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Investigation And Analysis Of Programs For Parental And Community Involvement In Rural And Small Town Southern Illinois K-8 Public School Districts

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This research is a product of the graduate program in [Educational Administration](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

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INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS OF PROGRAMS
FOR PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
IN RURAL AND SMALL TOWN SOUTHERN
ILLINOIS K-8 PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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Investigation and Analysis of Programs for
Parental and Community Involvement in Rural and Small Town
Southern Illinois K-8 Public School Districts

BY

Angela Mills

FIELD EXPERIENCE

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
SPECIALIST IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1997

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS FIELD EXPERIENCE BE ACCEPTED AS
FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE.

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine how rural and small town public elementary school districts in southern Illinois identify and integrate parental and community resources and services to promote the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. The study took place in the spring of 1997 utilizing a survey instrument developed by the author and sent to superintendents in rural and small town K-8 school districts with less than 1,000 students in southern Illinois.

The study revealed that parent organizations and committee memberships were the most common types of parental and community involvement in existence. Parent organizations were rated the most effective parental and community involvement practices. Respondents indicated that the future status of parental and community involvement practices (e.g., parent organization and volunteerism) would be primarily to leave them in place; however, a majority of the respondents indicated a desire to have increased involvement in the existing practices. The School Improvement Plan and Quality Review Visit were reported to have caused minimal change in parental and community involvement practices. However, over half of those schools indicated they began parental and community practices during the years which the Illinois State Board of Education urged schools to enhance involvement. Respondents noted that more parental and community involvement was desired. The reasons focused on communication and improved student achievement. Over half of the districts reporting requested information regarding newly established programs.

Several recommendations were made to rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois. One recommendation was for rural and small town K-8 public school

districts in southern Illinois to develop or revise a policy for parental involvement. This policy should characterize the mission statement of the district. It was recommended that districts should identify and integrate resources and services from the community. Rural and small town public K-8 school districts in southern Illinois should build partnerships with businesses. Businesses could become involved directly in education by participating in some type of work-to-school program. It was recommended that the Illinois State Board of Education should assist rural and small town southern Illinois school districts with professional development activities which meet the needs of the school and the community. The Illinois Quality Assurance and Improvement process has focused on the school as a learning community which extends beyond the classroom walls. To be successful with this process, it was recommended that schools and communities study ways to better serve each other.

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Chapter 1

Overview of the Problem

Individuals have taken a strong interest in their children's education, but as a country, cooperative efforts have largely been ignored. People are concerned about making schools accountable for how well they educate students and how well they involve parents in school decisions. Politicians, parents, community members, staff, and the students must take a look at past practices. They must work together to form a plan that can be reviewed and reorganized to implement accountability from everyone involved.

Background

Schools have been under pressure by the public to educate children to provide a high standard of academic achievement that prepares them for a global economy. Success for the future of these children requires a strong commitment to academic achievement. Parental and community involvement in education have been considered important predictors of student achievement (Epstein, 1995). Government, businesses, and communities have shown a strong interest in beginning new programs and partnerships to enhance efforts for improving education. The Goals 2000 legislation recognizes the need for parental involvement with one of the goals specifically focused on promoting increased parental involvement in education (United States Department of Education, 1994). The Improving America's Schools Act called for greater involvement of parents and communities in learning (United States Department of Education, Fall, 1995). The School-to-Work Opportunities Act and other state programs encourage employers to collaborate with parents and schools to help students learn job skills. Community and

religious groups, law enforcement organizations, museums, libraries, and members of the military provide programs and activities designed to strengthen the future for our nation's children (United States Department of Education, 1994).

Education has become everyone's business. Schools are looking for key elements of student academic success. Teachers identify strengthening the parents' roles in the education of their children as a key to academic success (Illinois State Board of Education, 1996). Businesses realize the importance of increasing family involvement by funding specific programs that promote family involvement in education. State laws are focusing on family involvement through teacher training, inclusion, and policy making. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Quality Assurance System emphasizes community involvement in the implementation of the School Improvement Plan of each district (Illinois State Board of Education, 1996). On July 11, 1994, President Clinton issued a directive requiring all federal agencies to support family-friendly work arrangements (Ballen & Moles, 1996).

The amount and type of community involvement have varied from school to school. Schools could benefit from a review of programs and partnerships already in practice. The study of new programs could provide insight into ways of revitalizing community involvement.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed by this study was: What are the perceptions of school administrators regarding parental and community programs?

The results of this study may provide Illinois schools with a valuable resource on new community involvement programs and partnerships. The study of new programs

should provide insight for strategies to revitalize community involvement.

