone calls. The data obtained from a survey gives us information on its

strengths and weaknesses and where to go from that point on. Surveys should go to school staff as well to obtain their perceptions of attitudes on parent involvement and best practice.

Another effective form of assessment to identify family perceptions of programs is small focus group meetings. A series of meetings could be held to discuss the six types of parent involvement. Questions could range from obtaining whether the design and language of a newsletter was family friendly to engaging attendees in decision making based on assessment of program (Guskey et al., 2006). A focus group meeting could also be held with community partners to evaluate the effectiveness of that particular partnership with the school and with families.

One issue that has been documented in research studies are educators' feelings of being inadequately prepared to begin building partnerships with families (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). A study conducted of the 50 states found that no state requires a full course on family involvement for the certification and licensing of teachers (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Another study done of 271 undergraduates in early childhood education found that many of them thought they were minimally ready to build a family-school partnership. Researchers reported that sixty percent of preservice teachers responded that they received only one class period in one college class on involving families (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Seventy-six percent believed a full university level course in involving parents in school should be required of all undergraduates in teacher education programs. This is a critical piece of information to have when it is the educators who will be relied upon to build those first relationships with families.

Schools, educators, families, and communities should never give up trying to establish a partnership with each other. When the research so pointedly shows that parent involvement makes a positive impact on student achievement it makes sense to invest time and funds on developing this aspect of education (Barrera & Warner, 2006; Epstein, 1995; Epstein, Jansorn, & Rodriguez, 2004; Guskey, Ellender & Wang, 2006).

Chapter 3

The Project

This chapter is organized to show the timeline of the actual project. The dates of committee meetings as well as activities are used as sub-headings. Names of committee members and others have been shortened to initials only to protect identity. Project documents can be found in the appendix cited.

Introducing the Project

Teachers in the three-year-old program through 6th grade at the Meskwaki Settlement School actively incorporated parent involvement activities during the school year. In the early childhood wing where I taught we hosted four parent involvement activities per year. They were related to the areas of math, literacy, the Meskwaki culture, and a culmination of all at the end of the school year. Organized parent involvement activities ceased after the sixth grade. For the middle school and high school families parent involvement was limited to parent teacher conferences and all school culture nights once per month. The administration of the Meskwaki Settlement School wanted to have in place a volunteer program in which parents and community members would become more involved in the school at the secondary level.

Following my review of existing research regarding parent involvement in schools, I designed a Power Point (Appendix A) for an in-service to introduce the parent involvement framework designed by Dr. Joyce Epstein (1995), review the activities in each area of the framework currently in practice at other schools, learn about the Meskwaki tribe and the difficulties they have overcome in education, and finally form a parent involvement committee that would begin to build a parent volunteer program. All

teachers from the Meskwaki Settlement School participated in the in-service including para-educators as well as teachers in special subjects. The initial in-service took place on November 7, 2008 in the school's media center. Figure 1 provides the agenda of this meeting.

| Schedule of inservice |
|---|
| 1:45 p.m. – Introduction of topic |
| 1:50 p.m. – Review of Meskwaki Settlement School Philosophy and Vision Statement |
| 2:00 p.m. – Power point on the framework of parent involvement |
| 2:30 p.m. – Invitation to the parent involvement committee and explanation of volunteer program goal |
| 2:45 p.m. – Closing/Questions/Comments |
| 3:00 p.m. – Interested persons in working with parent involvement will meet for the rest of inservice to work on short and long term goals associated with the committee and a volunteer program. |

Figure 1. Agenda of first meeting

After the in-service I was approached by staff interested in participating on the committee, and we held our first informal meeting in which we took only enough time to set a date for the first formal meeting. We departed with the idea that prior to the first meeting we all needed to be thinking of ideas on how to structure the committee, how to invite parents on board, and how often we would need to meet to firmly put in place a volunteer program.

Implementing the Project

I called a meeting of the Meskwaki Settlement School Parent Involvement Team (MSSPIT) again the following Monday. Because of the varied schedules of the teachers two meetings had to take place. The first meeting was held at 7:30 to 8:00 a.m. that

morning for those teachers who worked in the Meskwaki Settlement School Afterschool Program, and the second meeting was held from 3:30 to 4:30 to accommodate those who drove from further away and would be unable to come at the early time. The team was represented by three teachers from the early childhood programs, one lower elementary teacher, and one upper elementary teacher, two teachers from the middle and high school, and three support staff consisting of the school secretary, afterschool program coordinator and school nurse. Three members of the team were also parents of students in the school; however, they are not Meskwaki. Initially no Meskwaki teacher showed interest in becoming involved with the team. I took the lead as head of MSSPIT.

