

Analysis of the Parent Council consultations

Regina Board of Education – Phase One Consultation held January 2007

Prepared by
Kathleen Donovan
Assistant Professor
School of Social Work
Dalhousie University
March 23, 2009

Data was collected from participant responses from four parent council meetings. Each group meeting represented parents from each of the over fifty parent councils in this Regina district. The participants responded to the following question:

What primary changes should be made to the school system in order to enhance how you personally rate the system?

The responses have been categorized according to the frequency of the themes they represent. Exact wording of the responses were varied under each category, however, the themes arising generally fit under each category. Secondary themes are noted as mentioned more than once but not as frequently as key themes. Samples of statements are included to provide some detail of main variations under some themes. The key and secondary themes are represented in the following list, with the approximate number of times the theme was expressed represented by the number in parenthesis following each theme:

Key Themes:

Programs (31)
Curriculum (24)
Resources (23)
Class sizes (18)
Safety (15)
Equality (15)
Teaching staff (14)
Closed system – e.g. no input (12)
Standards – P/F (10)

The following represent the *secondary* themes noted in the data:

Secondary Themes:

Community involvement/multiuse
Middle school

Themes

Programs

Although the largest category arising from the consultations is coded by the word 'programs,' the range covered by this term is very broad. **The most frequent comment in this category regarded better accommodating special needs' students** including the provision of specialized resource people. The category also includes assistants for teachers, after school and meal programs (including sports), resources to help to those having academic difficulty, sports and daycare provision. There were a few parents' reference to the need for the SchoolPlus agenda to be implemented in the schools.

Curriculum

This theme is another broad area, with some categories only mentioned once. The most frequently mentioned includes references to the need for the curriculum to include more trades, technology, coping or life skills, health, cultural studies, job readiness and university preparation related courses.

Resources

The resources category is closely related to class size, as it includes those comments that referred to funding for more teaching assistance. The need for assistance for special needs was frequently mentioned. It also includes the need for relevant and up to date text books, computers, other books and educational material, desks, play structures, infrastructure, and better facilities.

Class Sizes

This was the most frequently mentioned specific category, with smaller classes being called for by large numbers of parents. There was also concern expressed about the process of 'split classes'. Some mentioned that the large class sizes made it difficult for teachers to know the students, others named a limit of 20 needed per class, overcrowding, and the size of classes leading to inability to work with students who have difficult behavioral problems. Some mentioned the need for more assistance for teachers.

Safety

Safety was another large category with little variation in meaning. Children were seen as particularly needing help with harassment. Safety needs stated related to safety in going to and coming from school as well as in the school and school yard, bullying, and fighting. Suggestions were made including more supervision, no fighting rules, more effective safety measures, educating students on

how to stay safe, programs on anti-bullying, school constables and more council involvement with parents regarding bullying.

Equality

The category of 'Equality' refers to the feeling frequently expressed by parents in the consultation that schools were not equitably provided with resources. Some schools received much more than did others. There was perceived to be a big difference between schools regarding resources, available classes, quality of the education and educational materials. One parent summed up his/her experience as follows: "My feeling is that in low poverty areas, our kids are not getting the type of education that other kids are getting in higher socio-income brackets, therefore ours go to high school, not equipped for that learning." Another expressed the concern that there is a need for "Continuity throughout the whole system; expectations of teachers, consistency in both elementary schools and high schools." Another parent expressed a need for "More equality among schools of bussing, lunch programs (universal), etc, (ie, free bussing for French immersion and not others, universal lunch supervision in some schools and not others)."

Teaching staff

A frequently expressed sentiment regarded the quality and treatment of teachers. Several parents expressed that some teachers lacked sensitivity, needed to care more, are provided with little incentive to perform better, should have more supervision, and that they should be better trained. Some also expressed that teachers need to be more respectful, consistent, to have more involvement with parents, to upgrade, and to teach students how to study. In addition others commented that teachers should be paid for extracurricular activities, there should be less turnover ("leave teachers in the school if they want to stay"), should be provided with technology-related training and that teachers needed more support.

Closed System – no input

This category refers to the feeling many parents expressed that they do not have input into decision-making processes in their schools and that there is little flexibility or openness to change on the part of the system. The system referred to was both the school board and trustees and the principles. Some parents expressed the need for more parent involvement about the goals and priorities of the school. Others felt that not enough parents were involved, and expressed the need to engage them. Others expressed there was too much bureaucracy and "too little accountability of high level administrators in their decisions."

Standards

This category most often referred to the schools being "too easy" and not failing students when they did not meet academic standards – that schools should not be pushing students through school. Some

students were said to be passed up to the next grade level even if they had missed half the school year or were not reading at their class's level.

Secondary Categories

The themes coded under Community Involvement and Middle School were not large areas but were mentioned by a few parents and repeated through the different school areas.

Community involvement refers to awareness of community needs, and the use of the school facility for multi-purposes. Such purposes include for child care, sharing the school with others, daycares, and community classes (such as Mom and tot classes). Several mentioned the need for more community involvement in the school. For example, "More awareness of community needs/wants", and "community as a whole involved – people who live in the neighborhood", "involved in the development of neighborhoods.."

The need for a Middle School was mentioned 3- 4 times as a need for those involved in the transition between elementary and high school as some "kids get lost in the system."

Summary –

Primary changes needed in the school system in order to enhance parents' rating of the system.

Although emphasis varied depending on the group of parents consulted, the consultations revealed a clear concern for improvement in the provision of resources and services for special needs' groups, including teaching assistants and facilities. Safety was another large emphasis clearly needing enhancement. Comments frequently related to harassment or bullying, but also to the need for improved security measures and plans within the schools. Class size and teacher to student ratios, with the impression being that class sizes are too large for sufficient individualized attention to students, comprised another large category needing change. In addition, the impression that schools have been unequally provided resources, to the detriment of children's education, was common. Finally, parents felt a need for sincere inclusion and consultation in bureaucratic systems and processes in order to provide their input into needed decisions affecting their children's education.