

## The Importance and Limits of Parent Involvement

It is understood that schools cannot educate children on their own—parent and community involvement are also necessary. Parental involvement has positive effects on student achievement, diminishes student misbehaviour, and increases the diversity of learning opportunities for students.

There are various ways parents can be involved. First is to be an advocate for their child. Effective advocacy involves attending parent teacher conferences, knowing what parental rights are, knowing the Ministry requirements, reading media stories about schools. Parent involvement includes volunteering for field trips, extracurricular events, and activities like reading to young children or helping in the library. Parent involvement includes supporting fund raising.

Parent involvement also includes participation in how the school is run—curricular emphasis, personnel decisions, and so on. During the 90s most school systems developed ways for parental involvement in these matters—in BC we have School Planning Councils. Research on shared decision-making demonstrates that parents are not, however, truly involved in decision-making. In spite of these structures, schools find ways to keep parents at arms length in these matters. The classic example is parental input to either support a popular teacher the school wants to dismiss or get rid of a teacher parents consider harmful to children—schools and districts cite legal and union constraints for keeping parents out of the loop. School Planning Councils in BC have had limited success for a number of reasons. For example, in most elementary schools teachers do not participate in direct discussion with parents about creating a school growth plan. In addition, no structures exist that facilitates participation when a majority of parents do not speak English as a first language.

Schools are more likely to value the first kinds of involvement, which are key to the success of children and schools, but the second kind of involvement is necessary to truly have a school that is responsive to and integrated with its community.

A book that looks at multicultural/multilingual contexts and parent involvement is *The Power of Parents: A Critical Perspective of Bicultural Parent Involvement in Public Schools*.

Sandra Mathison, PhD  
Professor of Education, UBC and McBride parent  
sandra.mathison@ubc.ca