The agenda was shared (Appendix B) and a morning group secretary was chosen to take notes. This was similarly repeated at the afterschool meeting. Two secretaries were needed to ensure that the information discussed at both meetings reached all members. We reviewed the school philosophy to remind us that our goal would be to provide for parent and community involvement as well as utilizing tribal resources such as tribal elders. The building goals were also reviewed as they contained goals that pertained to parent involvement in the school. We also briefly discussed that the outcome of the committee would be the parent volunteer program. We decided that this goal would have to be the priority of all decisions we made within the framework of the committee.

With all else completed we were able to focus then on the parent involvement team and how it would use Dr. Epstein's framework to achieve the ultimate goal of parent volunteers. I gave the five minutes to brainstorm their ideas of how they thought we could use the framework. It was decided that the Meskwaki Settlement School Parent

Involvement Team (MSSPIT) would be divided into six subgroups with one or two members heading up these groups. The subgroups would be six committees based on the six components of Epstein's framework: parenting, collaborating with the community, learning at home, communication, volunteering, and decision making.

At this point in our meeting one of the high school teachers, Mr. D., asked if he could address the team on an issue related to our purpose that could possibly become a hurdle for us to overcome before we could even begin in earnest. The team agreed to put the agenda aside for the moment and give the floor to him. He began by reminding us that the new middle school/high school building would be opening second semester. The administration had given the high school staff the task of finding ways to recruit students to attend the new building for the next school year. Not all Meskwaki children attend the Meskwaki Settlement School especially those in middle and high school. Many of those students attend the local public school in town due to more offerings in sports and academics.

At the first parent teacher conferences held the week before the MSSPIT was formed, Mr. D. decided to ask the parents who attended the following: (a) Why do you think some families do not send their children to school at MSS? (b) What is missing at our school that they have in town? (c) What can we do to be the best school for Meskwaki kids? He recorded answers from the parents and compiled them to present to administration. He also thought our team would need to know and understand the feelings of the middle school and high school parents if we wanted them to be involved within the school. What he discovered from parents was the following: *what MSS is lacking* were sports programs, drama or speech extra-curriculars, and no foreign language program.

We were considered too lenient on students who skipped school, too lax in use of consistent discipline, and finally the teachers at the public school in town were perceived as more qualified to teach than the teachers at the MSS; *what MSS is excelling in* was that students have more fun at MSS, the drop out rate is lower at MSS than in town, the MSS curriculum is based around the culture and language of the tribe, and that pregnancy rates are higher for Meskwaki teens who attend school in town.

The one idea that kept surfacing that night was the idea that the Meskwaki Settlement School was a “dummy school”. This is a perception that has been related to the Meskwaki Settlement School since it’s creation in the 1930’s. A perception exists within the community that the staff at MSS are not high quality teachers; nor do they care about the students. As to the last question on how to fix the problem, parents had no clear answers.

Armed with this information the MSSPIT decided that we would need to address the perception problem if we were to increase parental involvement in the school. It was decided then to focus on four of the six types of parental involvement and to actually combine two. The following components would be the focus for the subgroups: communication, volunteering, and learning at home/parenting. The committee members attending the morning session each agreed to be on one of the sub-committees. The information was recorded by the secretary to be presented at the afterschool meeting. It was further decided that because we would be unable to meet again during the month of November that we would communicate by school email and person to person meetings when needed. The email was to be addressed to all members of the MSSPIT at all times to keep everyone in the loop for information.

As we adjourned the first meeting we set the task for each sub-committee to brainstorm a list of ideas of how to build and move forward with their particular committee. The question to be answered by each committee was "How will this sub committee work to change the perception of the school for the Meskwaki tribe?" A survey (Appendix C) would be put in the mailboxes of each staff member in the school asking if they had a need for a volunteer, what projects were volunteers needed for, and were there other areas of the school that volunteers were needed in. At the afterschool meeting the morning notes were presented to those attending. Those members also agreed that in order to build parent involvement we would actively need to change community and parent perceptions. They too took a place on a sub-committee and agreed to work towards answering the perception question. At the afterschool meeting one of the members, Mrs. W., who was also a parent suggested one way to change perception quickly would be to recruit parents to the team. She agreed to begin talking to parents on the settlement who were her friends and neighbors to find interested parents. I told committee members that in the following weeks the MSSPIT would find, in their mailboxes, samples of volunteer handbooks from other schools around the nation. These volunteer handbooks were found on line after a search. I requested that each member write notes in margins on their likes, dislikes, questions, and concerns. The handbooks would circulate through all members, and then the committee would work on creating a volunteer handbook for the Meskwaki Settlement School.