Research Questions

The objectives of this study were to examine existing parental and community involvement in education, to analyze the productivity of programs and partnerships already in progress, and to investigate interest in new programs and partnerships for possible future use in rural and small town K-8 school districts. Specifically, this project examined the following research questions:

1. What parental and community involvement practices (committee membership, volunteerism, guest speakers, parent organizations, and other) are being used in rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois?
2. What is the effectiveness of present parental and community involvement of rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois, as perceived by administrators of rural and small town K-8 school districts?
3. Which present practices regarding parental and community involvement should be changed, as perceived by administrators of rural and small town K-8 school districts?
4. To what extent has the School Improvement Plan or Quality Review visit caused any change in parental and community involvement practices of rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois?
5. When did rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois begin current community and parental involvement practices?
6. What degree of parental and community involvement do rural and small town K-8 school administrators in southern Illinois wish to have in three years?
7. What is the interest in learning more about newly established programs for

parental and community involvement in rural and small K-8 school districts?

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made:

1. Districts have some type of parent, community, or both parent and community involvement.
2. Districts comply with state School Improvement Plan requirements.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were placed on this study:

1. The population sample was limited to rural area and small town school districts in southern Illinois.
2. The sample size was limited to districts with enrollments of fewer than 1,000 students.
3. The sample was limited to K-8 elementary school districts.
4. The costs associated with improvements were not investigated.
5. The availability of local business and school partnerships was not investigated.

Definition of Terms

The following operational definitions were used.

Community involvement. Includes persons in the area who are not parents of students, but sense a strong commitment to participate in education.

Parental involvement. Consists of parental participation in education in the public school, in private school, and/or at home.

Southern Illinois. Counties in southern Illinois: Alexander, Johnson, Massac, Pulaski, Union, Clinton, Marion, Washington, Edward, Gallatin, Hardin, Pope, Saline,

Wabash, Wayne, White, Franklin, Williamson, Hamilton, Jefferson, Jackson, Perry, Monroe, Randolph, and St. Clair.

Rural and small town elementary schools. Public K-8 school districts with student enrollments of fewer than 1,000.

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act. This act was first presented by the President and the Governors of each state in 1990. In 1994 Congress passed the act which consists of eight national goals to guide the federal government, states, local communities, and the private sector in commitments to improve the educational system in the United States. One of the eight goals is that schools will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement.

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act. This act, passed in 1994, encourages employers to collaborate with parents and schools to help students learn job skills.

Improving America's Schools Act. This act which contains the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) was passed by Congress in October 1994. One of its provisions is for greater involvement of parents and communities in learning.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature and Research

Rationale

Parent programs are important and may be related to student achievement. Many local school districts have minimal community involvement in the educational process and have struggled to find suitable ways to increase that involvement.

Review of Literature

Numerous articles on the subject of community involvement have been published. Some of the suggestions in those articles included: (a) developing a policy for parental involvement, (b) encourage parent-to-parent communication, (c) determine and meet family needs for services, (d) provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home, (e) include parents in school decisions, and (f) integrate resources and services from the community.

Schools have been under pressure due to lack of resources, increasing needs of children, and demands for future careers. Schools have taken advantage of parental and community resources to increase student achievement. Jesse (1996) suggested that parent involvement has been a predictor of student achievement. He indicated a strong link exists between parental involvement and effective schools. Over the years the attitude has shifted from focusing on the parents to focusing on the family. The nature of families and communities has increasingly changed. He suggested types of parental involvement have changed from fund raisers to more academic concerns, and he gave suggestions for increasing parent involvement. The suggestions included developing a policy for parental involvement, flood parents with information, and maintaining

administrative support.

The Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education, Inc. (1996), a parent-to-parent organization, was designed to assist parents who wish to be involved in their children's education. This organization has offered resources to assist people in meeting the educational needs of children. Resources offered include newsletters, annual conferences, a book catalog, workshops, and a lending library, which may be reached through a Web Site on the Internet or through traditional forms of communication such as phone or letters. Copies of the newsletters, Options in Learning, may be ordered through the resource catalog at a cost of \$3 to \$6 per issue. The newsletters included educational articles, letters from readers, additional resources, and notices of special events.

Partners Toward Achievement, a student enrichment program, promoted school, home, and community partnership as the basis for enhancing self-esteem and student achievement. This program focused on at-risk students and dropout prevention. The program may be viewed from two 30-minute video tapes filmed in actual classrooms and parent group sessions. The program offered techniques to teachers for motivating parents to volunteer time and talents, activities the school can initiate to enhance parent involvement, keys to successful conferencing with family members, and specific steps that school staff members can take to help parents feel welcome and comfortable at the school site (Smith, 1996).

