

Awakening the Giant: Parent and Community Involvement in Langley

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The title of this article, "Awakening the Giant: Parent and Community Involvement in Langley," is a metaphor of the power when the potential of parent and community involvement is fully utilized. Langley School District has always held this to be true and has worked towards this vision over the last decade.

Over 10 years ago after considerable research and a review of the literature Langley discovered Joyce Epstein. In the 6 keys to building positive partnership she identifies a typology of parent involvement that is not hierarchical. It values all types of involvement and allows parents to be comfortable to participate in whatever stage. (See text box, p.2)

The vision of parent involvement as articulated by Brenda LeClair, then Deputy Superintendent, was to involve parents in the educational system in meaningful ways and be as inclusive as possible to all the people working in the system. A district committee was struck that included all educational partners to shape district policy and practice.

Members of the team included CUPE (representatives of the two support staff unions), DPAC (District Parent Advisory Council), LTA (teachers), LPVPA (Administrators), and trustees. Brenda chaired this Committee and assigned staff to support the Committee's work.

Simply said but not simply done, the Committee worked through many challenging issues. Issues of confidentiality, job security, tokenism and teacher autonomy were deeply and passionately debated. During this time the members of the Committee worked together to understand each other's point of view and to develop policies and practices that all partners could accept and work towards.

The committee developed a Parent Handbook with suggested practices for teachers to use. It also gave the research base and rationale along with resources to help teachers involve parents in their classrooms in meaningful ways. (See text box, p.3)

The Committee at the same time shaped policy and eventually, the Trustees adopted this as policy for the district. (See text box, p.3)

District Initiatives

PALS (Parents as Literacy Supporters), Anderson and Morrison, 1999, is a program for preschool and kindergarten aged children and their parents designed to support children's early literacy development. PALS is based upon sound research, is no cost to families and is a joyful, respectful program which values family strengths. Through participation in 10 half day sessions throughout the year, parents gain a greater awareness of their children's development, as well as an enhancement of their own literacy development.

POPS (Parents of Primary Students) is a partnership program between home and school. The developers of this program believe that when families and schools work together, children do better. Using Joyce Epstein's model of successful school, family and community partnerships, the POPS program creates an environment of trust and respect that meets the needs of school communities. Due to the success of the PALS program, and the relationships that were formed within the community, parents asked to continue to meet in order to extend the home/school partnership throughout the primary grades. POPS sessions are held 4 evenings throughout the year.

"...parent-teacher cooperation, and mutual understanding between a child's home and school, will result in a superior learning environment for that child."

Barry Sullivan,
Royal Commission on Education
A Legacy for Learners: Summary of Findings, 1988

The Committee's mandate evolved. It provides leadership at the district level for parent involvement. Members provided training for School Planning Councils to include substantive parent activities in school plans knowing that any parent involvement in schools and their children's education would lead to better student achievement. At the same time, parent representatives were involved in writing the District Accountability Plan.

The Committee's work has been, largely, an educational one; professional development and in-service sessions for teachers, support staff, administrators and parents were given. (See story board, p.4)

This work continues. Charlie Etchell, Assistant Superintendent, now chairs the Committee and has provided the vision and leadership for the next phase of parent involvement in Langley. The principle of inclusion of all educational partners continues. The District is working towards not only parent involvement but on community involvement as well. Partnership with the community is extremely important as these overlapping spheres of influence affect children and families greatly. Parent involvement and engagement in their child's education is still the primary goal. The Committee's work in the next little while will be to work with our schools and our community to foster deep parent involvement and engagement in children's education. Then, we will truly have woken the giant.

Epstein's Six Types of Involvement

In the 6 keys to building positive partnership, Epstein identifies a typology that is not hierarchical. It values all types of involvement.

Type 1: Parenting

Type 2: communicating

Type 3: Volunteering

Type 4: Learning at Home

Type 5: Decision Making

Type 6: Collaborating with the Community

Joyce Epstein, 2002

District Initiatives

60 Minute MILE (Meaningful Intermediate Learning Experience) was designed in an attempt to improve parent involvement at the intermediate level, as well as to provide parents with strategies, tools and opportunities to work and learn with their children. Throughout the year, up to five sessions are held at the school. Through a parent survey, the community indicates the preferred time, topics, and format of the sessions. Parent and student feedback from this program has been extremely positive, and suggests a need to further implement meaningful programs at the intermediate and high school level.

TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork) – is a teacher-parent partnership process for interactive homework developed by the National Partnership of Schools, Johns Hopkins University. With **TIPS**, any teacher can regularly, and relatively easily, help all families stay informed and involved in their children's learning activities at home, and help all students complete homework that should promote greater success in school. For more information: www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/tips/

“We cannot afford to sequester parents on the periphery of the educational enterprise. Parent involvement is neither a quick fix nor a luxury, but is absolutely fundamental to a healthy public education system”.

Ann Henderson, 1988



Parent Handbook

This handbook is written to facilitate parents, teachers, administrators, and support staff and others who wish to create a school environment that benefits students and opens up opportunities for them. Since parental involvement in a child's education is the single strongest factor that promotes student success, in a child's education, it is important to include such involvement in our classrooms.

This handbook includes rationale, working models, communication strategies and suggested practices of parent involvement in a meaningful way. It also includes resources and a bibliography.

Download a copy of the Parent Handbook by going to

www.sd35.bc.ca/parents/parent_handbook.pdf

Excerpt of Board Policy 4024

Parents have the right and responsibility to participate in the process of determining the educational goals, policies and services provided for their children. They have the primary responsibility to ensure that children are provided with the healthy and supportive environment necessary for learning. They have a responsibility to help shape and support the goals of the school system and to share in the tasks of educating their young."

Reference: School Act, R.S.B.C., September 5, 2000, Statement of Education Policy Order, page D-85.

The Board of School Trustees recognizes that the most effective education for students occurs when parents are active partners in the learning process.

School staff and parents must work together as knowledgeable partners. Such collaborative partnerships, provide an atmosphere of teamwork which, motivates, supports and encourages children to become lifelong learners and valuable contributors to society.

Continued parental involvement in the education of children/youth, throughout all grade levels, contributes greatly to student achievement and a positive school environment.

*The term "parent" refers to any caregiver who assumes the responsibility for nurturing and caring for the child.

School Based Strategies

- Newsletters
- Agendas
- Book 'N Bag
- Parent Teacher Conferences
- Websites
- Parent In-service

All too often, "middle and high school teachers and administrators agree that family involvement and community connections are important, but their beliefs are not always supported by action".

Joyce Epstein, 2002

Parent Involvement

Implementation Story Board



“Volunteer” Group established
Group of CUPE members and district administrators

Parent Involvement Steering Committee
Representatives from DPAC, CUPE, LPVPA, LTA and Senior Management established

PIRC is formed
Parent Involvement Resource Committee with representation from all partner groups

Guidelines developed:

Parent Involvement Handbook is the result

Board Policy is written and adopted May 2001

Pro-D Opportunities invitational

- Stand alone workshops
- Commitment to Action series Building Positive Partnerships
- Awareness sessions for parents
- Orientation
- Orientation to Administrators
- On-going Parents as Partners

P.I.C.I. Parent Involvement Committee for Implementation established

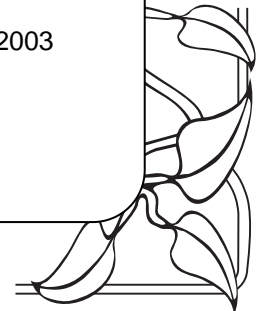
Epstein all day conference
October 2002

Evening presentation

Legislation

School Planning Council Training

November 2003



References

Anderson, J. & Morrison, F. *PALS Institute Binder*, Langley School District/UBC, 1999.

Epstein, J., Sanders, M., Simon, B., Salinas, K., Jansorn, N., & Van Voorhis, F., *School Family, and Community Partnership, Your Handbook for Action*. Thousand Oaks, Corwin Press, 2002.

Henderson, A. "Parents Are a School's Best Friends", *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 70(2), 1988.