December 11, 2008

The second meeting of the parent involvement team took place at the end of the Thursday's in-service in the media center. I sent the agenda through email (Appendix A)

earlier in the day. Two members were absent that day; however, three other staff members decided to attend to find out more of what the team was trying to achieve. The meeting began with a review of the previous meeting, the goals set, and our vision for the committee. The focus of the meeting then turned to the monthly newsletter. Ms. A., the English teacher, was in charge of collecting short articles from all staff members for the first newsletter. As of that meeting all the lower elementary teachers had submitted articles as had two of the secondary teachers. There was still one week left before Christmas break so it was decided that we would send out daily emails to remind staff to email their news to Ms. A.

On November 17th forty volunteer surveys were put in the mailboxes of all staff members. They were to be returned to Mrs. M. by December 5th at which time Mrs. E. would categorize results and create a volunteer application to be distributed to community members who expressed interest in volunteering at the school. Only ten of the surveys were returned despite repeated emails and in-person discussions. It was decided to use the ones we received back to create an application. Mrs. E. stated she would try to have the application completed prior to our last day before break.

The final topic on the agenda was the planning of the family read-in night. For the first ten minutes we brainstormed a list of ideas related to having a family night. Mrs. K. told the committee that the next Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) book distribution was to take place in February. She thought that if we tied a family night into the RIF distribution we could create a successful event. February was already slated to be a busy month with ITED/ITBS testing, parent/teacher conferences, and a culture night. Mr. D. wondered if we could partner up with the Meskwaki Settlement School culture staff and combine all

three events. All committee members agreed it sounded like a good idea, and I volunteered to talk with the culture staff the following day. With nothing further to discuss and everyone having an assignment the meeting was adjourned.

January 13, 2009

The MSSPIT met for the third time after school. I sent the agenda (Appendix B) out earlier in the day. We unfortunately fell behind in our timeline in several activities due to inclement weather resulting in school cancellations. The last day before break we did not have school due to inclement weather. Both the newsletter and the family night were delayed. However, Mrs. E. finished the volunteer application, (Appendix C), and they mailed out on January 13th. Six parents of Meskwaki school children signed up with an interest in volunteering at the school. The volunteer handbooks from other schools for review had been reviewed, and Mrs. W. was ready to create a draft for the Meskwaki Settlement School with my assistance.

Mr. D. reported that work on the school website would have to wait till summer. Due to construction work on the new school building the technology would be updated at a later date. The committee decided to look at the website this summer and work on it for the beginning of the 2009-10 school year. Likewise the learning calendars that were to be distributed with the newsletters were being put on hold to go out for the three months in the summer.

The February 11th family read-in night became the top priority. It was decided to not have a celebrity reader and instead use Meskwaki elders to fill this area. The read-in night would take place the same night as RIF distribution. The time would begin at 5:00 with a community meal and RIF distribution in pre-kindergarten through high school

classrooms. RIF technically is geared for pre-kindergarten through 8th grade. However, the RIF committee used funding to purchase books for secondary levels as well. After the meal and book distribution all families would meet in the gym. The wrestling mats would be rolled out for families to lounge in comfort. They would be encouraged to bring pillows and blankets. Books from classrooms would be provided as well as the children's RIF books. The culture staff would be asked to work on Meskwaki language books that children could read to their parents as well. One of the activities for the read-in is to take a break every 20 minutes and a Meskwaki elder would have five to ten minutes to tell a story related to Meskwaki culture. The night would end at 7:30 p.m.

The first Meskwaki Settlement School newsletter was published and sent through the mail on Friday January 16th. The mailing included 121 families and twenty-six non-custodial family members with a total of 147. The newsletter was also linked to the school's internal and external websites. Due to the cost of printing, only the first page of the newsletter was printed in color, the rest was printed in black and white. The committee also decided they would send newsletters down to the tribal center the next week to be on hand for any community member to read. We received some positive feedback the following week from school board members who praised us for our hard work and for the information sent out to the community. The newsletter carried articles from all classroom teachers, the administration, the school board, and other curricular areas. The school secretary offered to take over the publishing of the newsletter if the other members of MSSPIT would collect information from the staff. Four more newsletters will be published before the school year is over. One important change to the newsletter was the actual format. The school secretary has changed it to a booklet form

from the original eight stapled pages. The administration also consented to have it printed and include photos of staff members associated with particular articles.