Project Appleseed provided a checklist for an effective parent-school partnership. Six types of parental involvement were discussed. The goals, sample practices, challenges, and results were provided for assistance in implementation. The first type of

parental involvement was parenting. The goal was to help all families establish home environments to support children as students. The second type of involvement was communicating. The goal was to design more effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and student progress. The third type of involvement was volunteering. The goal was to recruit and organize parent support. The fourth type of involvement was learning at home. The goal was to provide information to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curricular-related activities. The fifth type of involvement was decision making. The goal was to include parents in school decisions. The sixth type of involvement was collaborating with community. The goal was to identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning. Project Appleseed, a not-for-profit educational corporation, has been operating in Missouri. It has no affiliations with any political party, organization, religious order or denomination (Epstein, 1996).

America Goes Back To School: Get Involved! is an initiative of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education and the United States Department of Education, in a nationwide effort that encourages parents, grandparents, community leaders, employers and employees, leaders, and every caring adult to actively participate in improving education in their communities (Riley, 1995). It has focused on making schools safe, encouraging parental and family involvement, helping America to become a literate society, reaching for higher standards and real accountability, making technology available to all children, preparing young people for careers, and making college more accessible. Each of the categories is accompanied by key facts and a list of ten activities.

This initiative was endorsed by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Council for American Private Education, the American Association of School Administrators, the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, the National Parent Teacher Association, U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, the cochairs of America Goes Back to School (Tipper Gore, Bo Jackson, and Ted Sanders) and many other groups (Riley, 1995).

The key to a successful back-to-school effort is planning year-long activities. The program suggested eight steps to build community partnership for learning: (a) schedule a start-up meeting with the school principal and other volunteers, (b) appoint a school-volunteer coordinator and take an inventory of activities already underway, (c) determine which of the six issues will be useful to work on for the school year, (d) develop a planning calendar, (e) use the school's regular back-to-school activities to make school efforts known to parents, (f) develop and implement the plan, (g) review the progress, and (h) evaluate the results (Riley, 1995).

In California, the Make a Difference model developed by Haskvitz (1996) turned a community service program from free labor, low-level tasks to activities which create beneficial community improvement while enhancing students' academic performance. The model is easily administered and can be incorporated into other programs. Students not only completed community service but also studied organization or community problems.

To learn about local history in one example, students were required to rewrite the history of their community at an elementary reading level. Interviews were conducted

with community members. The engaged learning required students to make use of classroom learning. Students had to locate and duplicate material from primary sources, create a computer data base, and create a video for use by students and teachers. The experience of using research, critical thinking, problem-solving, writing, and technological skills improved standardized test scores. The document was assessed and approved by the community's Historical Commission.

Another example using the Make A Difference formula was students volunteering in the local hospital while studying the facility. The students interviewed staff and administration, learned about budgeting, and studied specific job tasks. In an effort to improve the system, students prepared charts and graphs, sifted through masses of materials, and prepared a report for social studies that was real-world related with the potential to bring about change. The hospital staff evaluated the work and gave feedback. The students learned about a complex system, and the hospital had access to useful information.

The program is beneficial in two ways. One benefit for the students is that the skills they learned in school can be applied to solving real problems while enhancing academic performance. Another benefit is that students realized they were important members of the community who helped to transform community improvements. The program has received recognition from 35 groups, including the National Council for the Social Studies (Haskvitz, 1996).

Review of Research

The Improving America's Schools Act, from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education Programs, was passed by Congress in October 1994. It provided

federal support to at-risk children to help them achieve challenging standards. High-poverty schools decide how to spend Title I resources and have more flexibility in combining resources. Local education agencies play a new, critical role through providing consultation, coordination, and high-quality professional development (United States Department of Education, 1994).

The Improving America's Schools Act also provided for greater involvement of parents and communities in learning. New provisions ask school districts to coordinate and integrate Title I services with other educational services, such as Even Start, Head Start, and School-To-Work services. Title I schools are allowed to work with the community to provide health, nutrition, and other social services. Schools are required to address the transition needs of children. The act provided improved teaching through better professional development (United States Department of Education, 1994).

The Improving America's Schools Act provided new assistance for drug-free schools. Title IV authorized the continuing support of school- and community-based drug education and prevention programs. It also authorized activities designed to prevent youth violence through linkage of schools to communities (United States Department of Education, 1994).

Title III represents a commitment to promote the acquisition and use of educational technology to support school reform. It has provisions for programs for a national long-range technology plan. Title VI supports activities that encourage educational innovation. Funds are allocated to local education agencies located in high-poverty and sparsely-populated areas. Title X has provisions for charter schools that replace rules-based governance with goals-based accountability. Title XIII establishes a systematic

approach of technical assistance for education. It provides regional assistance centers such as National Diffusion Network, Eisenhower Regional Mathematics and Science Education Consortia, and technology-based assistance (United States Department of Education, 1994).

The United States Department of Education has published various materials designed to provide leadership to strengthen parental involvement. In 1994 Congress passed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which commits the federal government to support eight national goals. Goal eight states that “. . . every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement . . .” (United States Department of Education, 1994, p. 1).

Strong Families, Strong Schools was a review of the past 30 years of key research findings on the importance of involving families in their children's learning. Included in the review were ways for families to help their children at home and at school; ways school-family partnerships can welcome parents and recognize their strengths; ways communities can connect families and schools; a description of a “family-friendly” business; family partnership programs developed by many states; and federal policies and supportive programs. (Ballen & Moles, 1996).

Family Involvement Partnership for Learning was a brochure on how businesses, communities, parents, and schools can support family involvement in education. Richard W. Riley (1995), United States Secretary of Education, urged all schools to join the National Back to School Campaign in a nationwide effort that encouraged all Americans to participate in improving education in their communities.

Riley stated, “While American students read better than students in most other

countries, reading achievement has not improved for a number of years; just one-quarter to one-third of our students are reading at proficient levels. Too many students are still in the general track, not preparing for either college or careers after high school. While math and science achievement have improved, student performance is generally low compared to other countries. Too many high school graduates must enroll in remedial classes in college” (Riley, 1995, p. 10). Despite the indication that student achievement has been low, parents express satisfaction with their children’s achievement and the schools. Many parents do not have the information they need to make judgments about the effectiveness of schools. Parents and community members have been asked to review and comment on the Illinois standards which were based on national standards (Illinois State Board of Education, 1996). The National Council on Education Standards and Testing (Riley, 1995) has called for the development of a voluntary, nationwide system of assessments tied to the national standards. The national standards represent what young people need to know to be able to work successfully in the world today.

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Chapter 3

Design of the Study

General Design of the Study

The study utilized a survey to gather data about existing parental and community involvement in education, the productivity of those programs and partnerships, and possible future use of new programs and partnerships in rural and small town K-8 districts in southern Illinois public school districts. The survey was designed by the author to provide data to answer the following seven research questions. The survey number which provides data to that research question is enclosed in parenthesis.

1. What parental and community involvement practices (committee membership, volunteerism, guest speakers, parent organizations and other) are being used in rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois (question 1, part 1)?
2. What is the effectiveness of present parental and community involvement of rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois as perceived by administrators of rural and small town school districts (question 1, part 2)?
3. Which present practices regarding parental and community involvement should be changed, as perceived by administrators of rural and small town K-8 school districts (question 1, part 3)?
4. To what extent has the School Improvement Plan or Quality Review visit caused any change in parental and community involvement practices of K-8 school districts in southern Illinois (question 2)?
5. When did K-8 school districts in southern Illinois begin current community and parental involvement practices (question 3)?

6. What degree of parental and community involvement do K-8 school administrators in southern Illinois wish to have in three years (question 4)?

7. What is the interest in learning more about new established programs for parental and community involvement in rural and small town K-8 school districts (question 5)?

Population Sample

Eight Regional Offices of Education which serve the counties of Alexander, Johnson, Massac, Pulaski, Union, Clinton, Marion, Washington, Edward, Gallatin, Hardin, Pope, Saline, Wabash, Wayne, White, Franklin, Williamson, Hamilton, Jefferson, Jackson, Perry, Monroe, Randolph, and St. Clair in southern Illinois were contacted to obtain the following demographic information: (a) K-8 schools in rural and small town public school districts within the county and (b) the student population of all public K-8 school districts within the county. Names and addresses of these districts were acquired from the Directory of Illinois Public Schools, School Districts and Other Educational Units.

All of the counties' Regional Offices of Education were able to supply the demographic information. Demographic information was obtained for 25 southern Illinois counties containing 75 school districts which met the rural and small town school definition of public school districts with student enrollments of less than 1,000 for K-8 districts. The head administrator of the 75 districts was selected to complete the survey. Fifty completed surveys were returned.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The survey was developed by the author and was piloted with 10 parents and two teachers' aides at Farrington School, and was revised to provide greater clarity. Content

for the survey instrument was developed from the author's experiences as an internal/external reviewer for ISBE's Quality Assurance Process. This process addresses parental and community involvement in student learning.

The cover letter (see Appendix A) and Parental and Community Involvement Survey (see Appendix B) were sent to administrators along with a self-addressed stamped return envelope. Data were collected using the Parental and Community Involvement Survey to evaluate each of the research questions.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics using frequencies and percentages were used to present the results. The analyses of the data were presented through tables.

Chapter 4

Results of the Study

Overview

Seventy-five Parental and Community Involvement Surveys were sent to administrators in southern Illinois. Fifty completed surveys (66%) were returned.