The Meskwaki Settlement School Volunteer program did not take off as quickly as I hoped. To date there have been only two community members to return the volunteer application. One application was completed by a mother of three Meskwaki students in elementary and middle school. The other application was filled out by a mother of a child in the three-year-old program. They expressed an interest at working in any grade level and would be willing to shelve books, work one on one with children, as well as taking on the day to day copying and laminating teachers accumulate. The MSSPIT is now waiting on final procedures from the administration on how they want to handle volunteers. With the new school about to open the administrator has put our volunteer program on the back burner till the next school year. This is unfortunate news for us as we will most likely lose the volunteers we have recruited. It will give us time to finish the volunteer handbook and have everything ready to go on the first of the new school year. Personal phone calls were made to the others who had signed up with interest in volunteering in hopes of progressing along. The committee decided to make the volunteer program priority at the next meeting.

Our final public relations project has not come to fruition. MSSPIT planned on having a 'Drop in for coffee' time in the new middle school/high school building so community members would begin to feel comfortable coming into the school. At the time of the publication of this project the new building still has not opened due to last minute construction issues. Our administration feels very strongly that this type of public relations will go a long way in helping to promote the new building, and the plan is in

place to begin once the building opens. Middle school/high school staff will take turns one to two times per week meeting in the commons area with community members for coffee and to answer questions or start conversation. At the time of publication of this paper the new school is not set to open until the 2009-10 school year. Again, this gives us time to structure the coffee time and create a schedule for rotation of teachers.

February 11th was supposed to be the Meskwaki Settlement School Culture/Family Literacy Night. (Appendix D). The culture staff and MSSPIT had planned together and everything was ready to go. In January our school was affected by inclement weather, and the January culture night had to be postponed. The culture staff assured us we would simply go ahead with the Family Literacy/Culture night; however, they had now changed their minds and wanted to go ahead with the culture night they had originally planned, which was to be social dancing and supper. They had pushed the Family Literacy and Culture night to March but have once again postponed our partnership till April. Disappointed as we were we must defer to the culture staff as they have priority for events over all others. We thought maybe we could go ahead and do ours alone, but with so many other events happening in February we could not hope for good attendance. The up side to this is that we have now invited a member of the Iowa Energy basketball team to come and be a celebrity reader for that night. Many families are excited about the prospect of a well known athlete visiting the school. The culture staff has also begun to seriously work on creating Meskwaki language books for the children and families. The delay in our event gives everyone more time to create. Our goal for next year when we plan for this event again is to invite the Native American Author Joseph Bruchac to our school to participate in reading with our students.

Chapter 4

Conclusions/Recommendations

When I began teaching at the Meskwaki Settlement School in the early 1990's I realized that in order to be successful as a teacher and a non Meskwaki citizen it would be important to build relationships with families. These relationships would forge a connection that would make it easier in the long run to help families see the value in participating in their child's education. Back then there were only 40 families being served by fifteen staff in the K-8th grade school. Fifteen years later and with triple the amount of families and staff it's even more important to build and maintain relationships with families.

To build relationships it is necessary to learn and participate in the cultures to learn the histories of the families, to show appreciation of the diversity, and to use it to build curriculum. The intent of creating the Meskwaki Settlement School Parent Involvement Team during the 2008-09 school year was to create a more welcoming environment in the school and encourage the community to become part of the everyday workings of the school. This happened through the public relations efforts of the new monthly newsletter, the partnering of the MSSPIT team and culture staff for a family literacy night, and by creating a volunteer program where teachers and community members would work together,

While participating on the MSSPIT it became increasingly clear that we needed to learn patience when working with the Meskwaki community members. It is not their nature to rush into something impulsively. They take time and give much thought to what their own participation will be. It can be frustrating to those of us not of the Meskwaki

culture. We sometimes felt that we were fighting another historical battle to meet deadlines. In the end it was important to remember that it was not about us, it was for and about the children and families of the Meskwaki Settlement.

This project ran into several delays during the implementation process but I am hopeful that the activities planned will still occur. Inclement weather and construction hurdles seemed to be the ones that impacted several of our activities; however our parent activity for April is ready to go and as soon as the new school opens we will be able to begin our 'Drop in for Coffee' campaign. Our biggest hurdle is the policies behind the volunteer program. We have our volunteers cleared through preliminary background checks and now it's simply up to our administrator to make the final decision on scheduling and approval of the handbook.