Results for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was, What parental and community involvement practices (committee membership, volunteerism, guest speakers, parent organizations and other) are being used in rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois? Responses from survey question 1, part 1 provided data for that research question, as shown on Table 1.

Table 1

Current Parental and Community Involvement Practices Used

Type	No. of yes responses	No. of no responses	Percentage of yes responses
Parent organizations	47	3	94%
Committee membership	46	4	92%
Volunteerism	41	9	82%
Guest speakers	31	19	62%
Other	7	43	14%

Respondents indicated that the most common type of parental and community involvement practice used was parent organizations as reported by 94% of the districts. The next most common type of parental and community involvement practice used was committee membership as reported by 92% of the districts. Another type of parental and community involvement used was volunteerism as reported by 82% of the districts. Of the districts reporting, 62% utilized guest speakers. Only 14% reported using other types of practices which included sports boosters, advisory, athletic association, home visits, study skill program, technology, and computer repair and programming.

Results for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was, What is the effectiveness of present parental and community involvement of rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois, as perceived by administrators of rural and small town school districts? Responses from survey question 1, part 2 provided data for that research question.

As shown on Table 2, the most effective parental and community involvement practice was parent organizations with 43% of the administrators reporting the highest rating of effectiveness. The number of responses for parental organizations decreased as the ratings for effectiveness decreased. The second most effective parental and community practice was volunteerism according to 41% of the administrators reporting the highest rating of effectiveness. The number of responses for volunteerism also decreased as the ratings for effectiveness decreased. The ratings of effectiveness for committee membership were spread more evenly than the other practices with 24% of the administrators reporting the highest rating. The ratings of effectiveness for guest speakers were similar to the ratings for committee membership with 23% of the

administrators reporting the highest rating.

Table 2

Effectiveness of Current Parental and Community Practices

Type	Rating				
	Least effective			Most effective	
	1	2	3	4	5
Parent Organizations	4%(2)	4% (2)	23%(11)	26%(12)	43%(20)
Volunteerism	5%(2)	12% (5)	15% (6)	27%(11)	41%(17)
Committee membership	0%	22%(10)	17% (8)	37%(17)	24%(11)
Guest Speakers	3%(1)	23% (7)	35%(11)	16% (5)	23% (7)

Note. The number in parenthesis denotes number of responses.

Results for Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was, Which present practices regarding parental and community involvement should be changed, as perceived by administrators of rural and small town K-8 school districts? Responses from survey question 1, part 3 provided data for that research question, as shown in Table 3.

Of all the schools reporting, responses indicated that the future status of parental and community practices would primarily be to leave as is. Responses indicated future

status of parent organizations 85%, committee membership 78%, guest speakers 77%, volunteerism 73%, and other 71% in favor of leaving as is.

Table 3

Future Status of Parental and Community Practices

Type	Leave as is	Revise	Not sure	Own response	Discontinue
Parent organizations	85%(40)	13%(6)	2% (1)	0%	0%
Committee membership	78%(36)	18%(8)	4% (2)	0%	0%
Volunteerism	73%(30)	17%(7)	5% (2)	5%(2)	0%
Guest speakers	77%(24)	13%(4)	10%(3)	0%	0%
Other	71%(5)	29%(2)	0%	0%	0%

Note. The number in parenthesis denotes number of responses.

Revision was the primary reason for change in future status. In the category of other, 29% of schools responding indicated a desire for revision. Some revisions were reported as being needed for 18% of the respondents which had committee membership and for 17% of the respondents which had volunteerism. Fewer revisions were reported as being needed for 13% of the respondents with a parent organization. Also, fewer revisions were reported being needed for 13% of the respondents with guest speakers.

The highest percentage of responses (10%) of those not sure came from the category of guest speakers. Respondents reporting other types of practices indicated less uncertainty: volunteerism 5%, committee membership 4%, and parent organization 2%.

Only 5% of those schools reporting volunteerism stated a personal response. Those responses simply denoted a desire for an increase in volunteerism, but not a revision. No personal responses were reported in any other category. No schools reported discontinuing a program already in progress.

Results for Research Question 4

Research Question 4 was, To what extent has the School Improvement Plan or Quality Review visit caused any change in parental and community involvement practices of rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois? Responses from survey question 2 provided data for that research question, as shown on Table 4.

Table 4

Changes Caused by School Improvement Plan/Quality Review

Type	No. of responses	Percentage of responses
No change	21	42%
Very minor changes	17	34%
A few changes	8	16%
Several changes	3	6%
Major changes	1	2%

The extent of change caused by the School Improvement Plan, Quality Review Visit, or both appears to be minimal. Of the schools reporting, 42% indicated no changes had been made; 34% indicated very minor changes had been made; and 16% indicated a few

changes had been made. Only 6% indicated several changes were made, and 2% indicated major changes had been made. Minor changes included adjustments to involve more community input. Major changes included development of a community committee and a focus group.