Dr. Joyce Epstein's six types of parent involvement helped us to define what was ultimately important for our committee to achieve. It was used to help outline what we felt was needed in order to increase parental involvement in the school. We were able to brainstorm ideas under each of the categories and prioritize each idea as to its potential impact on family involvement. Even before starting this project we knew the school faced a public relations problem with community members wondering if this school was equal in quality to the public school in town, whether teachers were highly educated, and whether we offered enough challenges or options in our curriculum. This would be the battle of misinformation that needed to be resolved in order for the Meskwaki Settlement School to become a point of pride with the community. Before this project began our school already had many strengths associated with Dr. Epstein's framework. We already had parent involvement activities at the elementary level that were successfully

encouraging parents to work at home with their children. We also did a good job with communicating the successes, failures, and needs of the school to the families and community through regular newsletters from classrooms and through the tribes monthly newsletter. The two areas that were weak were collaborating with the community and volunteering. These have become the main focus of MSSPIT and once we overcome our initial delays we will finally have a strong program of parental involvement.

Before I began this project I saw myself as someone who would give 100% to the education of my students and their families. My own parent involvement activities have always been successfully attended with ties to the curriculum and components of teaching parents how to effectively work with their children. I had not looked at myself in the position of being a leader among my colleagues. Taking on this project forced me into a role I have grown to value as much as my role as educator. As things continue to move ahead I plan to continue with this project and my role within for years to come.

The recommendations that I have would be to continue the MSSPIT for the remainder of the school year with the idea of recruiting parents and other community members to join. At our last parent/teacher conferences we did spread the word about the committee and had two parents express interest in joining. We will be meeting again in March and have invited them to join us. We will be planning the April read-in night with the culture staff. Another recommendation is to continue with the monthly all school newsletters. In February we celebrated another year of making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and the front page was devoted to our achievement. Our parents and community members have responded favorably to our newsletters and have made suggestions of other things they would like to see.

The volunteer program is at a stand still as we wait for administrative input. My recommendation for the volunteer program is to keep in contact with our interested volunteers, continue to recruit others, finish the Meskwaki Volunteer Handbook, and work hard at making sure we start out school year 2009-10 with volunteers ready to enter the school and create a culturally enriched environment for the children of the Meskwaki tribe.

One last recommendation I have for our staff and for the MSSPIT would be to join in on the recruitment teams that will be going out into the community. With the new building set to open for the next school year our administrations wants teams of teachers to go out in the community to recruit more middle school and high school students that now go to South Tama. They want an elementary staff person to be part of each team in the event that there would be elementary age children that would transfer as well. I think this would be a golden opportunity to promote our Parent Involvement Team as well as give good public relations to the school. We want parents to feel welcome from the beginning and what better way than to give them the voice they need in the school.

After working on this project and writing this paper I am very excited for the next school year. We have in place a framework for parent involvement in our school that will help our school become the centerpiece of the community. We have worked intensely to build relationships with parents and other community members and I feel that during the 2009-10 school year we will all see the benefits.

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Appendix A
Parent Involvement Power Point

Parent Involvement Power Point for staff in-service November 7, 2008



CHAPTER 1

- Studies over 30 years show strong connection between parent involvement in school and student achievement, self-esteem, improved behavior, and better attendance.
- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 recognized that parent involvement was important to educational success and provided funding to help support the idea.

SO WHAT'S GONE WRONG?

- When parents and children are forced to share a space with others but not encouraged to share and support others language and culture parent involvement declines. (Flood, Lapp, Tinajero, & Nagel, 1995)
- When teachers beliefs include many hidden assumptions and generalizations about the parents of their students or the culture of the families, the gap widens. (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006)

IT ONLY TAKES ONE...

It takes only one negative experience to turn a parent away from becoming involved altogether.

WHAT IS PARENT INVOLVEMENT?

- There are some parents who believe that attending meetings, baking for fund raising, attending conferences or open house, and helping with homework is enough.
- However, this type of parent involvement progressively declines from early childhood to high school, so more in depth types are needed. (Shartrand, A, Weiss, H., Krelder, H., & Lopez, M., 1997)

AND THEN THIS HAPPENED...

- In 1982, only 17 years after the ESEA authorization, the Reagan administration eliminated parent involvement as part of Title 1 legislation. (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007)
- Parent advisory committees were virtually wiped out overnight and a downward spiral in academic success began.

SO.....

- o In 1997 Congress, concerned with low test scores in reading across the nation asked the Institute of Child Health and Human Development to form a panel to look into the effectiveness of a variety of reading strategies and approaches.
- o The NRP was formed and in 2000 gave their report to congress.

NRP

- o Not once does their study ever state that parent involvement in the reading process is crucial, only teacher preparation and effective reading strategies.

HOWEVER.....

- In 2001, 19 years after President Reagan eliminated parent involvement from Title I, President Bush used the NRP report to sign into law the NCLB Act, which is really just the ESEA Act of 1965 renamed and reorganized. (NCLB, 2002)
- One of the six areas targeted by NCLB is increasing parent involvement in schools and thus any school receiving Title I money is now required to spend part on parent participation programs.

SO WHAT IS PARENT INVOLVEMENT?

- o To include 15 parents in a parent education program that causes them to spend more time reading with their children and less time watching television with them will have a more profound effect than a school chili supper attended by 100 parents. (Redding, 1991, pg 1)

- o The school environment should be open and helpful, communication between families and educators should be frequent and clear, and parents need to be treated as collaborators in their child's educational process. (Carlson, 1991)

SHORT HISTORY OF EDUCATION AND THE MESKWAKI TRIBE

- o 1856 – as early as this date many persons in government and religion pursued the idea of a school for the Meskwaki with unsuccessful results.
- o 1875 – Two story building was built for a school and remained open till 1890 with limited attendance.
- o For next six years there was talk of forcing the tribe to send it's children to school.

IF YOU BUILD IT THEY WILL COME?

- o In 1895 Dr. Charles Eastman came to Iowa to speak to the Meskwaki Tribe about how important it was that they send their children to school. His speech was not well attended.
- o Horace Rebok, Indian agent at the time and School Superintendent Nellis would take the local policemen to the house of the Chief and tell him it was a crime not to send their children to the school.

WORDS OF CHIEF PUSH-E-TO-NEKE-QUA

- o The chief listened quietly and then spoke
- "My friend, the Mesquakies have always been friends to the white people, but they will not accept your school. You may come and kill us, but we will not give you our children. I will say no more."

TIMELINE CONTINUED...

- o 1897 - New Indian Industrial School was built just west and adjacent to city of Toledo
- o It had two dormitories one for girls and one for boys and would comfortably hold and educate 110 Meskwaki children.
- o It had many out buildings such as a laundry, barn, and workshop in attempts to teach them various skills.
- o It was set to open in 1898.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

- o Three months after the Chief said he would not send the children, he gave permission for them to go.
- o Despite the cooperation of the Chief the highest attendance the school ever saw was about 50 students by 1899.
- o At one point one of the Chief's daughters was arrested for causing problems within the tribe. Agent Rebok asked for them to be brought to the school. The Chief stated that he would agree to his daughter going to jail, but not to the school.

OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS....

- o Agent Rebok would arrest and fraudulently charge any Meskwaki member who spoke out against the school.
- o 1901- Rebok is replaced by Agent William G. Malin.
- o His first order of business was to obtain guardianship of about 20 Meskwaki children at the school so he could keep attendance consistent.
- o When the children ran away from the school he tried to retain guardianship and keep them in the school. Fortunately for the tribe the courts sided with them.

TIMELINE CONTINUED

- o 1938 two schools on the Settlement were combined to create the Sac and Fox Day School.
- o As far back as the 1950's the tribe talked about building a new more modern school.
- o The BIA threatened to close the day school in 1968.
- o The day school remained open until 2001 when it was closed and all students and faculty moved into the new building.
- o 2009 the new high school will open it's doors.

SIX TYPES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

In a recent MetLife survey 71% of principals and 59% of teachers declared parent involvement to be high priority for their schools, but expressed frustration with the results.
(Padgett, 2006)

PARENTING

oNMSA defines parenting as providing assistance to parents to help them understand their children, acquire parenting skills, and set home conditions to support learning at all grade levels. (2002)

PARENTING ACTIVITIES

- o At school # 82 in Buffalo, NY, an adults only math tutoring class was set up in order to teach parents how to help their children with math homework.
- o At Sherman Elementary school in Eau Claire, WI invites families to school three times per year. They serve supper in the cafeteria and then the parents go to the library for parent education workshops while students play in the gym.
- o At the Chicago Child-Parent Centers health and nutrition classes are held as well as life skills development to accompany the preschool classes.

COMMUNICATING

oThe activities of the school need to focus on keeping families informed of report cards, school conferences, school events.

COMMUNICATION IDEAS

- o At Wing Lake Elementary School in Seattle, WA they have the added challenge in their elementary school because the students there speak more than 15 different native languages. The school planned four Family Cultural Math Nights. Newsletters went home in the language of the families and when they met at math night they were able to converse with others in their native language about math issues.
- o West Hertel Academy # 94 holds a "Bring Your Parent to School Day" in order to familiarize families with children's routines, the school, and curriculum.