Results for Research Question 5

Research Question 5 was, When did rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois begin current community and parental involvement practices?

Responses from survey question 3 provided data for that research question, as shown on Table 5.

Table 5

School Year Current Program Began

Year	No. of responses	Percentage of responses
Before 1985	17	34%
1985-1995	29	58%
1995-1996	4	8%

One stage of the Quality Review process began in 1985. The next stage began in 1995. Responses show that while 34% of the districts reported current programs beginning before 1985, 58% reported beginning programs between 1985 and 1995. Only 8% of the districts reported beginning a program during the 1995-1996 school year.

Results for Research Question 6

Research Question 6 was, What degree of parental and community involvement do K-8 school administrators in southern Illinois wish to have in three years? Responses from survey question 4 provided data for that research question, as shown on Table 6.

More parental and community involvement was desired by 58% of the respondents. Forty percent of the respondents wanted parental and community involvement to remain about the same. Only 2% of the districts reporting wanted less involvement.

Table 6

Future Parental and Community Involvement Practices

Involvement	No. of positive responses	Percentage of positive responses
More involved	29	58%
About the same	20	40%
Less involved	1	2%

Respondents were given the opportunity to specify reasons for wanting more, less, or the same amount of involvement. Table 7 provides the reasons for wanting more involvement. The reasons for more involvement focused on increased parental and community support, improved student achievement, increased quality of educational services for students and the community, better communications, and increased parental and community ownership.

Table 7

Reasons for More Involvement As Cited by Administrators

Reasons	Descriptions
Support	<p>Number of persons involved could be greater, most parents cannot volunteer because of work schedules.</p> <p>Public schools need all the assistance, support and expertise it can garner from the local communities.</p> <p>Great for the children to have as many parents involved as possible.</p> <p>Would provide better support and understanding for school's role.</p> <p>Helps generate more support for school and school programs.</p> <p>The more the community knows about the good things going on, the more community support we have.</p> <p>It is becoming more increasingly important for parents and community members to become involved to compensate for those students whose parents aren't involved.</p> <p>We need parental and community support in our technology planning.</p>

(table continues)

Student Achievement	<p>Greater parental involvement makes for greater student achievement in any school system. If we can get all of parents helping their children out at home, achievement would soar but this is an almost impossible task.</p> <p>It takes a great deal of effort to provide quality education at multi-levels suitable for each pupil.</p> <p>It is needed to move SIP forward.</p>
Quality of services	<p>We have really progressed; however, we feel we need to provide a place for our large senior citizen population.</p> <p>Parent/community involvement in the education of children increases the quality of educational services by the school.</p> <p>There are many areas in which parent and community involvement groups could assist our programs.</p>
Communications	<p>I believe the closer we work together the more likely a bond issue could be passed.</p> <p>Strong involvement goes hand in hand with good communication and commitment—both of which are needed to get the most from a small district.</p> <p>Creates better communication, eliminates problems.</p>
Ownership	<p>Want more involvement so the community has ownership, but do want to change manner of involvement so that it is</p>

(table continues)

	more productive.
	More involvement means more acceptance.
Other	Could use more involvement.
	Like to have <u>more</u> parents involved.

Table 8 provided reasons for involvement to remain the same. Most respondents reported satisfaction with the status quo, noting good participation in current practices. A few respondents reported no desire for additional input from parents. The only reason given for wanting less parental involvement was "Staff and Board wants less/no parent involvement in any areas of decision/recommendation of school plan."

Table 8

Reasons for Involvement to Remain the Same as Cited by Administrators

Reasons	Descriptions
Satisfaction with current involvement	<p>We enjoy excellent parent support and participation as is. However, there is always room for improvement.</p> <p>I am happy with our parental support.</p> <p>We have good parental involvement now (I only wish parents of our older students would work with the schools more).</p> <p>I feel we have excellent parent involvement at this time.</p>

(table continues)

We are generally satisfied with our current level of parent/community involvement through P.T.O. and such.

Not desirous of additional involvement

Only a certain amount of parent involvement is desired. Of

We don't need too many directions to go.

I am not a true supporter of parent involvement as far as being in the building.

Results for Research Question 7

Research Question 7 was, What is the interest in learning more about new established programs for parental and community involvement? Responses from survey question 5 provided data for that research question, as shown on Table 9. A large number of districts requested information regarding new established programs for parental and community involvement. Of the districts reporting, 60% requested information regarding Project Appleseed and America Goes Back to School. While 36% did not request information, 4% mentioned already having one of the programs.