COMMUNICATION IDEAS

- o At New Community Schools in North Perth, Scotland the schools designed 'drop-ins' as a way of communicating with parents.
- o **Drop in for coffee** gave parents an opportunity to talk with a teacher about concerns or questions they harbored about the school.
- o **Coffee Plus** – arts and crafts, healthy cooking
- o **Coffee Too** – Parents have opportunity to obtain education credits.
- o **Coffee Extra** – Parents have opportunities to engage in volunteer and fund raising work for the school.

VOLUNTEERING

o Volunteering is simply defined as involvement at and for the school by parents and community members.

VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES

- o Barnum school in Taunton, MA the school recruited high school parent and community volunteers as big buddies to be paired with prekindergarten "little buddies" who had difficulties learning important readiness skills.
- o Woodson South Elementary School in South Chicago the Read-to-me program was created to provide an opportunity for parents to work in the school monitoring students in reading.

LEARNING AT HOME

o Learning at home is more than doing the homework it is about the expectations of the school and parent's expectations for their children.

LEARNING AT HOME IDEAS

- o Col. E. Brooke Lee Middle School in Silver Springs, MD the school was disheartened by low reading test scores. The school formed a study group to study the impact of poverty on literacy development and planned a variety of activities to combat the problem.
- o They held library card drives, participated in the Book It! Program and provided a chance for students to attend a baseball game if they met their reading goal.

DECISION MAKING

o Activities designed to solicit the voice of parents in decisions about school policies and practices.

DECISION MAKING ACTIVITIES

- o Milwaukee, WI a group known as Parents Plus provided free tickets for every family member to a Disney on Ice show if they filled out a survey on school needs. This was to help a small elementary school create their own Action Team for Partnerships.
- o Springfield, IL chapter of Parents for Public Schools works to make sure that parents have a seat at important decision making meetings. Members of this committee sit on many education committees and publish a newsletter of current events in the area.

COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY

o Finding resources and services from the community surrounding the school for families and students as well as the school.

COLLABORATING IDEAS

- o Frederick Law Olmsted School # 53/56 Buffalo, NY has an Afterschool Enrichment Program partnered with several community partners to provide cooking classes, yoga, dance, and crafts for 12 weeks.
- o In Immo, SC at Ballentine Elementary School they celebrate a different character trait each month. In October the theme was "cooperation", and they collected over 1700 pounds of food for the Harvest Hope Food Bank.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- o Can the six types of parental involvement framework be used to build a strong community at the Meskwaki Settlement School? If so, how?
- o What types of meaningful activities increase parent involvement?
- o What information or lack of information prevents families from becoming involved in the school and their child's education?
- o Will increasing parent involvement at the Meskwaki Settlement School contribute to maintaining Meskwaki Culture and language at least within the school context?

RESOURCES

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MESKWAKI SETTLEMENT SCHOOL VISION STATEMENT

- o We wish to create a school that offers a state of the art education for our students that is second to none in the State of Iowa. We believe there are no excuses for not offering each child the opportunity to learn and grow academically, socially, culturally, and emotionally. We vision a school where our children are eager to come to school because 1) They are excited about learning. 2) They are confident in their ability to experience success and accept responsibility for their actions and achievements. 3) They care about themselves and others, and have a sense of responsibility to the community

MESKWAKI SETTLEMENT SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

- o The Meskwaki Settlement School and the Sac & Fox Tribe:
- o Will operate for its youth a comprehensive, bilingual, alternative, community based educational environment, designed to incorporate the wisdom and beauty of the Meskwaki culture with the knowledge and skills of our modern technological society.
- o Will preserve the Meskwaki culture, including its language, history, and traditions; promote Meskwaki values and lifestyles; sponsor Indian cultural ceremonies and events; promote pride in one's school, home, and community.
- o Will provide quality academic education; establish a strong academic sequence solidly rooted in basic education and blossoming into a multifaceted, innovative, learning environment; employ highly-qualified teachers, staff, and administrative personnel; develop and implement a strong supportive service program, involving needed professional support, counseling, and special education environment conducive to cultural, social, physical, academic, and spiritual development; provide for parent and community involvement in educational activities; and utilize Indian resource consultants, especially tribal elders.
- o Will regard our youth with the most dignity and respect, promoting the development of positive awareness of self; and finally, we as educators, shall endeavor to constantly recall to mind that we exist, first and foremost, to serve the needs of our Indian youth.

WHAT'S THE ULTIMATE GOAL?

- o To create a Meskwaki Settlement School Volunteer Program
- o Recruit parents and other community members to participate
- o Have regular contacts in the building

TIME LINE

- o November – put together parent involvement committee
 - Would like teachers, culture teachers, specials, secretaries, kitchen staff and anyone else I left out to be on this committee
- Meet once per month, twice if possible
- Brainstorm how to "invite" the community to participate, how we want parents to volunteer, and the process to become a volunteer

TIME LINE

- o When the high school opens would like to have a couple times per week where community can drop in for coffee. An available staff member would be on hand to answer questions or start conversations.
- o By February
 - Would like to have parents and community members sitting on the parent involvement committee

TIME LINE

- o By May of 2009
 - Would like to see parents and community more regularly at the school

TIME LINE

- o By September 2009
 - Would like to see the start of a regular volunteer program

ISSUES WE NEED TO DECIDE ON

- o How will we recruit parents to be on this committee?
- o What will our volunteers do? We want specific ideas to be able to give to volunteers. We aren't going to say we need volunteers and then struggle to place them.
- o Volunteer handbook – most schools have a volunteer handbook, we will look at many options and then create our own. Why reinvent the wheel.
- o Volunteer application – we will be working closely with administration to figure out how people will apply and IF a background check is needed.
- o How will we celebrate our volunteers? What will we do each year or semester or quarter to say "thank you" for all they do.

Appendix B
Meeting Agendas

Agenda for MSSPIT
Monday November 10, 2008
7:30-8:00 a.m.
3:30-4:30 p.m.

1. Establish secretary for morning and afternoon meetings
2. Review Meskwaki Settlement School philosophy
3. Review Meskwaki Settlement School building goals
4. Discuss ultimate goal of MSSPIT for volunteer program
5. Review Dr. Epstein's six types of parental involvement framework
6. Decide on how MSSPIT will be structured
7. Where do we go from here?

Agenda for MSSPIT
Thursday December 11, 2008
3:00-4:00 p.m.

1. Review ultimate goal for MSSPIT volunteer program.
2. Updates from newsletter committee. Deadline for submissions
3. Update from collection of surveys on volunteer needs in school
4. Preliminary planning on family read-in night on Feb. 11, 2009.
Invitation to Iowa Energy to send celebrity reader.

Agenda for MSSPIT meeting

January 13, 2009

3:30 – 4:30

1. Feedback on monthly newsletter sent out yesterday. Set deadline for February newsletter.
2. Planning for February 11th read-in night. Iowa Energy is no longer an option due to home game. Who else to invite.
3. Feedback on volunteer handbook draft.
4. Volunteer applications sent out last week to interested persons. Any applications received back?
5. Update on learning calendars and website.

Appendix C
Volunteer Program Documents

Volunteer Needs Survey

The Meskwaki Settlement School Parent Involvement Team is working together with administration to begin a community volunteer program. In order for MSSPIT to better plan for volunteers we need your input. Please answer the following questions and return to Mrs. E.'s mailbox by December 5th.

1. Would you be able to use a volunteer in your classroom?
2. What types of things do you need a volunteer to do for you?
3. How much time would you need a volunteer for per week?
4. Are there other areas of the school you feel would benefit from community volunteers?

Meskwaki Settlement School Volunteer Program

Volunteer Application

Name _____ Phone _____ (H) _____ (C)

Address _____ City _____ Zip _____

Email address _____ Best way to contact: _____

I'd like to volunteer: __ Weekly __ Monthly __ Occasionally(explain) _____

I can help: __ Mornings __ Afternoons __ Evenings

Hours/days available: _____

Check (x) activities you are interested in helping with:

Classroom tasks (making copies, laminating, cutting, checking papers, making books, making file folder games)

Working with students (reading with a child, one/one help, progress testing)

General help (recess/hallway monitors, lunchroom helpers)

Library (shelving books, repair books, read to PK-1st grades)

Nurse (filing at start of school year, help with health assessments)

Special activities (Pride week, Native American day, Red Ribbon week, conferences, RIF, Harvest meal, Earth day)

Culture nights (hallway monitors, activities)

Other: _____

Skills, Interests: _____

Do you speak Meskwaki? Fluently Some No (circle one)

What grades do you prefer to work with? _____

Background Check Required

Appendix D
Meskwaki Family Literacy Night Program

Meskwaki Settlement School Culture/Literacy Night
Meskwaki Read-In
Agenda

6:00-6:30 RIF book distribution in classrooms, cookie and milk snack

6:30 – 7:30 Read In taking place in gym

6:50-7:00, 7:20-7:30 Breaks for Meskwaki Story telling by tribal elders and culture staff.