Table 9

Request for Information Concerning Newly Established Programs

Request	No. of responses	Percentage of total
Yes	30	60%
No	20	40%

Note. Two of the no responses noted already having a program.

Chapter 5

Summary, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

This study investigated the perceptions of administrators in rural and small town K-8 public school districts in southern Illinois regarding parental and community involvement in relation to the district's School Improvement Plan. A survey instrument developed by the author was sent to the head administrator of 75 districts.

The specific research questions addressed by this study were:

1. What parental and community involvement practices (committee membership, volunteerism, guest speakers, parent organizations, and other) are being used in rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois?
2. What is the effectiveness of present parental and community involvement of rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois, as perceived by administrators of rural and small town K-8 school districts?
3. Which present practices regarding parental and community involvement should be changed, as perceived by administrators of rural and small town K-8 school districts?
4. To what extent has the School Improvement Plan or Quality Review visit caused any change in parental and community involvement practices of rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois?
5. When did rural and small town K-8 school districts in southern Illinois begin current community and parental involvement practices?
6. What degree of parental and community involvement do rural and small town K-8 school administrators in southern Illinois wish to have in three years?

7. What is the interest in learning more about newly established programs for parental and community involvement in rural and small K-8 school districts?

This study was based on data collected from a survey of 50 out of 75 administrators of rural and small town K-8 southern Illinois public school districts. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data collected for each specific research question.

A review of the current literature was conducted. The Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education, Inc. (1996) was designed to assist people who wish to be involved in their children's education. Partners Toward Achievement (1996) has promoted school, home, and community partnership as the basis for enhancing self-esteem and student achievement. Project Appleseed (1996) provided a checklist for an effective parent-school partnership. America Goes Back to School (1996) has encouraged parents and communities to actively participate in education and provided steps, facts, and activities to get involved. The Make A Difference model (1996) suggested ways students not only completed community service, but also studied an organization or community problem. The results were beneficial for the students and the community.

A review of the current research was conducted. Two acts from Congress were involved in supporting parental and community involvement. The Improving America's Schools Act (1995) provided federal support to at-risk children, greater involvement of parents and communities, professional development, assistance for drug-free schools, and authorized activities designed to prevent youth violence. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act committed the federal government to support eight national goals including partnerships to increase parental involvement.

Other research materials provided valuable information on increasing involvement. *Strong Families, Strong Schools* (1996) has provided key research findings on the importance of involving families in children's learning. It also provided ways for families, communities, and businesses to become involved. *Family Involvement Partnerships for Learning* (1995) is a brochure indicating how businesses, communities, parents, and schools could support family involvement in education. The National Council on Education Standards and Testing (1992) called for the development of a voluntary nationwide system of assessments tied to the national standards. The national standards represent what young people need to know to be able to work successfully in the world today.

Findings

The study revealed that parent organizations and committee membership were the most common types of parental and community involvement already in existence. Parent organizations were rated the most effective parental and community involvement practices. Respondents indicated that the future status of parental and community involvement practices (e.g., parent organization, volunteerism) would be primarily to leave as is; however, a majority of the respondents indicated a desire to have increased involvement in the existing practices. The School Improvement Plan and/or Quality Review Visit was reported to have caused minimal change in parental and community involvement practices. Respondents gave specific reasons which suggested that strong parental and community involvement was a positive influence on improving student achievement. Over half of the districts reporting requested information regarding newly established programs.

Conclusions

The most common type of parental and community involvement practices was parent organizations used by 94% of the districts reporting. In the past this meant organizations which primarily provided fund-raising activities. Now districts are looking for ways to bring the community and school together for advancement into academic success. Also rated as the most effective practice, parent organizations were perceived by administrators as a worthwhile program. Parent organizations have generally been an effective practice.

Committee membership (92%) was used nearly as much as parent organizations, but the ratings of effectiveness were spread more evenly from highest to next to the lowest. This may have been caused by a lack of direction for some committees.

Volunteerism was used by 82% of the districts and was rated the second most effective practice. If used wisely, parents can be a significant resource to the educational process. In return, parents are helped by gaining an understanding of how the school works.

Of the districts reporting, 62% utilized guest speakers. The ratings of effectiveness for guest speakers were spread out similarly to the ratings for committee membership. Guest speakers could be more effective if the teachers and speakers worked more closely to ensure that topics were made appropriate for the audience. Revision was the primary reason for change in future status of practices. However, the largest number of responses (135 from all categories) designated a preference to leave programs as they are. The extent of change caused by the School Improvement/Quality Review Visit was reported as primarily very minor or none. However, over half of those schools indicated they

began their parental and community practices between 1985-1995. One stage of the Quality Review Process began in 1985 which urged schools to enhance parental and community involvement.

More parental and community involvement was desired by 58% of the school districts reporting. The reasons for more involvement focused on increased communication and improved student achievement. Although the amount and type of involvement varies, most schools have a desire to keep or increase parental and community involvement. Parent organizations have been rated the most effective in the past. Quality Assurance visits have had some impact on increasing involvement, but school superintendents seem to have their own desire for more involvement.

A large number of districts (60%) requested information regarding newly established programs. Certainly there is a great interest in increasing parental involvement in the schools. Administrators are interested in more details regarding the process for establishing a new or revised program, and they need more assistance in shaping suitable parental and community programs. Assistance could come from on-line sources off the Internet and from the Illinois State Board of Education.

Recommendations

Rural and small town public school districts in southern Illinois need to develop or revise a policy for parental involvement. This policy should characterize the mission statement of the district. Parental involvement should increase if it has administrative support.

After establishing a policy, districts need to gather as much information on parental and community involvement as possible. If on-line services are available, a great deal of

information could be obtained directly from the Internet. If not, districts should call or write to the United States Department of Education for free materials explaining various established programs.

Districts should follow some basic steps to increase parental and community involvement. They need to identify and integrate resources and services from the community. They should provide training for parents and establish shared parent and school responsibility. They should organize volunteer work and recognize the efforts of those volunteers. They should set up conferences, telephone trees, and more effective school-to-home communication. They could provide information to families on how to help students with homework. They should be encouraged to apply for grants which provide assistance to improve teaching and learning through parental and community involvement.

Rural and small town public school districts in southern Illinois need to build partnerships with businesses. Businesses could become involved directly in education by participating in some type of work-to-school program.

The Illinois State Board of Education needs to assist rural and small town southern Illinois K-8 school districts with professional development activities which meet the needs of the school and the community. The Illinois Quality Assurance and Improvement process focuses on learning. Part three of the process focuses on the school as a learning community. The learning community extends beyond personnel employed in the district to all human resources who are stakeholders of a school. If districts are to be successful with this process, schools and communities need to know *how* to better serve each other.

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Appendix A

Cover Letter

R 1, Box 137
Bluford, IL 62814
March 12, 1997

- First Name Last Name
- School District
- Address
- City, State Postal Code

Dear Name:

I am a graduate student at Eastern Illinois University working on my Field Study Experience as part of the requirements for obtaining an Educational Specialist degree in Administration. The topic of my field study is Investigation and Analysis of Programs for Parental and Community Involvement in Rural and Small Town Southern Illinois K-8 Public School Districts. You have been chosen to represent your district in this study. I would greatly appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time to fill out the enclosed survey and return it to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope by March 21, 1997. All responses are confidential.

The results of the study will be shared with Frank Llano, Associate Superintendent, Accountability and Quality Assurance; Diana Robinson, Associate Superintendent, Business, Community, and Family Partnerships; and Mary Jayne Broncato, Associate Superintendent, Educational Innovation and Reform. I will also make the results available to you if you request a copy.

Please place the survey in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope and return to me by March 21, 1997.

Thank you,

Angela Mills

Appendix B

Parental and Community Involvement Survey

1. What parental and community involvement practices are currently being used in your district?

Practices: Please indicate by yes or no.

Effectiveness: Please rate from 1 to 5 with 1 being the least effective and 5 being most effective.

Future Status: Please indicate by using **discontinue, revise, leave as is, not sure, or your own response.**

Practices:	Yes/no:	Effectiveness: (1-5)	Future Status:
Committee membership	_____	_____	_____
Volunteerism	_____	_____	_____
Guest speakers	_____	_____	_____
Parent organizations	_____	_____	_____
*Other	_____	_____	_____

*Briefly describe other: _____

2. To what extent has your School Improvement Plan or Quality Review visit caused any change in parental and community involvement practices? 1= no change, 2= very minor changes, 3= a few changes

4= several changes, 5= major changes _____ If response was 3, 4, or 5, briefly describe the changes:

3. When did your district begin current community and parental involvement practices?

Before 1985 _____ 1985-1995 _____ 1995-1996 _____

4. How do you want your district's parental and community involvement practices to look three years from now? More involved _____ About the same _____ Less involved _____

Reasons? _____

5. Would your district be interested in learning about new established programs (e.g. *Project Appleseed* or *America Goes Back to School*) for parental and community involvement? Yes or no? _____

If yes, please give name and address:

6. Please indicate school district enrollment: <250 _____ 250-500 _____ 501-750 _____ 751-1,000 _____

7. Please indicate school district location: Rural _____ Small Town _____

8. If you have any additional information you would like to share, please write:
