

Parent Partnerships: A Descriptive Study Revealing Parent Partnership Strategies
Being Practiced in Christian Schools

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to discover which parent partnership strategies are being practiced in Christian schools whose mission statements identify parent partnership as a priority. Research not only reveals a spiritual decline among teenagers today, but also shows how children generally follow in the spiritual footsteps of their parents. If a Christian school's primary purpose is to cultivate spiritual formation within students, and children generally follow in the spiritual footsteps of their parents, then a parent partnership strategy that resources, challenges, and encourages the spiritual growth of parents may be a viable solution school leaders could use to fulfill the school's mission. While the Christian school community has incorporated partnership language into its mission, a problem exists in knowing what schools are doing to partner with parents. An informed investigation of this problem began with a descriptive study of mission statements gathered from targeted schools to verify the schools' partnership priorities. The study then identified trends and patterns from current partnership practices within Christian schools to help define what Christian schools are doing to partner with parents. The study was designed to establish an overview of parent partnership strategies and build a foundation of research to support future studies.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“The partnership between the home and school is an absolute necessity if we are going to be able to impact the hearts and minds of future generations for eternity” (G. Schultz, personal communication, August 22, 2013). Leaders possessing a strong sense of mission, like Schultz, must communicate the vision to help constituents move toward a common goal (Anderson, 1999; Covey, 1994). The common goal for most Christian schools is to produce students who are spiritually mature and ready for the challenges of life (Schultz, 2003). Christian school mission statements often cite the belief that home, school, and church must work together to accomplish this result (see Appendix A). However, there is a lack of research concerning what Christian schools are doing to partner with parents in the home. The purpose of this study is to discover which parent partnership strategies are being practiced in Christian schools whose mission statements identify parent partnership as a priority.

The literature is consistent in pointing leaders toward the need to provide vision if the organization is to fulfill its mission (Barna, 1996; Covey, 1994; Hackman, 2002; Maxwell, 1993). The biblical writer of Habakkuk 2:2 (NIV) instructs leaders to write the vision down and make it simple so whoever reads it can follow. However, before it can be written down, a leader must develop the vision to match the purpose of the organization, and once the purpose is understood and the vision is written down, people naturally come together as they envision a better future (Anderson, 1999). The vision Schultz (2003) described, invited Christian educators to partner with the home and church to equip students with a biblical worldview to impact the world for Christ. Inspired by this vision, many educational leaders have incorporated partnership language

into their schools' mission statements (see Appendix A) as they have become aware of the need to partner with the church and parents to fulfill the overall mission of spiritual formation. For example, the mission for Tree of Life Christian School states: "In partnership with the family and the church, the mission of Tree of Life Christian Schools is to glorify God by educating students in His truth and by discipling them in Christ" (Tree of Life, 2013). Like Tree of Life Christian School, many Christian schools throughout the United States have come to embrace the value of home, school, and church working together to provide students with a firm foundation so they can impact the world for Christ (Schultz, 2003).

Christian educators with a mission and vision targeting spiritual formation through partnerships with the home and church face the challenge of spiritual decline among young people today (Ham, 2009; Kinnaman, 2011; McDowell, 2010). Comparing surveys taken in 1960 and 1990, McDowell (2010) identified regression in the view of Scripture, church attendance, and belief in the love of God. Similarly, the 1990 National Survey of Religious Identification (The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2001) found religious identification within the United States dropped between 1990 and 2000. This finding was interpreted as a potential growing trend of secularism among Americans. According to the data, people, specifically teenagers, are declining spiritually.

The spiritual decline observed has a direct correlation to who is leaving the church and why they are leaving (Ham, 2009; Kinnaman, 2011). According to Ham (2009), 40% ($n = 1,000$) of the individuals surveyed who once attended conservative and evangelical churches, indicated they left the church by the age of 15. The early exodus of

youth from the church may well result from a perceived lack of relevance between Scripture and the problems youth face (Ham, 2009). According to Kinnaman (2011),

A person sets his or her moral and spiritual foundations early in life, usually before age thirteen, yet the teen and young adult years are a significant period of experimentation, of testing the limits and reality of those foundations. In other words, even though the childhood and early adolescent years are the time during which spiritual moral compasses are calibrated, the experimental and experiential decade from high school to the late twenties is the time when a young person's spiritual trajectory is confirmed and clarified. (p. 31)

As a result, Kinnaman found most faith switching to occur between the ages of 18-30, with one out of nine in this age range leaving the faith all together.

McDowell (2010), Kinnaman (2011), and Ham (2009), found that teens in the United States are in a spiritual recession. Both Kinnaman and Ham recognized the child's need for a strong spiritual foundation to prevent spiritual decline. Ham focused on the lack of substantial biblical answers given to a child's quest for information as the culprit for the spiritual breakdown and eventual departure from the faith. Kinnaman on the other hand, pointed to natural spiritual development and experimental tendencies as the cause for spiritual decline. Regardless of cause, evidence indicates young people are spiritually declining, which presents a challenge to leaders embracing spiritual formation as a cornerstone of an organization's purpose.

While research indicates a spiritual decline among teenagers in the United States, religion is not dead (Smith, 2005). According to Smith, a majority of teenagers in this country have a spiritual hunger and tend to follow in the spiritual path of parents when it

comes to religion. Contrary to popular stereotypes, Smith did not find youth to be religious dissidents running away from their parents' religion; instead three out of four teenagers were found to consider their religious views to be similar to their parents. This varied by religious tradition, but the results were fairly consistent across religious affiliations. "Even though agents of religious socialization do not appear to be wildly successful in fostering clarity and articulacy about faith among teens, it remains true nevertheless that parents and other adults exert huge influences in the lives of American adolescents" (Smith, 2005, p. 28). In addition, teens with married parents are more likely to be religious; teens with understanding parents who invest in their children's lives in a relational manner are more likely to be religious; and teens with parents who attend religious services are more likely to be religious (Meyer, 1996; Smith 2005). As a result of interviewing and observing spirituality among American teens, Smith drew the conclusion that American teenagers have not outgrown the influence of their parents, but the question remains as to what kind of influence parents have upon their children.

Studies indicate a spiritual decline exists among youth in the United States (Ham, 2009; Kinnaman, 2011; McDowell, 2010), and teenagers generally follow the spirituality of their parents (Meyers, 1996; Smith, 2005). Synthesizing the research leads one to ask why the spirituality of teenagers is declining if they are following in the spiritual path of their parents. If teenagers are following in the spiritual path of their parents and the spirituality among teenagers is declining, a plausible conclusion could suggest that teenagers are following in the footprints of their parents' spiritual decline. In response to the research, helping parents ultimately helps children, which directs the attention toward parent partnerships and how best to conduct them.

Evidence suggests parent partnership strategies help children learn in the classroom (Epstein, 2005). When parents get involved in the educational process, children make gains academically and behaviorally (Sylva et al., 2008), as well as emotionally (Havighurst, Harley, & Prior, 2004). While academic, behavioral, and emotional gains due to parental involvement have been documented within the educational setting, research is lacking on the impact parent partnerships have upon the spiritual formation of students within the Christian school. However, before effectiveness studies can be initiated, a descriptive study, as the first foray into this new field of study, must be conducted (Grimes & Schultz, 2002). The new area of inquiry and the purpose of this descriptive study were to discover which parent partnership strategies are being practiced in Christian schools whose mission statements identify parent partnership as a priority.

Statement of the Problem

If a Christian school's primary purpose is to cultivate spiritual formation within students, and children generally follow in the spiritual footsteps of their parents, then developing a partnership between home and school may aid the fulfillment of purpose. While the Christian school community has often incorporated partnership language into its mission, a problem exists in knowing exactly what parent partnership practices are being implemented. Compiling parent partnership practices will potentially help direct educational leaders and support further research to determine the effectiveness of such strategies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover which parent partnership strategies are being practiced in Christian schools whose mission statements identify parent partnership as a priority. After beginning with a descriptive study of mission statements gathered from the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) accredited schools to verify the schools' parent partnership priorities, the study identified trends and patterns from current parent partnership practices within Christian schools that have a parent partnership priority.

Research Question

The study addressed the following research question: Which parent partnership strategies are being practiced in Christian schools whose mission statements identify parent partnership as a priority?

Significance of the Study

Given the apparent spiritual decline of young people, alongside the Christian school mission to impact spiritual transformation using parent partnerships, the need exists to identify what Christian schools are doing to partner with parents. This study filled a current gap in knowledge about practices that Christian schools use to partner with parents, and results will help educational leaders understand best practices needed for parent partnership implementation.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

While it would be good to solicit information from all Christian schools, the delimitation of the study restricted the survey to administrators leading schools in the United States that were accredited by ACSI. The study excluded participants who did not

include partnership language in their school mission statement. In addition, the actual number of school administrators who responded to the survey served as a limitation to the study. Given the limited number of respondents, care must be taken in generalizing the results, as it may not be representative of the larger population, including schools in international settings. A second limitation to the study involved potential bias in administrators' perspectives and personal viewpoints, but it was assumed that administrators responded to the best of their ability in limiting their own bias in responding to the survey.

Definition of Terms

To fully understand the purpose of the study, the following operational terms must be defined:

Accredited Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) K-12 schools are like-minded Christian schools that have met the criteria for accreditation established by the ACSI accrediting agency.

Administrator is one who is responsible for the implementation of the school's program and advancement of the school's mission.

Catholic education is an academic program taught from a Catholic perspective and serves as an extension of the Catholic Church.

Christian education is an academic program taught from a biblical worldview and represents a Protestant perspective.

Formal partnership programs are implemented from a third party to direct the school's partnership practices.

One-way communication consists of explanations or directives that do not solicit a verbal or written response from people being addressed.

Parent is the one who is the biological or adoptive parent or legal guardian of a child enrolled within the given school.

Parent partnership practices are intentional planned strategies conducted on behalf of the school to help parents and educators work together to reach desired outcomes according to the stated mission.

Passive communication is an exchange of words and ideas without face-to-face interaction.

Spiritual formation is the process of growth and development through which individuals become conformed into the likeness of Christ.

Two-way communication is a verbal or written exchange of words and ideas between one or more people.

In summary, the purpose of an organization is reflected in its mission statement (Anderson, 1999). The mission for the Christian school is to spiritually form enrolled students (Schultz, 2003). However, research conducted by McDowell (2010), Kinnaman (2011), and Ham (2009), concluded that the spiritual condition of youth in the United States is declining. Smith (2005) identified the significant influence parents have upon their children's spiritual condition, which introduces the need for a school to partner with parents as a way to better fulfill the mission of spiritual formation. Since a mission statement, according to Anderson (1999), seeks to capture the heart of an organization, choosing to include partnership language within a school's mission indicates a high priority for this type of relationship. To better understand what Christian schools are

doing, this study sought to discover which parent partnership strategies are being practiced in Christian schools whose mission statements identify parent partnership as a priority.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to discover which parent partnership strategies are being practiced in Christian schools whose mission statements identify parent partnership as a priority. After establishing a biblical foundation, investigating the theoretical framework, and analyzing several partnership programs, the literature review revealed five key areas for parent partnerships: communication, parent training, decision making, volunteerism, and collaboration with the community. These five key areas served as the foundation for the survey and guided interpretation of results.

The Bible instructs parents to train and disciple their children according to God's principles as illustrated in the following passages. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 instructs parents to impress God's commandments upon their children through communicating with them about faith issues when seated, lying down, walking, or getting up. Psalm 78:2-8 echoes Deuteronomy 6 and outlines the plan for generational evangelism as one generation is challenged to share the great things God has done with the following generation. Proverbs 22:6 calls parents to train children when they are young so they will not depart from the faith when they become old. Jewish parents served as the primary educators for their children and they followed these biblical directives and trained their children with a set standard of educational ideals that included the following five characteristics (Elwell, 1996).

According to Elwell (1996), Jewish parents trained the individual which required a focus on developing the whole person inside and out. Second, Jewish parents emphasized history and stressed the importance of recognizing the acts of God and remembering the events as they happened. According to the biblical narrative, God often

instructed the Israelites to establish markers to remind them of His work and parents were instructed to retell the story so the next generation would not forget. Third, Jewish parents emphasized personal freedom and responsibility and stressed the need for accountability. They trained children to make “right” choices. Fourth, Jewish parents emphasized their identity as a chosen people. They stressed the importance of holiness and recognized the need to instruct all nations in the ways of the Lord as a light to the world. Fifth, Jewish parents emphasized human sin and the need for atonement. They stressed their need for help to bridge the gap between a righteous God and His fallen creation.

While the Bible places the ultimate responsibility upon parents to train their children, it is a task they need not do alone because when parents are equipped through partnerships, those parents are better prepared to fulfill their Godly role and teach their children (Wilson, Wilson, & McConnell, 2008). These partnerships are important, but defining this partnership is not easy (Mitchel, 2009).

In an effort to define parent partnerships, the United States Department of Education (2004), educational researchers (Cowan, Napolitano, & Sheriden, 2004), The National Association of School Psychologists (2012), and leaders within the National Parent Teacher Association (Pennsylvania Parent Teacher Association, 2013) have developed definitions derived in part from the characteristics of partnership philosophies that their respective organizations have embraced. While terminology may vary from one organization to another, the definition developed by each group seeks to limit the complexity and set the tone for how teachers are expected to interact with families in the

educational arena. All of the definitions developed by these organizations share common themes that include the need for communication, collaboration, and decision making.

In the No Child Left Behind Act, the United States Department of Education (2004) has required schools to identify a plan for parental involvement in order to receive federal funding. This plan defines parental involvement as follows:

The participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including ensuring

- that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning;
- that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school;
- that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child (ESEA, Section 9101, p. 32).

As noted within this definition, parent partnership requires intentional communication, active involvement, and mutual respect for decision making within the educational process.

Cowan et al. (2004), define parent partnerships as “a reciprocal dynamic process that occurs among systems (e.g., families, communities, partnerships), schools/classrooms, and/or individuals (e.g., parents, educators, administrators, psychologists) who share in decision making toward common goals and solutions related to students” (p. 1). Cowan et al. continue to explain how the collaboration process is guided by the academic and behavioral goals that all parties have mutually determined as the target for overall outcomes. This definition enlarges the circle to include everyone

involved in making educational decisions on behalf of the child. Cowan et al. emphasize decision making as a primary goal for parent partnerships within a community of parents and professionals committed to collaborate and make decisions together on behalf of the child.

The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) (Pennsylvania Parent Association, 2013) in the United States defines parent involvement as the participation of parents in every facet of children's education and development from birth to adulthood, recognizing that parents are the primary influence in children's lives. Parent involvement takes many forms, including:

- Two-way communication between parents and schools;
- Supporting parents as children's primary educators and integral to their learning;
- Encouraging parents to participate in volunteer work;
- Sharing responsibility for decision making about children's education, health, and well-being;
- Collaborating with community organizations that reflect schools' aspirations for all children (p. 73).

In addition to the definition embraced by the United States Department of Education (2004), the PTA definition for parent involvement promotes volunteerism and community collaboration as key components in the connection between the home and school.

The National Association of School Psychologists (2012) defines parent involvement in this manner:

Unlike traditional parent involvement activities that emphasize passive support roles for families (e.g., volunteer, fundraiser), partnerships involve families and educators working together as active, equal partners who share responsibility for the learning and success of all students. Families and educators are broadly defined to include all caregivers and a variety of school staff, such as administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals. (p. 1)

This definition joins Cowan et al. (2004) in calling for equality between parents and professionals and broadening the definition of the family to include all caregivers. However, the basic understanding of parent involvement coincides with the previous definitions.

While the definition for parent partnerships varies between organizations, common themes emerge from each definition to include communication, training, decision making, volunteerism, and community. Although the definition of parent partnerships in education may be complex, a study of the current literature reveals how research is beginning to give shape to the idea of parent partnerships. To fully understand how parent partnerships have been defined, one needs to understand the theoretical framework developed by leading theorists.

Developmental theorists agree that relationships are important to children as they grow and mature (Fowler, 1991; Kohlberg, 1987; Piaget, 1969; Vygotsky, 1997); however, each theorist adds a unique contribution to the conversation. Piaget (1969) identified the act of learning as a developmental activity that requires interaction between teacher and child in order for growth to take place. While a student's interaction with a teacher is important to the educational process, one is left with a question

concerning the impact relationships beyond the classroom have upon children. Piaget affirmed the importance of relationships but did not build a framework to include relationships beyond the teacher and child. Some 30 years later, Vygotsky (1997) defined the educational process as a social activity and identified development as the conversion of social relations into mental functions. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development describes learning as a process mediated by a more experienced learner, but like Piaget, relationships experienced beyond the teacher are not discussed at length. Kohlberg (1987) believed that teacher initiated discussions are designed to challenge student thinking and cultivate moral development. While this may define the basic job description for a teacher, Kohlberg expanded this understanding to include parents, clergy, community leaders, coaches, and other adults in the child's life. Finally, Fowler (1991) affirmed the importance of relationships in faith development because the nature of a relationship implies trust in another person, a key component in establishing faith in God. While this idea is important to grasp, what does one do with the relationships that counter trust and cause children to fear? What impact does a child's environment at home have upon the child's ability to trust or mistrust other individuals? In addition, what impact does the parent's work environment have upon the child as job stress invades the family system? Because relationships are important in the developmental stages of learning, Getzels' (1968) social system perspective and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory contribute significantly to the theoretical framework for social development in the educational context.

Getzels' (1968) social system perspective illustrates how interactions between participants impact one another, creating the need to include communication skills within

the partnership definition. In this perspective, Getzels identified two dimensions that impact the behavioral outcomes of social systems. The normative dimension, which includes the institution, roles, and expectations, represents the individual's functioning environment. The personal dimension, which includes the individual, personality, and need-disposition, represents the individual's attempt to function within the social system's environment. Behavior is the result of the multiple interactions between the institution's roles and expectations, and the individual's personality and need-disposition.

In addition to the two primary dimensions, Getzels (1968) suggested the cultural dimension must also be considered when analyzing social systems. "The expectations for behavior in a given institution not only derive from the requirements of the social system of which the institution is a part, but also are related to the values of the culture which is the context for the particular social system" (p. 92). The manner in which institutions and individuals interact with the culture, ethos, and values plays a significant role in the behavioral outcomes of the social system. Following the same logic, the manner in which the school and parents interact with the culture, ethos, and values plays a significant role in the partnership strategies embraced by a school (Keyes, 2000).

Several years later, Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed an ecological theory of human development that credited the growth of the individual to the various exchanges made within his/her environment. He defined development as "a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment" (p. 3). The structure of this ecological theory is likened to a set of Russian Matryoshka dolls or nested measuring cups. The innermost level of the theory, called the microsystem, is the setting that contains the individual. This would include the family, classroom, or team. The second

level, the mesosystem, examines the relationship between individuals and requires an honest look at the impact people bring to various forms of interaction. The third level, called the exosystem, suggests the person's development is profoundly affected by events occurring in settings in which the person is not even present. For example, this level suggests children are impacted by their parents' work environment because the level of stress at work often manifests itself at home, impacting the relationships in either a positive or negative manner. The fourth and final level, called the macrosystem, is the culture that encompasses the first three levels and serves as the blueprint for the culture that organizes the various settings within the society. According to Bronfenbrenner, these four levels constantly impact the individual and bring lasting change in the way in which people deal with their environment.

Both Getzels (1968) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized the relational aspect of the human experience and challenged researchers to consider the impact the environment has upon a child's development. This led to a framework for practitioners upon which to build ideas for parent involvement, as illustrated through the work of Epstein (2011) and Swap (1993).

Outlining the importance for parent partnerships, Epstein (2011) explained how students and their families live in diverse communities that vary in proximity to schools. Wherever the community and school are located, educators need to understand the geography, history, economics, and social characteristics that comprise the diversity in which students live. Epstein asserted that without an understanding of this diversity, educators tend to work alone and overlook the people who play a significant role in the students' lives. Without these significant partnerships, educators fall prey to

compartmentalizing children into various roles instead of teaching the whole child. This segmentation has the potential to eliminate from children's learning the support needed from parents, extended family, neighbors, friends, community leaders, clergy, and other adults within the community (Epstein, 2011).

While parental involvement may play a significant role in a child's education, confusion and disagreement exist among educators and parents as to which practices of involvement are most important and how to obtain the kind of participation needed to make a difference. Because of this Epstein (2011) conducted a series of studies in elementary, middle, and high schools between 1981 and 1991 that generated six observable behaviors or types of involvement. These six types of involvement include:

Type 1: Parenting - helping all families understand child and adolescent development and establishing home environments that support children as students.

Type 2: Communicating - designing and conducting effective forms of two-way communication about school programs and children's progress.

Type 3: Volunteering - recruiting and organizing help at school, home, or in other locations to support the school and students' activities.

Type 4: Learning at Home - providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and curriculum-related activities and decisions.

Type 5: Decision Making - including parents on school committees and soliciting input from parents concerning school decisions.

Type 6: Collaborating with the community - gathering resources from the community to strengthen and support partnerships and increase student learning (Loc. 1,211).

These six types of parent involvement have been widely used and have been adopted by the Department of Education (2004) and the Parent Teacher Association (Pennsylvania Parent Teacher Association, 2013) as the official guidelines for parent partnerships.

Similar to Epstein (2011), Swap (1993) began to think about parent partnerships in terms of models, and developed four primary models used to describe relationships between parents and educators within the school context.

- The Protective Model is the dominant model for home-school relationships. In this model the goal is to reduce conflict between parents and teachers by separating the responsibilities between parents and teachers. This model is driven by three assumptions:
 - a) parents delegate educational responsibility to the school;
 - b) parents hold the school responsible for results;
 - c) educators accept this arrangement.
- The School-To-Home Transmission Model enlists parents in supporting the objectives of the school. Assumptions driving this model include:
 - a) children's achievement is fostered by home and school continuity;
 - b) the role of the school is to identify contributing factors for school success;
 - c) parents endorse the importance of school and cultivate a successful environment at home.

- The Curriculum Enrichment Model incorporates family contribution into the school's curriculum in an effort to extend what happens during the school day. The assumptions for this model include:
 - a) parents and educators should work together to enrich curriculum objectives and content;
 - b) relationships are based upon mutual respect and both parents and educators are seen as expert resources in this process of discovery.
- The Partnership Model encourages parents and educators to work together to accomplish a common mission. Two assumptions that drive this model include:
 - a) accomplishing the joint mission requires a re-visioning of the school environment and a need to discover new policies and practices, structures, roles, relationships, and attitudes in order to realize the vision;
 - b) accomplishing the joint mission demands collaboration among parents, community representatives, and educators (p. 27).

These models construct the framework for current practices schools use to partner with parents. The partnership model embraces ideas such as collaboration and joint decision making that are congruent with the partnership definitions developed by the Parent Teacher Association and the United States Department of Education.

Building upon the theoretical framework developed by Getzels (1968) and Bronfenbrenner (1979), and the research conducted by Epstein (2011) and Swap (1993), several partnership programs have been developed and used over the past 45 years

(Comer, 1996; Harley & Prior, 2004; Havighurst, 2004; McCormack, 1999; NNPS, 2013; Rich, 1997; Sylva, Scott, Totsika, Ereky-Stevens, & Crook, 2008). The programs share an ecological approach to parent partnerships and support the common themes of communication, training, decision making, volunteerism, community, and collaboration identified within the parent partnership definitions discussed previously.

During the same time period that Getzels (1968) was developing the theory of how social systems impact relationships and learning, Comer (1996) was developing a strategy to implement within a school system located in New Haven, Connecticut. Like Getzels, Comer (1996) came to understand the impact environment had upon the child's educational experience. When Comer walked into the school, teachers were found to be desperate for help to restore order among a student population that appeared to be alienated and unchallenged. In response to what he discovered, Comer "formulated a school-level systemic approach to educational change that addressed all aspects of a school's operations" (p. 2). This system grew into what is often referred to as the Comer Process or School Development Plan (SDP).

The SDP was developed in two low achieving, poorly attended, and relationally dysfunctional schools. These two schools mirrored the conditions of many schools in the same region. The staff morale was low, teachers did not trust parents, and parents mistrusted teachers, which created an environment of hostility. The school staff accepted low achievement as inevitable and the teachers seldom worked together to meet the needs of the students. Although the situation looked bleak, the stage was set for what eventually would become a model for over 1,000 schools nationwide (Comer, 1996).

Using similar concepts developed by Getzels (1968), Comer (1996) sought to understand the variety of interactions that occurred throughout the school. Taking an ecological approach, Comer analyzed the impact the larger community had on the school's environment within the school, as well as on student learning. Comer found educators deficient in their understanding of child development and lacking in relational knowledge. In addition, the school leaders did not have a plan to provide training to address these deficiencies to help the staff grow in these areas. This lack of understanding resulted in students being taught with low expectations and teachers labeling these underdeveloped students as troublemakers who needed punishment for their bad behavior. Comer noted how these students generally came from families whose values and attitudes were not aligned with a commitment to academic learning. This observation supported his belief that the most successful students came from functional families and attended schools with home and school congruence that cultivated a culture of success. Comer believed that individuals are products of their environment and when the environment is congruent with success, the child is positioned to succeed.

After Comer (1996) had identified the lack of congruence between the school's environment and success, he developed the SDP to move the school toward a solution. He began the journey by making an attempt to initiate every action on behalf of the children within the school community. Along with this intention, he focused on collaborating with parents, school staff, and community members as a way of fostering ownership. This approach precipitated the development of positive interventions designed to take the place of harmful interactions frequently found in the school prior to the implementation of the SDP.

As the SDP developed, it became clear that this comprehensive approach was needed to introduce an organizational and management system overhaul that was based on knowledge of child development and relationship issues. Comer (1996) believed that the organization and management of the American educational system was entrenched in the values, ways, and attitudes of the larger society, and this system was then maintained by traditional methods of instruction and preparation that were patterned after a business model rather than a relational model (Seely, 1989). Since most individuals within organizations resist change, efforts to lead constituents must be strategically planned by the leader (Kotter, 1996). “Providing knowledge of research findings, in-service education, and mandates from administrators or outsiders rarely bring about significant or sustained change” (Comer, 1996, p. 8). Instead of top down directives, Comer initiated change by creating mechanisms that allowed parents and staff to engage in a process that included new knowledge, practical application, and success (Seeley, 1989). Success then released motivation for more success and encouraged the use of the new knowledge until the old was eventually replaced (Kotter, 1996). The SDP focused on parents as the center of change, and the goal for the program was to engage parents and staff in a process in which the school community would first gain knowledge of the three mechanisms to be used, as well as knowledge of child development and behavior management. The SDP was not developed to be a quick fix or an add-on.

Implementation of the SDP requires commitment from the school leadership and demands time and energy because it represents a different paradigm of working in schools. The traditional organization and management of school governance is replaced by the SDP structures and all of the activities in the school are managed through the SDP

process. Once a cooperative and collaborative spirit exists throughout the school, the SDP can be expected to produce the desirable outcomes.

According to Comer (1996), the SDP uses three mechanisms to lead the entire initiative. The first mechanism is used to establish the School Planning and Management Team (SPMT). This team serves as the central organizing body in the school that is generally led by the principal. Members of this team include teachers, parents, and support staff representatives. The overall goal of this team is to plan and coordinate the activities of the school through the process of collaboration and consensus. The second mechanism is the Parent Team (PT), which includes three levels of participation. The first level requires participation in the Parent Teacher Association; the second level requires volunteering in the classroom; and the third level is to represent the parent body on the SPMT. The third mechanism is the Student and Staff Support Team (SSST). This team includes the staff within the school that work outside of the classroom to provide counseling, medical assistance, and educational support and services to meet the wide range of needs within the student body. These staff members seek to work proactively instead of reactively with parents and teachers to develop plans for educational success.

Once the teams are set up, the program seeks to conduct three operations (Comer, 1996). A Comprehensive School Plan is the first operation conducted by the SPMT. This plan provides a set of structured activities that will be used by the SPMT to establish priorities, set goals, and approach school improvement in a strategic manner by using data from academic achievement, behavior reports, absenteeism, and other felt needs within the school. The second operation that is implemented is Staff Development. Workshops for teachers and parents are designed to meet a specific need: to provide

effective skills for working with underdeveloped children in the classroom. These activities also seek to help teachers integrate academic, fine arts, social, and extracurricular components into the overall curriculum in order to meet a wide range of needs for all students. The third operation to be fulfilled is Monitoring and Assessment. A special committee made up of a representative from each stakeholder is assigned to organize data collection, interpret the data, and submit a plan to the SPMT for periodic assessment. While these operations are important, the set of three guiding principles bring character to the entire program.

In order to sustain respect for adults and value for children within a learning community, the SPD is driven by three guiding principles – consensus, collaboration, and no fault – that nurture a positive climate (Comer, 1996). Consensus requires people to conduct deep discussions resulting in the best solution and prevents people from being alienated because of a perceived loss. Collaboration requires participation and demands that every point of view is treated with respect. A no-fault environment facilitates honest communication. Comer (1996) believes that when a school operates upon these guiding principles, it will foster a positive environment and cultivate ownership from everyone involved in the educational community. When school personnel nurture a positive climate using consensus, collaboration, and no-fault as principles to guide the process, implementation of ideas is more likely to happen.

The Comer (1996) process has documented many success stories; however, the program has drawn criticism from where it has not worked. Castle Park Elementary School contracted the Comer SDP but ran into trouble when the staff could not implement the core concepts of the program. Larkins (n.d.) observed abusive practices

such as the display of hostility toward those outside of the leadership team after the SDP was implemented. When voting was discontinued and consensus was affirmed as the method for decision making, Larkins noted various factions within the staff pressuring others to conform to ideas with consensus, which contributed to the silencing of the staff when issues were being discussed. Because of the school's failure to deal with these dysfunctional issues, the program was discontinued two years after it began.

Glazer (2005) offered another perspective that brought the Comer process into question. In an effort to understand Comer's methods, Glazer questioned the lack of curriculum to promote student achievement within the overall strategy for the program. Glazer understood the need for relationships but wondered about the academic plan once relationships were established. Second, Glazer recognized the program's emphasis on relationships but did not understand how waiting five to seven years before improvement is realized could be acceptable. According to Glazer, seven years seemed too long to wait for results. The third question Glazer raised was to wonder how a school could operate without any conflict. From what Glazer observed, if conflicts arose, the Comer group would withdraw. Glazer acknowledged the successes that originated from the Comer process, but he equated the program's success with other school-reform models that are based upon an individual's commitment to the task and to the inspiring role of the leader and Comer himself.

The Comer (1996) process offers a plan for schools in need of cultural transformation, but there are schools in existence that need a program to assist with parent partnership practices without restructuring the existing leadership of the school. The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS, 2013) was developed to

accommodate schools with a desire to add a partnership component to their program while maintaining their existing leadership structure. The NNPS model consists of four components: a leadership team, a framework for parent involvement, a one-year action plan, and an evaluation process. Using research-based programs, the NNPS helps schools organize and create an environment that promotes healthy partnerships between home, school, and the community through implementing goal oriented activities and strategies. Each school within the program designs its own plan according to specific goals based upon the needs and interests of the educational community. The NNPS provides a three-step process and a timeline to launch the program and guide the school toward success.

The first component of the NNPS program is leadership. Using an Action Team for Partnership (ATP), schools in the NNPS organize and sustain their partnership programs for school, family, and community (NNPS, 2013). The ATP serves as a committee that oversees the program and leads the various activities sponsored by the overall program. This team consists of 6-12 members that include the principal, teachers, parents, a parent liaison, parent organization officers, students (if used in a high school), community members, and others who work with families within the school community. The ATP is responsible for creating and writing a one-year plan, leading the plan, and evaluating the plan's effectiveness. Having at least six members enables the team to divide responsibilities in order to prevent fatigue and burn out. Leadership is important for the success of the program, and necessary skills and understanding of the partnership model must be embraced.

Once the ATP is identified, the team decides how it is to be organized. The team either sets the agenda by using an improvement goal format or by using a format based on the six types of parent involvement. If the improvement goal format is used, the team will then identify two academic goals, one nonacademic goal, and one goal that will establish a supportive partnership environment. If the team uses the six types of parent involvement, subcommittees for each of the six types will be developed, and activities to implement each of the six types will direct the annual strategy. Both formats require knowledge of the six types of involvement and a clear understanding of the partnership approach.

After the format is chosen, the ATP then develops a one-year action plan to implement within the school community. The action plan requires detailed information that outlines the various activities sponsored by the team, including dates, target grade levels, materials needed, preparation plans, volunteers, and a plan for evaluation. The ATP also obtains input from other constituents concerning the goals and strategies recommended.

The last component of the program involves evaluation. The NNPS manual includes evaluation tools that are available for the school to use on site. These tools are designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership program and help the ATP plan for the future. There are also survey templates available to gather feedback from constituents within the educational community. As stated on the NNPS website, the Annual Review of Team Processes helps schools assess how well the ATP is working together as a team. The review prompts discussions about the quality of interactions and needed improvement in the composition of the team, schedule, and content of team

meetings, effectiveness of committees, extent of shared leadership, and progress on program implementation (http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/nnps_model/school/atp.htm).

The NNPS has conducted several studies since 1981 to evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership program. Epstein (2005) cited the Focus on Results study to point toward the need for clear communication. The results of this study showed a decline in absenteeism among students when educators communicated clearly with families about the importance of school attendance. Additionally, results of the study showed NNPS schools to have fewer discipline problems, greater proficiency in math, stronger reading skills, and higher scores overall. The studies conducted by the NNPS have played a significant role in establishing best practices for schools to use when implementing the partnership model (Epstein, 2005).

The SDP and the NNPS are programs that require a significant school wide commitment for implementation. Another, less intensive parent partnership that can be implemented within a single classroom, school campus, or an entire district is the MegaSkills program created by Rich (1997). Through many years of teaching and parenting, Rich came to champion the important role that parents play to help their children succeed in both school and life. As a result of this understanding, the MegaSkills program was developed to equip parents and teachers with 10 basic skills to keep learning fun so a child's love of learning could foster success (Rich, 2013).

As an educator, Rich (1996) observed American education and addressed concerns ranging from curriculum design to classroom size. "In education, we can plead; we can beg; we can change the books, put in more teachers, and fix the buildings. But kids won't learn unless they want to learn, unless they have the will to learn" (p. 62).

Rich (1997) noted how children learn to read but they do not continue reading; children learn simple arithmetic, but they fail when applying the skills. MegaSkills was created to help children acquire the skills needed to become successful in the classroom and beyond through training parents as educators and getting children involved in higher level thinking and problem solving strategies.

The MegaSkills program utilizes two main strategies: teacher training and the development of a home curriculum. Teachers must understand the value for parent partnerships and understand the framework to facilitate ecological health needed for children to grow and develop within each sphere in which they live (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 2011; Rich, 1996). However, teachers in general lack training in how to work with parents and many teachers do not feel prepared to implement meaningful partnership practices (Ratcliff, 2009). Once the framework for parent partnerships becomes established, the next step within the strategy is to provide a curriculum for parents to use at home that is easy to understand and user friendly. This curriculum, using ordinary household items, helps parents teach the 10 essential skills children need to succeed in school and beyond.

What started in 1960 developed into a comprehensive program that was launched in 1988 through the release of the *MegaSkills* book (Rich, 1988). After a strong reception of this book, Rich designed a workshop for parents in 1989 with the idea to reach more families by training a core group of leaders to lead the program in multiple communities. By 1996, the MegaSkills program had trained over 6,000 leaders in 47 states. These 6,000 leaders have in turn provided local programs for their communities to reach over 90,000 families.

One of the communities impacted by the MegaSkills program is located in a small, rural Texas-Mexico border town in the Rio Grande Valley. The school district in this community was found to have made a remarkable improvement with test scores and overall enthusiasm for education (Chavkin, Gonzalez, & Rader, 2000). Within three years, the district improved 20 percentage points in the fifth-grade assessment and 26 percentage points in the eighth-grade assessment. Attendance at workshops sponsored by the school doubled at both the elementary and high school levels. Open house attendance increased by more than 50%. According to the report, as a result of the MegaSkills program, the morale within the district was enthusiastic, and the constituents were ready to make improvements for the following year.

Parent Partnership programs like the SDP (Comer, 1996), NNPS (Epstein, 2011), and MegaSkills (Rich, 1997) point educational leaders toward parent partnership best practices using leadership training, effective communication, and programmatic training. In the area of leadership, while each program requires leadership adjustments, the Comer program is the most transformative, requiring a complete overhaul of the leadership structure within the school. Secondly, communication is required to direct participants within each program toward success. The Comer program also requires the most radical communication patterns through implementing consensus; however, each program uses strong communication skills to facilitate program success. The third component found in common among all three programs is training. MegaSkills appears to have the strongest vision for equipping parents with practical skills to help their children, but all three programs train both teachers and parents to work together to fulfill the goals set by the various leadership teams and sponsoring programs.

While nation-wide programs have been launched in the United States, regional programs have also proven successful in improving parent partnerships within the educational community. Recent research points to the role of emotional competence in children's development, necessitating a better understanding of how to assist those who care for children with the task of helping children grow emotionally. With a sample group of 50 parents, Havighurst, Harley, and Prior (2004) conducted a pilot study designed to discover the effects of a parenting program focusing on emotional health. The sample was recruited from a lower to middle class metropolitan region and targeted parents with four to five year old children. Parents agreed to attend six two-hour sessions held once a week for six weeks. The sessions used a variety of instructional modes, including large and small group discussion, video presentations, demonstrations, and role plays. An emphasis was placed upon teaching parents how to coach their children toward emotional health using specific skills from the curriculum developed by Gottman (2013). Practical scenarios were discussed throughout the training to help parents know what to do in what the study defined as high risk situations, such as bedtime, meals, school, and shopping. The sample group consistently reported that the ideas and skills learned through the training made a difference in how they related to their children, as well as how they related to other adult relationships. These findings support Getzels' (1968) idea about how behavior is the result of the multiple interactions between the institution's roles and expectations, and the individual's personality and need-disposition. Analysis of the results of a variety of surveys from both parents and children indicated that this particular parenting program might have contributed to the parents' ability to help their children with difficult emotional responses and problematic behaviors. Havighurst et al.

(2004) agreed that further research is needed to determine which parenting skills are actually acquired and what aspects of children's emotional competence changed as a result of the intervention.

In another regional study, Sylva, Scott, Totsika, Ereky-Stevens, and Crook (2008) built upon the idea that parent training programs may produce a benefit in reducing behavior problems in children aged 3-10, while also increasing academic performance. Using the parent training program *Incredible Years* (Webster-Stratton, 2013), Sylva et al. initiated an intervention to target literacy problems, combined with a cognitive literacy program based on the "Pause, Prompt, Praise" (Donald, 2004) approach to reading. The goal for the project was to address both the behavior and literacy problems by training parents to support their children's reading at home. The understanding that reading problems contribute to behavior problems and behavior problems contribute to reading problems stimulated the idea for this project.

The sample group was randomly selected from eight primary schools located in a low income inner city neighborhood. The intervention consisted of three phases and was conducted over three terms. The first phase consisted of 12, two and a half hour-long weekly sessions to address behavior issues. The second phase consisted of 10 weekly parent group sessions that targeted reading issues, and the third phase consisted of a review from both programs over a six-week period. Parents participated in weekly meetings throughout the three terms to ensure consistency and maintain quality control for the entire program.

The reading gains made by the intervention group were equivalent to six months, which led Sylva et al. (2008) to conclude that training parents to deal with behavior

problems and giving them strategies to support reading at the same time is beneficial for children in disadvantaged communities. In addition to gains made in reading, writing was also strengthened as parents reported similar results when tackling academic issues from a behavioral standpoint. This study demonstrated how a community responded to an issue and brought change; reinforcing Bronfenbrenner's (1979) idea that learning to read is more than teaching skills. If the child's environment is strengthened, his/her skills will be strengthened.

In both regional studies, a prescribed parent training program was used to reach a certain goal, which adds the element of curriculum to the list of best practices. The pilot study conducted by Havighurst et al. (2004) helped parents train their children to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner so their children could relate in an appropriate manner. This training produced a better behaved child and possibly a better behaved parent as the idea of coaching was introduced and practiced throughout the study. The second study conducted by Sylva et al. (2008) directly tied the idea of parent training to academic success. This study focused on a program that gave parents skills in both behavior and reading, which combined to help their children succeed in reading. The result of these two studies demonstrate the benefits that parent partnerships bring to the school environment and also strengthen the idea for an ecological approach to human development and educational success (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Getzels, 1968).

“The value of parental involvement has become an acceptable truism across a wide spectrum of political positions in the United States. Conservatives and liberals, religious fundamentalists and secular families have all endorsed parental involvement as a fundamental component of successful schooling” (Casanova, 1996, p. 30). While

parent partnership practices are broadly accepted and touted as a way to increase student achievement, there are those who feel parent partnership practices have not been sufficiently scrutinized in regards to the cultural assumptions they hold, the advantage they provide to some social groups, and the demands they place on groups such as minorities and immigrants (Carvalho, 2001; Theodorou, 2007). This critique concerning parent partnerships is important to consider, especially in schools possessing a large diversity of cultures, a wide range of socioeconomic status, and a significant population of people who may be socially vulnerable.

The programs examined up to this point were designed to increase parent involvement within the public school system where cultures are diverse, socioeconomic status is varied, and the socially vulnerable exist. When observing parent involvement in Christian education, the benefit for stronger partnerships expands to include spiritual formation as an additional benefit. Catholic schools have taken the lead in promoting the partnership with the home as evidenced in the writings from the Vatican Council II (1965) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994). *The Declaration of Christian Education*, as written in the Vatican Council II (1965), clearly outlines the teachings of the Church concerning general education, Christian education, parental responsibility, and the role of the Catholic school in helping parents fulfill these responsibilities. While the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) does not add new material to the conversation, it reinforces the ideas presented by the writings in the Vatican Council II.

The first section of *The Declaration of Christian Education* clearly affirms that “all men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education” (Paul, 1965, p.1). This right to an education is

then expanded to include a right to a Christian education in the second section. The third section outlines the argument for parental involvement. “Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators” (Paul, 1965, p.1). The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) explains that:

...parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery – the preconditions of all true freedom (p. 594).

The Catholic school is introduced in the fifth section of *The Declaration of Christian Education* (Paul, 1965). “Among all educational instruments the school has a special importance. It is designed not only to develop with special care the intellectual faculties but also to form the ability to judge rightly, to hand on the cultural legacy of previous generations, to foster a sense of values, to prepare for professional life” (Paul, 1965, p. 1). In Section Six, the role of parents and the arm of the Catholic school unite. *The Declaration on Christian Education* gives parents the liberty to choose the Catholic school as a way to educate their children. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) states, “As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental. As far as possible parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators” (p. 596). Elevating Christian education to

a parental right places responsibility upon the Catholic Church to provide access to Catholic schools, but if access is not available, “the Church must be present with her own special affection and help for the great number who are being trained in schools that are not Catholic” (Paul, 1965, p.1).

The nesting of home, school, and church as ecological structures interconnected (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is embedded within the Catholic Church writings, but to what degree is the Catholic school helping parents function as parents? This question became the catalyst for a study conducted by McCormack (1999) to understand the role of the Catholic school in training parents. In response to church writings and historical beliefs about raising children, parents and the Catholic Church leadership began looking to the Catholic school for leadership in helping parents learn how to train their children in the ways of the Catholic Church.

McCormack’s (1999) study followed a quantitative, descriptive, and self-reporting design. A questionnaire was developed by 16 experts and given to a pilot group of 38 parents to establish internal consistency. Once the questionnaire was ready, it was distributed with a strategy that targeted certain grade levels using a random sampling from each grade level chosen. The participation rate was 94%, representing 332 parents. The results identified five behaviors with which parents desired to have help from the school. These areas included “learning how to (1) provide opportunities for self-choice in areas of personal freedom, (2) foster autonomy, (3) involve the child age-appropriately in family problem solving, (4) delay attention when a child demands it inappropriately, and (5) choose family activities that feature the child’s abilities” (p. 3). When asked what parents thought the school was doing well in providing support, they felt the school was

most helpful in “teaching parents how to (1) nurture the spiritual needs of the child, (2) model sharing, (3) require all family members to treat the family with respect, (4) give practice in positive social behavior, and (5) connect the child’s choices with consequences both to self and others” (pp. 3-4). Follow-up interviews were conducted, revealing that some of the practices discussed in the questionnaire were suited to meet the needs of inexperienced parents, while other concerns raised were geared toward parents of adolescent children.

The findings of the study invited further research in this area of parent training and affirmed the school as a conduit to share with parents; however, more research is needed to find what actually needs to be shared. The results of the study affirmed the leadership and professional expertise of the Catholic school to prepare parents to establish a strong foundation for psychological, social, spiritual, and moral development for children birth to 18 years of age. It was also noted that teachers may need to be trained in the same manner to facilitate consistency of teaching (McCormack, 1999).

During this time period, discussions were also held in Catholic conferences and congregations that argued how parents must manage the basic education of their children in emotional, personal, and social matters (McCormack, 1999). At the same time, it was noted that parents seldom had adequate training and experiences to enable them to conduct this education efficiently. McCormack highlighted how training is required for a great variety of professions, businesses, and trades, from the barber to the bricklayer, but anyone can become a parent without training. The result is a large number of adults who are playing highly significant roles in the development of the next generation who are often quite unequipped to manage these roles adequately. In this study parents were

reported to experience confusion, inadequacy, and bewilderment in promoting the unique life formation needed for their children, which illustrates the need for parent training as a key component within parent partnership programs being developed today.

While McCormack (1999) reported from a Catholic perspective, the goal for Christian education in general is for students to know Jesus Christ as Savior, to be continually transformed into the image of Christ, and be fully equipped to serve Christ in everyday life (Schultz, 2003). Christian education is to seek spiritual formation for all students, as illustrated by the Catholic Church.

Turning to the Protestant Church, it is interesting to note how the timing of the conversation initiated by Roehlkepartain (1993) coincided with the same period of time when the Catholics were revising their Church Catechism. In sharing how the church must return to embrace the call to teach, Roehlkepartain noted how only a few churches intentionally addressed the educational needs of parents, creating a specific need for systematic efforts to include the family as an emphasis in Christian education, which in this context means Sunday school. Through research conducted by Search Institute and the Effective Christian Education Study, Roehlkepartain discovered activities that had the greatest impact on a young person's faith maturity, including talks with parents about faith, participation in family devotions, spending time in prayer and Bible reading, and involvement in family service projects. However, according to the study, two-thirds of the families in the study rarely or never had family devotions, more than half of the teenagers did not talk to their fathers about faith, a third did not talk to their mothers about faith, and two-thirds of the families did not do family projects to help others.

After noting a declining interest among adults in religious training for children, Roehlkepartain (1993) pieced three main reasons together to explain the reality. The first reason noted was the busy schedules families kept. Due to busy schedules, consistent meal times have ceased to exist for many families, which has eroded the time most families sit and talk to one another in a natural environment. Secondly, religiously mixed marriages were found to present another challenge for declining interest in religious training for children. When a family fails to decide which religious path they are going to follow, confusion ensues. Third, a lack of confidence and minimal biblical proficiency has led parents toward religious decline due to a sense of inadequacy. Instead of becoming proficient so they can teach, parents have generally ignored their ignorance and deferred the teaching about God to the Church.

Roehlkepartain (1993) outlined several ideas to help cultivate spiritual awareness for families. He suggested the Church take the initiative in establishing faith conversations by creating situations that cause families to interact. Whether in a classroom setting or through homework assignments, the goal is to create family conversations about faith. Along with creating this conversation, Roehlkepartain encouraged churches to promote family devotions by providing resources and teaching parenting skills so parents can lead structured family devotions. He also noted that service projects help families understand the broad scope of the gospel. The goal of each idea is to stimulate families toward spiritual action with the hope that spiritual action will cultivate spiritual formation.

Roehlkepartain (1993) concluded his suggestions by challenging churches to address two broad areas: content and skills. In a day and age when people are constantly

bombarded with information, parents need help to discern erroneous information. Parents need to understand the developmental processes their children are going through. They need to understand relationships, stages of faith, stages of life, how to deal with crisis, how to handle truth, and how to be in the world, but not of it. Along with content, parents need skills. They need to learn how to plan, organize, say no, communicate, and start a conversation about God. If parents can become confident in content and skills, they will have what it takes to begin a journey toward spiritual maturity (Roehlkepartain, 1993). Unlike the Catholic conclusion, Roehlkepartain did not cite the Christian school as the arm of the Church to help parents fulfill their God given duty. Instead, Roehlkepartain concluded his work by stating how his study results renew the challenge to discover innovative ways to encourage families to grow in faith. It could be suggested that one innovative way would be to use the Christian school as a conduit to partner with parents.

Using the Christian school as an innovative way to partner with parents is not well documented. While many evangelical Christian schools include parent partnerships when describing their mission, research pertaining to parent partnerships within the Christian school is lacking.

The focus of this study was to discover which parent partnership strategies are being practiced in Christian schools whose mission statements identify parent partnership as a priority, particularly in the five areas that aligned with the literature review: communication, parent training, decision making, volunteerism, and community collaboration. In summary, the following five partnership practices served as the core for this descriptive study.

Communication is a basic building block for partnerships as outlined by Epstein's (2011) research and demonstrated by programs developed by Comer (1996) and Rich (1988). Seeking to move beyond one-way communication practices, Epstein (2011) advocated designing and conducting effective forms of two-way communication to discuss school programs and children's progress.

Parent training empowers parents to lead and offers them skills to succeed (Havighurst et al., 2004). Whether providing information to families to help students with homework or helping families understand child and adolescent development, training parents is significant in facilitating parent partnerships (Epstein, 2011).

Decision making invites parents to become a part of the solution and cultivates camaraderie between parents and educators (Epstein, 2011). According to Comer (1996), consensus requires people to conduct deep discussions resulting in the best solution and prevents people from being alienated because of a perceived loss. Instead of top down directives, Comer initiated change by creating mechanisms that allowed parents and staff to engage in a process that included new knowledge, practical application, and success (Seeley, 1989). Whether working toward consensus or simply making a majority decision, including parents in the decision making process is important for healthy parent partnerships (Epstein, 2011).

Volunteerism is the act of inviting parents to add value to the school's program by recruiting and organizing help at school, home, or in other locations to support the wide range of school activities (Epstein, 2011). Comer (1996) made room at various levels to incorporate volunteerism into the school community. According to Epstein (2011), a strong volunteer base exemplifies a strong parent partnership.

Community collaboration extends parent partnerships to include a wide variety of professionals in the community. This collaboration gathers resources from the community to strengthen parent partnerships and increase student learning (Epstein, 2011). According to Swap (1993), when educators and parents seek to accomplish a similar mission, they, along with community representatives, must collaborate.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to discover which parent partnership strategies are being practiced in Christian schools whose mission statements identify parent partnership as a priority. In order to answer this question, the research focused on what schools are actually doing and probed to discover what administrators perceived to be the most important parent partnership practices in schools using partnership language within their mission statement. The research provided data to serve as a launching pad for researchers to find indicators as to the overall difference partnership activities make within Christian education.

Participants

The population for this study included PK-12 Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) accredited schools located in the United States. ACSI accredited schools were chosen because they have demonstrated the ability to adhere to a set of quality educational standards and would be considered like-minded in their pursuit of Christian education. The purposive sample included the responsive schools and the participants were the administrators that submitted usable data. Schools accredited with ACSI met the inclusion criteria for the study and schools without this accreditation were excluded from the study. For schools that met the inclusion criteria, a list of 971 email addresses was obtained from the ACSI main office in Colorado Springs, CO. The population was invited to participate in the survey through several email invitations. While each school was encouraged to participate, the decision to join the study was up to the individual administrator.

Instrument

Using the website www.surveymonkey.com, the study relied on the use of an electronic survey (See Appendix B) to solicit responses from administrators leading ACSI accredited schools. The electronic survey was implemented because: (a) it was economical, (b) it allowed participants to remain anonymous, (c) it was flexible, and (d) it was user friendly. Survey development and implementation followed the Tailored Design Method from Dillman (1999).

Five areas aligned with the literature review served as the basis for the 20-question survey (See Appendix B). Communication (Questions 5-6), parent training (Questions 7-8), decision making (Questions 9-10), volunteerism (Questions 11-12), and community collaboration (Questions 13-14) formed the core of the instrument. After agreeing to participate in the study (Question 1), participants were asked to examine their school's mission statement. Because the stated mission represents the central focus of an organization (Anderson, 1999), Question 2 inquired about the school's mission statement and asked participants further questions if they used partnership language within their mission statement. If the school did not use partnership language within its mission statement, the survey concluded. If the participants indicated the school used parent partnership language within its mission statement, Questions 3 and 4 asked them to identify specific programs used to facilitate parent partnerships. Questions 5-14 formed the core for the survey, covering the categories communication, parent training, decision making, volunteerism, and community collaboration. They were designed to identify what practices were being used to partner with parents and discover what administrators perceived to be the most important parent partnership practices used within their school.

From a list of 11 options, Question 5 asked participants to identify what practices are used to communicate with parents at their school. Question 6 asked participants to identify the top three practices according to the participants' perceived understanding of importance. Six of the options represented one-way communication practices and five options represented two-way practices.

Question 7 asked participants to identify areas of training offered to parents. Question 8 asked participants to identify the top three practices for parent training according to their perceived understanding of importance. Two out of the four options represented interpersonal skill training and two focused on cognitive skills.

Question 9 asked participants to identify areas their school uses to invite parents to help make decisions. Question 10 asked participants to identify the top three practices used for decision making according to their perceived understanding of importance. Three of the six options represented decisions involving interpersonal skills and three represented technical decisions.

Question 11 inquired how participants use parents as volunteers. Question 12 asked participants to identify the top three practices for using volunteers according to their perceived understanding of importance. Out of the 10 options, four were task oriented and six were student oriented.

Question 13 asked participants to identify how their school collaborates with other professionals within their community. Question 14 asked participants to identify the top three practices for community collaboration according to their perceived understanding of importance.

The last section of the survey included six questions (15-20). Four of those questions solicited demographic information such as grades offered, age of school, and the number of students enrolled. One question asked participants to describe their perception of impact from parent partnerships by using the words very positive, positive, neutral, negative, or very negative. The final question offered the opportunity for participants to withdraw.

Research Procedures

The survey questions were created to reflect best practices for parent partnership found within the models and research conducted by leading practitioners (Comer, 1996; Epstein, 2011; Rich, 1997; Swap, 1993). The parent partnership practices that served as the core for the survey included communication, training, decision making, volunteerism, and community collaboration. The survey was piloted by two former Christian school administrators, one administrative assistant, and one curriculum specialist to determine ease of use, check for grammar, and examine flow of content. Revisions were made based on feedback and then reviewed by members of the dissertation committee. Once the survey (See Appendix B) was revised and edited, Dillman's (1999) Tailored Design Method for internet surveys was implemented.

Administration of Survey

Each head of school at an ACSI accredited school located in the United States was invited to join the study. The invitation to participate in the study was sent via email through the ACSI main office. Four contacts were made to each school via email over a period of five weeks upon commencement of the survey. The first contact (See Appendix C) was made via email from Dr. Glen Schultz on January 7, 2014, which

described the study and presented a convincing argument designed to encourage participation from those receiving the message. The researcher sent a second email (See Appendix D) one week later announcing the official opening of the study and targeted those who had yet to respond to the survey. Two weeks later, a third contact (See Appendix E) was sent to invite non-responders to participate. One week later, the researcher sent a fourth email (See Appendix F) to announce the survey closing date set for February 7, 2014 and invite participation for the last time. After the survey closed, the researcher sent a fifth email (See Appendix G) to thank those who participated in the study and share what participants can expect in the form of a future report. The survey was open for 31 days beginning on January 7, 2014 and ending on February 7, 2014.

Data Analysis Strategy

Using Survey Monkey software to track answers and identify frequency of responses, a summary response sheet was used to analyze the data. Along with this analysis, the researcher categorized the participants' responses from open-ended questions to identify common themes. Using the Borda count (Saari, 1985), participant perceptions of importance were ranked.

Summary

The research conducted in this study was limited to 971 K-12 ACSI accredited schools located in the United States. If the participant's response from the second question revealed the use of partnership language within the school's mission statement, the school administrator was invited to respond to 18 additional questions. These questions were designed to reveal the communication strategies, training opportunities, processes for making decisions, opportunities for volunteering, and collaboration the

school used to partner with parents. In addition, the administrator was also asked to identify the top three areas of importance for parent partnerships and was given opportunity to share insights through open-ended questions. Because the literature base is limited within this line of inquiry, the descriptive methodology was used as a way to provide the data needed to answer the research question.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The research conducted by this study was designed to answer the question, “Which parent partnership strategies are being practiced in Christian schools whose mission statements identify parent partnership as a priority?” The focus of this study was limited to administrators serving at PK-12 ACSI accredited schools and involved a 20-question survey administered to each participant. The survey questions developed from the research (Comer, 1996; Epstein, 2011; Rich, 1997), solicited responses, which were compiled and presented in a summary response format. The study results identify partnership practices used within Christian schools and demonstrate what administrators of Christian schools perceive as important parent partnership practices. Such results can serve as a baseline for further parent partnership inquiry.

The target population for the study included ACSI accredited PK-12th grade schools located in the United States. The survey was emailed to 971 schools that met the inclusion criteria. Of the 971 schools, 351 (36%) administrators agreed to participate by answering Question 1. Of the 351 participants who agreed to participate, 231 (66%) answered “yes” to Question 2 and affirmed the use of partnership language within their mission statement. The 120 (34%) participants indicating they did not use partnership language in their mission statement concluded the survey after the second question, leaving 231 (66%) participants to respond to the remaining 18 questions.

Question 3 asked participants if their school uses a formal program to facilitate partnership strategies and 226 (98%) out of the 231 responded. One hundred sixty-six (74%) responded “no” and sixty (26%) responded “yes.” In addition to this response, Question 4 gave participants the opportunity to identify the name of the formal strategy

used within their school. Of the sixty participants affirming the use of a formal program, fifty-five (92%) responded with a specific answer (See Appendix H). Eight (15%) out of the 55 participants responded with an answer but did not offer the name of a formal program offered at their school. Eighteen (33%) out of the fifty-five participants identified Parent Staff Fellowship or something equivalent as the name of their formal parent partnership program. Three (5%) of the responding participants indicated they use Renweb as their formal program to partner with parents. The remaining twenty-six (47%) out of the fifty-five responding participants each named a program they use to formally partner with parents. Out of the two hundred thirty-one participants who completed the entire survey, twenty-six (11%) of the participating schools use a formal parent partnership program other than a Parent Staff Fellowship.

Questions 5-14 asked participants to respond to questions that identified specific strategies used within their school and revealed what they perceived to be the most important strategy. These questions represented the core of the survey and were aligned with the literature review. Responses were analyzed to describe what these Christian schools were doing to partner with parents.

Given 11 types of communication practices from which to choose, Question 5 asked participants to identify communication strategies found within their schools. Out of the 231 participants completing the survey, 222 (96%) answered the question. Table 1 lists the communication strategies used most frequently and rank orders them according to the participant responses.

The 11 communication practices were divided into several categories: one-way (either school to home or home to school), two-way, or a combination of the two. Out of

the six strategies identified with responses over 80%, the parent survey strategy represented the only two-way communication pattern. As illustrated in Table 1, the overuse of non-personal forms of communication may indicate a lack of relational understanding or may simply be the result of a fast paced internet driven culture that values efficiency and immediacy over personal interaction.

Table 1

Frequency of Communication Strategies in the Christian School

Communication strategy	<i>n</i>	%	Category
Email	218	98	One-way / Two-way
Website updates	215	97	One-way
School newsletter	198	89	One-way
Online grade book	197	89	One-way
Parent survey	186	84	Two-way
Classroom newsletters	180	81	One-way
Parent staff fellowship meetings	139	63	Two-way
Parent interviews	134	60	Two-way
Texting	133	60	One-way / Two-way
Parent town hall meetings	78	35	Two-way
Home visits	17	8	Two-way

Note. *N* = 222.

In addition to these strategies, participants were given the opportunity to identify strategies not included on the provided list. Thirty-two participants identified strategies that were placed into nine additional categories. Table 2 summarizes the categories and

rank orders them according to frequency of responses. For a verbatim list of responses, see Appendix I.

Table 2

Frequency of Open Ended Responses Concerning Communication Strategies in the Christian School

Additional strategy	<i>n</i>	%
Social media	10	31
Workshops	6	19
Daily informal	5	17
Coffee chats	4	13
New family	2	6
Phone calls	2	6
Class representative	1	3
Annual report	1	3
Athletic meetings	1	3

Note. $N = 32$.

Question 6 asked participants to identify their top three strategies for communication with parents according to perceived importance. To identify what forms of communication were perceived as the most important, the participants' choices were scored using the Borda count point system (Saari, 1985). The participant's top choice received 3 points, second choice received 2 points, and third choice received 1 point. All forms of communication were given a numeric value to determine the total score for each perceived importance for communication and rank ordered. Using the Borda count,

Table 3 rank orders the strategies participants perceive to be the most important form of communication between parents and the school community.

Table 3

Frequency of Perceived Importance for Communication Strategies in the Christian School

Strategy	Rank-1	Score	Rank-2	Score	Rank-3	Score	Total Points
Email	74	222	52	104	40	40	366
Online grade	55	165	56	112	24	24	301
School newsletter	22	66	34	68	36	36	170
Class newsletter	16	48	26	52	22	22	122
Parent interviews	24	72	5	10	8	8	90
Website update	8	24	13	26	32	32	82
PSF meetings	10	30	10	20	15	15	65
Texting	8	24	9	18	11	11	53
Surveys	1	3	9	18	21	21	42
Town hall mtg.	3	9	5	10	11	11	30
Home visit	0	0	1	2	0	0	2

Note. Score – Rank-1 $n \times 3$; Rank-2 $n \times 2$; Rank-3 $n \times 1$.

The data reveal the use of email as the most important form of communication perceived by the participants, followed by online grade book, school newsletter, and class newsletter (See Table 3). Conducting parent interviews, listed fifth, was the first face-to-face form of communication to be cited as important. The data suggest while some forms of two-way personal communication are perceived to be more important than what is

actually practiced, the predominant form of communication both perceived as important and actually practiced is passive and electronically driven.

Question 7 asked participants to identify what their school does to train parents. Out of the 231 participants completing the entire survey, 181 (78%) answered the question. Participants were asked to identify strategies used within their school to train parents from four basic areas of need. The four areas were divided into two categories, with one being interpersonal skills and the other cognitive skills. When asked to identify what forms of parent training their school practiced, participants identified a higher usage rate for technical training, citing academic training as the most used form of parent training (See Table 4). Table 4 reflects the rank order of the four common strategies participant schools use to train parents.

Table 4

Frequency of Parent Training Strategies in the Christian School

Training strategies	<i>n</i>	%	Category
Academic support	146	81	Cognitive skills
Parenting skills	104	57	Interpersonal skills
Technology support	88	49	Cognitive skills
Christian discipleship	79	44	Interpersonal skills

Note. *N* = 181.

In addition to these strategies, participants were given the opportunity to identify strategies not included on the provided list. Out of the 181 participants responding to the question concerning parent training, seven (4%) participants contributed an additional comment. Out of those seven participants, one (14%) participant identified the need to

train parents with a Christian philosophy of education as an additional strategy needed for parent training. One (14%) participant affirmed an individual approach must be used for parent training. Two (28%) participants stated they do not train parents, and three (43%) participants argued the position that the Christian school is a supportive ministry to the Church and should give the responsibility for parent training to the Church. For a verbatim list of responses, see Appendix J.

Question 8 asked participants to identify their top three parent training strategies according to their perceived importance within their school. To identify what parent training strategies were perceived as the most important, the participants' choices were scored using the Borda count point system (Saari, 1985). The participant's top choice received 3 points, second choice received 2 points, and third choice received 1 point. All strategies were given a numeric value to determine the total score for the perceived importance of each parent training strategy (See Table 5).

Table 5

Frequency of Perceived Importance for Parent Training Strategies in the Christian School

Training strategy	Rank-1	Score	Rank-2	Score	Rank-3	Score	Total Points
Christian discipleship	78	234	61	122	36	36	392
Parenting skills	65	195	69	138	37	37	370
Academic support	59	177	56	112	78	78	367
Technology support	4	12	19	38	46	46	96

Note. Score – Rank-1 $n \times 3$; Rank-2 $n \times 2$; Rank-3 $n \times 1$.

When asked to identify the perceived importance of parent training, participants identified the interpersonal form of Christian discipleship as the most important (See Table 5). When asked to identify the parent training strategy most frequently practiced, participants identified training for academic support (See Table 4).

Question 9 asked participants to identify how their school includes parents within the decision making process. Out of the 231 participants completing the entire survey, 159 (69%) responded to the question to identify decision making strategies used within the participant's school. Two categories were identified within this section. The technical category dealt with policy or non-personal areas, while the interpersonal category dealt with people.

The data indicate decision making is important, but participation is more likely to involve parents in school policy decisions than other strategies. When asked to identify the decision making practices most frequently used within the Christian school, rank ordering of response alternated between technical help and personal help. Table 6 reflects the rank order of decision making practices used in participant schools.

Table 6

Frequency of Decision Making Strategies in the Christian School

Decision making strategy	<i>n</i>	%	Category
School policy	115	72	Technical
Spiritual formation	91	57	Interpersonal
Curriculum	69	43	Technical
Discipline	68	43	Interpersonal
Budget	28	18	Technical
Hiring personnel	25	16	Interpersonal

Note. *N* = 159.

In addition to these strategies, participants were given the opportunity to identify strategies not included on the provided list. Out of the 159 participants responding to the question concerning decision making, 13 (8%) participants contributed with an additional comment. Out of these 13, four (31%) participants indicated they do not use parents to help make decisions. Two (15%) participants did not understand the question. Two (15%) participants use parents to help with scheduling decisions. Two (15%) participants incorporate parents in all decisions. One (7.5%) participant uses parents to help make uniform or dress code decisions. Two (15%) participants responded to the question with information that did not address the question. For a verbatim list of responses, see Appendix K.

Question 10 asked participants to identify their top three decision making strategies according to their perceived importance within the school. To identify what decision making strategies were perceived as the most important, the participants'

choices were scored using the Borda count point system (Saari, 1985). The participant's top choice received 3 points, second choice received 2 points, and third choice received 1 point. All strategies were given a numeric value to determine the total score for each parent training perceived importance and rank ordered as shown in Table 7.

When comparing the actual practice of decision making (See Table 6) to the participants' perceived importance of decision making (See Table 7); budget and personnel decision making partnership practices ranked low and school policy decision making practices ranked high. Both actual practice and the perceived importance for decision making were found to be congruent. In both the actual practice and the perceived importance, budget and personnel decisions rank significantly below other practices such as spiritual formation and school policy.

Table 7

Frequency of Perceived Importance for Decision Making Strategies

Decision making	Rank-1	Score	Rank-2	Score	Rank-3	Score	Total Points
Spiritual form.	69	207	37	74	20	20	301
School policy	59	177	41	82	39	39	298
Discipline	25	75	31	62	25	25	162
Curriculum	6	18	34	68	31	31	117
Budget	5	15	8	16	14	14	45
Personnel	2	6	3	6	6	12	18

Note. Score – Rank-1 $n \times 3$; Rank-2 $n \times 2$; Rank-3 $n \times 1$.

Out of the 231 participants completing the entire survey, 216 (93%) identified strategies used for parent volunteers. Question 11 asked participants to identify how they

use parents as volunteers within their school. Table 8 rank orders the most common strategies identified by the participants' responses.

When comparing the findings from the volunteer category (See Table 8) to the decision making category (See Table 6), frequency of responses for volunteerism in fundraising was high at 194 (89%) (N=216). Frequency of responses in decision making for budget decisions was significantly lower at 28 (18%) (N=159). It appeared the participating schools welcomed the fundraising efforts conducted by the parents, but the parents were not involved in deciding how to spend the money they raised.

Table 8

Frequency of Volunteer Strategies in the Christian School

Volunteer activity	<i>n</i>	%	Category
Special events	211	98	Task oriented
Classroom	197	91	Student oriented
Fundraising	194	89	Task oriented
Community service	166	77	Task oriented
Marketing	146	68	Task oriented
Middle school athletic coaching	109	51	Student oriented
Elementary athletic coaching	98	45	Student oriented
Lunch room monitor	97	45	Student oriented
Academic tutoring	79	36	Student oriented
High school athletic coaching	75	35	Student oriented

Note. *N* = 216.

In addition to these volunteer strategies, participants were given the opportunity to identify strategies not included on the provided list. Out of the 216 participants responding to the question concerning parent volunteers, 11 (5%) participants contributed with an additional comment. Three (1.3%) participants indicated they partner with parents to provide transportation for school sponsored events. Two (1%) indicated they partner with parents for building and grounds maintenance. Two (2%) stated they partner with parents for intercessory prayer. One (.5%) partners with parents to help in their admissions office. For a verbatim list of responses, see Appendix L.

Question 12 asked participants to identify their top three volunteer strategies according to their perceived importance within the school. To identify what volunteer strategies were perceived as the most important, the participants' choices were scored using the Borda count point system (Saari, 1985). The participant's top choice received 3 points, second choice received 2 points, and third choice received 1 point. All strategies were given a numeric value to determine the total score for each volunteer strategy perceived important and rank ordered in Table 9.

Table 9

Frequency of Perceived Importance for Volunteer Strategies

Volunteer	Rank-1	Score	Rank-2	Score	Rank-3	Score	Total Points
Special event	68	204	60	120	41	41	365
Classroom	67	201	42	84	34	34	319
Fundraising	25	75	44	88	33	33	196
Marketing	34	102	21	42	20	20	164
Comm. service	7	21	18	36	26	26	83
Lunch monitor	2	6	11	22	14	14	42
Tutoring	4	12	7	14	15	15	41
Elem. coaching	2	6	2	4	7	7	17
MS coaching	0	0	4	8	9	9	17
HS coaching	1	3	2	6	7	7	16

Note. Score – Rank-1 $n \times 3$; Rank-2 $n \times 2$; Rank-3 $n \times 1$.

The data indicate school administrators view parent volunteering as a significant partnership practice. The survey offered each participant 10 possible strategies to choose from when indicating how parents are used to volunteer within their school. Table 9 indicates what volunteer strategies are being used in Christian schools. The perceived importance for parent volunteers mirrored the actual practices cited in Table 8, indicating a congruency exists between belief and practice for using volunteers within the Christian school.

Table 10

Frequency of Collaboration Strategies in the Christian School

Type of collaboration	<i>n</i>	%	Category
Pastors	171	82	Local Church
Counselors	124	60	Church / Community
Public school services	123	59	Local community
Medical doctor	76	37	Local community
Social services	74	36	Local community
Psychiatrists	42	20	Local community
University testing services	36	17	Local community
None	11	5	

Note. *N* = 208.

Collaboration with other professionals is a common strategy used by educational leaders. Question 13 asked participants to identify specific strategies their schools use to collaborate with other professionals within their community. Two hundred-eight (90%) participants out of the 231 who completed the survey answered this question. Table 10 rank orders the most common strategies identified by the participants' responses. The data from Table 10 indicate schools are open to seeking help outside of the school program.

In addition to these volunteer strategies, participants were given the opportunity to identify strategies not included on the provided list. Out of the 208 participants responding to the question concerning community collaboration, seven (3%) participants contributed with an additional comment. Two (1%) participants indicated they use other

Christian schools to collaborate, and the remaining five participants each added one (.5%) additional strategy: fellow directors, public school administrators, youth pastors, private diagnosticians, and special needs professionals. For a verbatim list of responses, see Appendix M.

Question 14 asked participants to identify their top three strategies for community collaboration according to their perceived importance within the school. To identify what collaboration strategies were perceived as the most important, the participants' choices were scored using the Borda count point system (Saari, 1985). The participant's top choice received 3 points, second choice received 2 points, and third choice received 1 point. All strategies were given a numeric value to determine the total score for each parent training perceived importance and are rank ordered in Table 11.

Table 11

Frequency of Perceived Importance for Collaboration Strategies

Collaboration	Rank-1	Score	Rank-2	Score	Rank-3	Score	Total Points
Pastors	110	330	30	60	28	28	418
Counselors	27	81	72	144	34	34	259
Public school	34	102	36	72	41	41	215
Medical doctor	10	30	20	40	22	22	92
Social services	11	33	11	22	22	22	77
Univ. services	5	15	8	16	13	13	44
Psychiatrists	3	9	10	20	14	14	43

Note. Score – Rank-1 $n \times 3$; Rank-2 $n \times 2$; Rank-3 $n \times 1$.

When participants were asked to identify the perceived importance for collaborating with other professionals within the community (See Table 11), their responses mirrored the actual practices outline in Table 10 with the exception that they preferred using university services to psychiatrists by one percentage point.

Question 15 asked participants to indicate what kind of impact parent partnerships have had in the life of their school. Of the 231 participants who completed the survey, 210 (91%) answered this question. Ninety-nine (47%) of the 210 participants perceived the impact as very positive, 100 (48%) perceived it as positive, 10 (5%) perceived it as neutral, and 1 (.5%) perceived it as negative.

Using an open-ended format, Question 16 invited participants to share qualitative data concerning anything they would like to express concerning parent partnerships (See Appendix N).

Out of the 231 participants who completed the survey, 187 (81%) administrators responded to Question 17 concerning the range of grades offered at the school. Thirteen (7%) participants represented PK-5th grade schools, 45 (24%) represented PK-8th grade, 8 (4%) represented 9th-12th grade high schools, 1(.5%) represented 6th -12th grade, 86 (46%) represented PK-12th grade, and 34 (18%) represented K-12th grade.

Question 18 asked participants to identify the age of their school and 209 (90%) administrators out of the 231 responded. One school (.5%) at the time of the survey was 0-5 years old. Sixteen participants (8%) indicated their school was 6-10 years old. Thirty-seven (18%) schools indicated they were 16-20 years old. Fifteen (7%) indicated they were 21-25 years old. One hundred twenty-two (58%) indicated their school was 26 years or older.

Of the 231 schools that use partnership language within their mission statement, 209 (90%) responded to Question 19 and offered information concerning school size. Fourteen (7%) represented schools of 0-100 students, sixty (29%) represented schools of 101-200, 43 (20%) represented schools of 201-300, twenty-seven (13%) represented schools of 301-400, 20 (10%) represented schools of 401-500, and forty-six (22%) represented schools of 501 or more.

When comparing the perceived impact of parent partnerships from Question 15 to the data obtained from Questions 17, 18, and 19 concerning grades offered, age of school, and student population, little difference is noticed. Out of 210 (91%) responses, one (.005%) participant indicated parent partnerships create a negative impact upon the school and 10 (.05%) participants indicated parent partnerships impact the school neutrally.

Out of the 11 participants indicating parent partnerships have a negative or neutral impact upon the school, six (55%) represent schools that have a grade range of PK-12th, three (27%) represent schools that have a grade range of K-12, and two (18%) represent schools that have a grade range of PK-8th.

Out of the 11 participants indicating parent partnerships have a negative or neutral impact upon the school, five (45%) represent schools of 501 or more students, two (18%) represent schools of 301-400, one (.09%) represents schools of 201-300, 2 (18%) represent schools of 101-200, and one (.09%) represents schools from 0-100.

Out of the 11 participants indicating parent partnership have a negative or neutral impact upon the school, eight (73%) represent schools that have existed for 26 years or

more, two (18%) represent schools that have existed between 16-20 years, and one (.09%) did not indicate how many years their school existed.

With less than 1% ($n = 210$) indicating parent partnerships have a negative or neutral perceived impact upon the school, the data suggest there is an even distribution of support for parent partnerships regardless of grades offered, age of school, or student population.

Question 20 gave each participant an option to withdraw from the study before submitting their responses. Only one person declined out of the 231 participants.

Participants responded to each question on the survey as they desired. When comparing the rate of response to the core questions that aligned with the literature review, communication received the most responses while decision making received the least (See Table 12). This may indicate an aversion to the inclusion of parents in the decision making process or may indicate a simple disregard for the question. When comparing communication as the question answered the most to decision making as the question answered the least, one could draw the conclusion that the administrators of the participating Christian schools prefer to communicate with parents, but without discussing matters that involve decision making.

Table 12

Rate of Response to Questions Concerning Parent Partnership Strategies

Partnership strategy	Eligible participants	Actual responses	%
Communication	231	222	96
Volunteerism	231	216	93
Collaboration	231	208	90
Parent training	231	181	78
Decision making	231	159	69

The purpose of this study was to discover which parent partnership strategies are being practiced in Christian schools whose mission statements identify parent partnership as a priority. Because the Christian school uses parent partnerships to fulfill the mission to impact spiritual transformation, knowing what Christian schools are doing to partner with parents is needed, but a gap of knowledge exists in the literature between what is desired and what is practiced. This study was initiated with the goal to fill this gap of knowledge and discover what Christian schools are doing to partner with parents.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Parent partnerships are not new. As the literature review revealed, parent partnership strategies have been developing for some time and research has been conducted to establish best practices within public schools. This study investigated common themes identified from the literature and analyzed responses gathered from participating administrators (Comer, 1996; Epstein, 2011; Rich, 1997) in order to answer the question: Which parent partnership strategies are being practiced in Christian schools whose mission statements identify parent partnership as a priority? This chapter presents a brief summary of need, design, and significance of the study, as well as a brief report of findings, implications, limitations, and recommendations for further study.

Because of the limited research in the field of parent partnerships within the Christian school, this study used a descriptive research model to discover common strategies practiced in Christian schools and provide usable data for educational leaders who wish to learn about the role parent partnerships play within the Christian school. The study was designed to establish an overview of parent partnership strategies and build a foundation of research to support future studies. It used a 20-question survey to gather information from the 971 eligible Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) accredited schools in the United States. The responses were compiled and analyzed to define current parent partnership practices. As a result, understanding the scope of parent partnerships has grown as evidenced by the findings of the study.

Data were collected using the online services of www.SurveyMonkey.com. The survey was created and piloted by the researcher and consisted of 20 questions developed from the literature review. The survey questions were designed to reveal what parent

partnership strategies were being used in the participating Christian schools. In addition, the survey also identified what parent partnership strategies were perceived to be the most important. The types of questions used included multiple choice, rank ordering, and open-ended responses. The electronic survey provided several advantages such as cost effective procedures, confidential responses, ease of scoring, and efficiency, but none greater than the user-friendly interface that facilitates the administration of a survey by using the click of the mouse while sitting at one's desk.

Using the data-driven reports produced by SurveyMonkey.com and a self-generated summary response sheet, the research was analyzed to find the common parent partnership strategies used within the participating Christian schools and discover the perceived importance of those strategies. The implications and recommendations for further study stem from this analysis and provide the substance for the remainder of this chapter.

Conclusions from Findings

The target population for the study included 971 PK-12 ACSI accredited schools in the United States. The survey was emailed to 971 qualifying schools of which 351 (36%) participated. Of the 351 participants, 231 (66%) affirmed the use of parent partnership language within their mission statement, while 120 (34%) did not. The percentage of schools using parent partnership language may indicate a general understanding of the importance for parent involvement. This familiarity with the partnership concept demonstrates the underlying commitment ACSI educational leaders have to partner with parents. This kind of commitment is needed to expand the use of

parent partnership practices as outlined by the following four major findings from this study.

The study surfaced four major findings related to the five major parent partnership components aligned with the literature review and addressed in the survey. Before discussing the major findings within the study, it is important to note three significant biographical findings that help frame the four major findings of the study.

First, 199 out of 210 (95%) of the responses received indicated the perception of parent partnerships to be positive. As a result, this seems to indicate an overall openness and affirmation for parent partnerships in ACSI accredited schools. The open posture toward parent partnerships coincides with the use of partnership language within many ACSI accredited school's mission statements and may indicate ACSI accredited Christian schools favor the concept of parent partnerships. This open posture is a good indicator that ACSI schools are ready to grow in understanding and application for parent partnership practices.

Secondly, it was found that grades offered by the school, the age of the school, or the school's student population does not impact the perceived importance administrators have for parent partnerships. At first glance, with 174 responding schools out of 209 (83%) indicating they were older than 16 years, a perceived understanding that parent partnerships increase with the age of the school could exist. However, when comparing the perception of impact that parent partnerships have on a school with the actual age of the school, there is not an observable correlation to suggest that parent partnerships are valued more with the age of the school. Schools from all age ranges indicated the perception of parent partnerships to be very positive. Similarly, the even distribution of

school population and the amount of grades offered from respondent schools indicates the perceived importance of parent partnerships is greater than the size of school or scope of program. The data suggest the perceived importance school administrators have for parent partnerships transcend what grades are offered, how long a school has existed, and the number of students enrolled.

Thirdly, when asked if their school uses a formal program to facilitate parent partnerships, 26 (11%) out of the 231 participants indicated they use a program other than a Parent Staff Fellowship. The high percentage of the 226 (74%) schools affirming parent partnerships within their mission statements without a formal plan to facilitate this partnership may indicate there is either a gap between what one believes and what one does, or there is a lack of understanding concerning what defines a parent partnership. If a gap exists between what one believes and what one does, administrators need to take a serious look at their mission and think through their values because a mission needs to summarize the main focus for the school's program (Anderson, 1999). However, if there is a lack of understanding concerning parent partnerships, administrators need to cultivate understanding by reading about, experimenting with, and initiating a wide variety of partnership practices, beginning with the core practices outlined within this study. Whether a gap exists or understanding is limited, more data are needed to define the criteria for a formal parent partnership program. Using a set of criteria, one may be able to categorize the limited programs available and begin to evaluate programs according to effectiveness.

In summary, if schools view parent partnerships in a favorable manner, administrators perceive the impact of parent partnerships as favorable regardless of

school size, age of school, and grades offered, and a need exists to clarify what a partnership is, the future for parent partnerships is bright. The following findings are designed to give shape to the future of parent partnerships and contribute to the conversation.

The first major finding (See Table 1) indicates schools prefer electronic and non-personal forms of communication when interacting with parents. The data suggest while some forms of two-way personal communication are perceived to be more important than what is actually practiced, the predominant form of communication both perceived as important and actually practiced is non-personal and electronically driven. This may indicate a lack of relational understanding or may simply be the result of a fast paced internet driven culture that values efficiency and immediacy over personal interaction. In response to this finding, educational leaders need to evaluate the practices used to communicate with parents. This may mean stepping outside of the cultural norms and creating ways to engage parents face to face. It may mean letting go of some control and listening to parents who have good ideas or slowing down to ask a question. Evaluating how one communicates is a great start to improving one's communication practice.

The second major finding reveals a discrepancy between what schools do and what administrators perceive to be the most important strategy for parent training. When asked to identify what forms of training their school practiced, participants identified a higher usage rate for technical training, citing academic training as the most used form of parent training (See Table 4). However, when asked to identify the perceived importance of parent training, participants identified the interpersonal form of Christian discipleship and parenting skill training as the most important (See Table 5). According to the data,

the actual practice noted by the participants stands in contradiction to the perceived importance indicated by the same group of participants. In response to this finding, educational leaders need to measure their practice against their values and make adjustments to align their practices with their values. This discussion mirrors the previous discussion about using partnership language in a mission statement without having a strategic plan to implement the partnership strategies. It is too easy to say what people want us to say but it is more important to have our words align with our actions. To value discipleship training alone will not create a partnership. Partnership practices that align with the mission will create strong partners if both partners desire the same outcome.

The third major finding indicates schools agree that parent participation in decision making is important, but participation is more likely to involve parents in school policy decisions than other strategies. When comparing the actual practice of decision making to the participants' perceived importance of decision making (See Table 7), the interesting observation is not what ranks high but rather what ranks low. In both the actual practice and the perceived importance, budget and personnel decisions rank significantly below other practices such as spiritual formation and school policy. Similarly, when comparing the findings from the volunteer category to the decision making category, it appeared the participating schools welcomed the fundraising and marketing volunteer efforts conducted by the parents, but the parents were not involved in deciding how to spend the money they raised. This may indicate a low priority for administrators to include parents in decision making when it comes to issues involving money or personnel.

Similarly, the fourth major finding reveals a wide discrepancy between the rates of responses when comparing the five major partnership strategies. When the rate of response is measured for each question pertaining to the five partnership strategies outlined in the survey, participants were observed to answer the question concerning decision making 27% ($n = 231$) lower than the question dealing with communication (See Table 12). This may indicate an aversion to the inclusion of parents in the decision making process or may indicate a disregard for the question. When comparing communication as the question answered the most to decision making as the question answered the least, one could draw the conclusion that the administrators of the participating Christian schools prefer to communicate with parents, but without discussing matters that involve decision making. Whether it is communication or recruiting volunteers, in light of the third and fourth finding, educational leaders need to find appropriate ways to include parents in making significant decisions. Effort must be made to understand why some decision making practices are acceptable and others are not.

The three biographical findings and four major findings provide data to make recommendations for further study. However, before making recommendations, it is important to discuss limitations on generalizability and identify the implications for Christian schools. Once these are discussed, the study will conclude with three recommendations to further the study of parent partnerships in Christian schools.

Limitations on Generalizability

This study targeted 971 ACSI accredited schools in the United States. Out of the 971 schools contacted, 351 (36%) schools participated in the study and 231 (24%)

schools, based upon the inclusion of parent partnership language within the mission statement, were eligible to complete the entire survey. Although Christian schools share a common mission, it cannot be assumed that the results of this study are generalizable to all Christian schools. The following limitations are present within this study and should be considered when determining the generalizability of the data.

According to Charter, (1999) a minimum of 400 subjects is recommended for reliability studies. While the sample size of 231 (24%) ($N = 971$) is representative of ACSI Christian Schools within the United States, generalizations to the larger population of Christian schools may not be valid. It is possible for a school to exclude parent partnership language from its mission statement and at the same time have a parent partnership program. It is also possible for a school to include parent partnership language in its mission statement and not have a parent partnership program.

There were several areas the survey did not take into account. First, the survey did not gather data concerning geographical location, eliminating any discussion concerning geographic conclusions. Secondly, the survey did not gather data concerning ethnic diversity, making it difficult to understand ethnic implications and replicate the study to better understand cultural distinctions. Thirdly, the survey was conducted exclusively in the United States, eliminating the replication for international schools due to the cultural norms of those regions. Finally, the survey was conducted exclusively for ACSI Christian schools. While the responses may differ from school to school, the philosophical underpinnings of most ACSI schools are shared in common. Because of the target population, the study was not designed to discover what parent partnership

strategies are being used in non-Christian schools or other Christian schools that may not share the same ACSI values.

Implications for Christian Schools

This study presents educational leaders with two major implications to consider. First, if educational leaders within the Christian school movement identify spiritual formation as the overall mission for the school and acknowledge parent partnerships as a component in fulfilling this mission, they must thoughtfully respond to the following implications to develop a strategy for parent partnerships.

With 231 (66%) out of the 351 of schools responding to the survey indicating they use parent partnership language in their mission statement, it is evident that a majority of schools understand the important role parents have in the educational process. However, with 166 (74%) out of the 231 schools using parent partnership language indicating they do not use a formal program to facilitate parent partnerships, an apparent gap exists between what one affirms and what one does. As indicated by the participant responses, the lack of a formal program does not indicate complete abdication of parent partnership strategies; it merely indicates a possible low level of strategic planning when implementing parent partnership strategies. With the low percentage of identifiable programs and the contrast between stated priorities and frequency of practices, it appears the participating schools may be partnering with parents without a strategic plan. If the school includes an important theme such as parent partnership within its mission, logic would then lead toward a well-planned strategy to fulfill that mission.

The second and most compelling implication this study presents to the Christian school is the need to examine its mission and determine if parent partnerships exist as a

viable strategy to fulfill its overall mission. Once this question is answered, educational leaders must address how they will incorporate the research-based strategies of communication, training, decision making, volunteerism, and collaboration into their parent partnership program. They must understand how they are going to engage parents in conversation and invite them to participate in meaningful activities. Leaders also need to know how to include parents in making decisions and implement parent partnership training so everyone learns and grows together. If the mission to partner with parents is embraced and the decision to implement partnership strategies is made, further study needs to explore the effectiveness of the various strategies in helping Christian schools fulfill their mission.

Recommendation for Further Study

The conclusions drawn from the findings and implications support the need for further study. The following recommendations are suggested.

- The overall mission of the Christian school is to spiritually form students. If a key strategy for mission fulfillment includes parent partnerships, it is suggested that studies be conducted to determine program effectiveness. Formal parent partnership programs need to be classified and analyzed for effectiveness. Twenty-six formal programs were cited, which indicates programs for Christian school parent partnerships exist. Future research should investigate the effectiveness of specific formal parent partnership programs. These data would be useful in developing future programs.
- This study could be expanded to discover what parent partnerships are being implemented within ethnic groups, rural settings, and urban settings.

- A need exists for triangulation of the data if this type of study were to be replicated. It is suggested that a future study include responses of administrators as well as the responses of parents and teachers so the responses could be compared. In addition, it is suggested that a future study include non-accredited schools and other Christian schools from accreditation agencies other than ACSI.

Summary

The results of this study revealed important data concerning the actual parent partnership practices conducted and the perceived importance for specific parent partnership strategies in the represented ACSI Christian schools. In addition, the implications of this study should challenge the Christian educational leader to examine the school's mission statement and determine the value that parent partnerships have in mission fulfillment. Once a direction is set, educational leaders need to implement strategies that align with their perceived importance. Educational leaders then need to expand this study to include evaluation of parent partnership strategies and develop programs that help schools fulfill the mission to develop spiritually formed followers of Christ.

Most ACSI Christian schools share a common mission to disciple students in their Christian faith. However, leading studies reveal spiritual maturity is declining among teenagers today (Ham, 2009; Kinnaman, 2011; McDowell, 2010). In addition, studies also show that children in general follow in the spiritual footsteps of their parents (Meyer, 1996; Smith, 2005). When synthesizing the research, it appears that parents may be leading their children into spiritual descent. A strategic way to reach the students in the

Christian school is to reach the parents. This research provides the first foray into discovering what Christian schools are doing to partner with parents. Since the descriptive study has now been conducted, it would be logical to inquire about the effectiveness of the parent partnerships as they relate to a child's spiritual formation. Is there a relationship between a school's parent training program and the spiritual development of its students? This descriptive study has laid a foundation to support future research to discover the relationship between home and school partnership activities and the spiritual development of students. If educational leaders discern the role parents have within the school and commit to leading in a relational way, opportunities to grow will emerge and the school will improve as lessons are learned, strategies are evaluated, and parent partnerships become like Christ.

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Appendix A

A Sampling of Christian School Mission Statements

Cornerstone Christian School (<http://www.ccsconnection.org>)

As home, school and church work together, students will embrace a biblical worldview and impact their community, nation and world for Christ.

Tree of Life Christian School (<http://www.tolcs.org>)

In partnership with the family and the church, the mission of Tree of Life Christian Schools is to glorify God by educating students in His truth and by discipling them in Christ.

Eastern Mennonite School (<http://www.emhs.net>)

Within the context of a rigorous curriculum, Eastern Mennonite School joins with the home and church to call students into relationship with Jesus Christ.

Blue Ridge Christian School (<http://www.brcschool.org>)

Our mission is to assist Christian parents and evangelical churches by providing a biblically based educational program that instills a whole-hearted love of the Lord Jesus Christ, develops Godly character, and emphasizes academic excellence.

Appendix B

Electronic Survey

Parent Partnerships within the Christian School

Welcome

***1. The purpose of this study is to discover what parent partnership strategies are being practiced in the Christian schools whose mission statements identify parent partnership as a priority. This research project is being conducted by Rick Martin, a Christian School administrator in Virginia. You are invited to participate in this research project because you are an educational leader at an ACSI accredited school. Your participation in this research study is voluntary, and if you choose to participate, you may withdraw your participation at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.**

The procedure involves filling an online survey that will take 5-7 minutes. Your responses will be anonymous and we do not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. The survey questions are designed to help the researcher discover current practices being used for parent partnership within Christian Schools

All data is stored in a password protected electronic format. To help protect your anonymity, the surveys will not contain information that will personally identify you. The results of this study will be reported as group responses only and any specific data mentioned will be done so anonymously.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Rick Martin (rickmartin@ccsconnection.org). This research project is being conducted in conjunction with Columbia International University and has been approved by the university's IRB.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are at least 18 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

At the end of the questionnaire, the participant will once again have an option to decline

Parent Partnerships within the Christian School

participation by clicking a "decline" button.

- Agree
 Disagree

Mission

***2. Does your school's mission statement include the idea of working with the home or partnering with parents?**

- Yes
 No

3. Does your school use a formal program to facilitate partnership strategies?

- Yes
 No

4. If so, what is the name of the program?

Communication

Parent Partnerships within the Christian School

5. What forms of communication are used within your school?

(check all that apply)

- Online grade book
- Email
- Texting
- Website updates
- Parent staff fellowship meetings.
- School newsletter
- Classroom newsletters
- Parent surveys
- Parent interviews
- Home visits
- Parent "town hall" meetings

Other (please specify)

6. In your opinion from the list below, identify what you feel are the top three strategies for communicating with parents according to your perceived understanding of importance.

	1st most important	2nd most important	3rd most important
Online grade book	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Email	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Texting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Website updates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parent staff fellowship meetings,	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School newsletter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Classroom newsletters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parent surveys	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parent interviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Home visits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parent "town hall" meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Training

Parent Partnerships within the Christian School

7. In what area does your school train parents?

(check all that apply)

- Parenting skills
- Academic support
- Christian discipleship
- Technology support

Other (please specify)

8. In your opinion from the list below, identify what you feel are the top three strategies for training parents according to your perceived understanding of importance.

	1st most important	2nd most important	3rd most important
Parenting skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Christian discipleship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technology support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

Decision Making

9. What areas does your school use parents to help make decisions?

(check all that apply)

- School policy
- Curriculum
- Hiring personnel
- Discipline
- Budget
- Spiritual formation

Other (please specify)

Parent Partnerships within the Christian School

10. In your opinion from the list below, identify what you feel are the top three strategies for parent assisted decision making according to your perceived understanding of importance.

	1st most important	2nd most important	3rd most important
School policy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hiring personnel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discipline	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Budget	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spiritual formation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>		

Parent Volunteers

**11. How does your school use parent volunteers?
(check all that apply)**

- Special event preparation
- Classroom volunteers
- Academic tutoring
- Lunch room monitors
- Fundraising
- Elementary athletic coaching
- Middle school athletic coaching
- High school athletic coaching
- Community service projects
- Community connections and marketing

Other (please specify)

Parent Partnerships within the Christian School

12. In your opinion from the list below, identify what you feel are the top three strategies for using parent volunteers according to your perceived understanding of importance.

	1st most important	2nd most important	3rd most important
Special event preparation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Classroom volunteers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic tutoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lunch room monitors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fundraising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Elementary athletic coaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Middle school athletic coaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High school athletic coaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community service projects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community connections and marketing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>		

Collaboration with Community Leaders

13. How does your school collaborate with other professionals in your community to better understand issues a parent may be facing?

- Medical Doctor
- University testing services
- Public school services
- Social services
- Counselors
- Psychiatrists
- Pastors
- None

Other (please specify)

Parent Partnerships within the Christian School

14. In your opinion from the list below, identify what you feel are the top three forms of community collaboration according to your perceived understanding of importance.

	1st most important	2nd most important	3rd most important
Medical Doctor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
University testing services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public school services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counselors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Psychiatrists	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pastors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>		

Summary

15. What type of impact have parent partnerships had in the life of your school?

- Very positive
- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative
- Very Negative

16. Is there anything else you would like to share about parent partnerships?

Biographical Information

Parent Partnerships within the Christian School**17. What grades does your school include?**

- PK-5th grade
- PK-8th grade
- 6th-8th grade
- 9th-12th grade
- 6th-12th grade
- PK-12th grade
- K-12th grade

Other (please specify)

18. How old is your school?

- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26 years plus

19. How many students does your school serve?

- 0-100 students
- 101-200 students
- 201-300 students
- 301-400 students
- 401-500 students
- 501 or more students

20. If for some reason you would like to withdraw from this survey, you may click the button below and decline participation, otherwise click done at the bottom of the page to submit your responses.

- decline

Appendix C

Letter of Endorsement

To:
From: "GlenSchultz@xxxxxxxxx.xxx via surveymonkey.com" <member@surveymonkey.com>
Subject: Glen Schultz – Parent Partnership Survey invitation
Body: Dear Administrator,

I am writing to ask you to support a very important research project that Rick Martin, Principal at Cornerstone Christian School, is conducting. The topic of this project is extremely important to the future of Christian schools across the country.

The first biblical principle that I set forth in my book Kingdom Education states that the education of children and youth is the primary responsibility of parents. Christian schools exist to assist parents in providing their children with a Bible-based, Christ-centered education as they strive to fulfill this responsibility. The partnership between the home and school is an absolute necessity if we are going to be able to impact the hearts and minds of future generations for eternity.

Rick's study is centered on the question, "What are Christian schools doing to partner with parents?" I believe this research project will provide Christian school leaders with some very important information and possibly some tools to help them build strong relationships between the home and school.

I trust that you will get behind Rick and assist him in this project. Your involvement is critical in making sure that valuable data is collected so that we can better fulfill the mission of kingdom education. Thank you in advance for your support and involvement in this project.

Yours in Christ,

Glen L. Schultz
Director, Kingdom Education Ministries

Here is a link to the survey. This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx>

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx>

Appendix D

First Follow-up

To:
From: "Derek_Keenan@xxxx.xxx via surveymonkey.com" <member@surveymonkey.com>
Subject: Parent Partnership Survey – Derek Keenan invitation
Body: Dear ACSI Administrator,

This letter is to urge your positive response to the request for participation in a research study on the effective practices of partnering with parents. Rick Martin is conducting this study to complete the requirements for his doctoral studies at Columbia International University. The survey is brief and should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. The results will be published and will benefit the Christian school movement in the challenging days in which we are serving.

I am well assured of the professional standards and confidential manner in which this research will be conducted. The collection of data and the reporting of such data will meet the standards for academic research.

I would encourage you to participate in this study as a great value to your school; your own professional development, as well as making a significant contribution to the research base for the Christian school movement. ACSI heartily endorses this research project and we appreciate you giving it serious consideration.

Sincerely,

Derek J. Keenan Ed.D.
Vice President, Academic Affairs

Here is a link to the survey. This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx>

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx>

For questions regarding this survey, please contact RickMartin@xxxxxxxxxxxxx.xxx or call xxx.xxx.xxxx.

Appendix E

Second Follow-up

To:
From: "rickmartin@xxxxxxxxxxxxx.xxx via surveymonkey.com" <member@surveymonkey.com>
Subject: Parent Partnership Survey – Second Follow Up
Body: Dear ACSI Administrator,

Two weeks ago, Dr. Glen Schultz, director of Kingdom Education Ministries and author of Kingdom Education, sent you an invitation to participate in a study that he described as extremely important to the future of Christian schools across the country.

Within that letter, he included a link to a survey designed to gather information about how your school partners with parents. Whether you partner with parents or not, your participation in this study is important.

I am excited to share that (include #) schools have responded to date and I hope to include your school as well. As of today, I have not received your response. While I know your time is valuable, I would like to ask you again to consider adding value to this survey by participating.

Simply click the link below and follow the instructions. The entire survey should not take more than 5 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions, you can call me at xxx.xxx.xxxx or email me at rickmartin@xxxxxxxxxxxxx.xxx.

Thank you for considering this request.

Here is a link to the survey. This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx>

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx>

Appendix F

Third Follow-up

To:
From: "rickmartin@xxxxxxxxxxxxx.xxx via surveymonkey.com" <member@surveymonkey.com>
Subject: Parent Partnership Survey – Last Call
Body: Dear ACSI Administrator,

Three weeks ago, Dr. Glen Schultz, director of Kingdom Education Ministries and author of Kingdom Education, sent you an invitation to participate in a study that he described as extremely important to the future of Christian schools across the country.

The data received to date is already revealing vital information concerning what Christian schools are doing to partner with parents and your participation would add even more value to this conversation. This is our last call. Whether you partner with parents or not, your participation in this study is important.

While I know your time is valuable, I would like to invite you to consider contributing to this study. Simply click the link below and follow the instructions. The entire survey should not take more than 5 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions, you can call me at xxx.xxx.xxxx or email me at xxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxxxx.xxx.

Thank you for considering this request.

Here is a link to the survey. This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx>

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from us, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from our mailing list.
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx>

Appendix G

Thank you letter

Date:

Subject: Research survey on what Christian schools are doing to partner with parents

Dear ACSI Administrator,

I am writing today to thank each of you for participating in the Parent Partnership Study. Your responses are being analyzed to discover what Christian schools are doing to partner with parents. As soon as the study is complete, I will summarize the data and send you a brief report of my findings.

Once again, if you have any questions, you can call me at xxx.xxx.xxxx or email me at xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.xxx

May God bless your year and give you success.

Sincerely,

Rick Martin
Principal xxxxxxxx xxxxxx xxxxxxxx

Please note: If you would like to be removed from this list, please click the link below

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx>

Appendix H

Formal Parent Partnerships Identified in Question #4

- If you are looking for a name like the PTA. We don't have one. Our strategies are formulated on a student-by-student basis. This is done through daily communication between the parents and the teacher or administrators. For the younger students we have the "Parent Pocket" and for the older students we have the "Daily Assignment Journal."
- Equipping
- Multiple programs
- It is our mantra, it isn't something we name, our programs are to that end beginning with communications.
- Quarterly Parent Collaboration Nights, 3 Parent Info Nights, Parent Open Forum before Advisory Board Meetings and 2 What to Expect Nights
- Child and Family Education Plan, similar to an IEP
- We have a Back to School Night, A school, school families, board families, and church Sunday service that is followed by a luncheon. There are two mandatory parent/teacher conferences a year. We have a parent fellowship and a Harvest Party for school families. There is a Grandparent Day each year along with a luncheon.
- 40 hr. Voluntary service to SE Christian School
- Parent Teacher Fellowship
- Parent Advisory Committee
- Parent Teacher Fellowship
- Parent Teacher Fellowship, Moms In Prayer, Dads Night Out
- Parent Teacher Fellowship
- Parent Teacher Fellowship
- Partnership Conference
- Parent-Teacher Guild (PTG)
- Parent Teacher Fellowship (PTF)
- Parent Teacher Fellowship PTF
- PTF Parent Teacher Fellowship
- Parent Teacher Fellowship Annual Parent Focus Groups
- Parent-Teacher Fellowship
- Parent Teacher Fellowship
- Parent teacher fellowship
- Parent Teacher Fellowship
- PTF - Parent Teacher Fellowship CCB - Classroom Community Builder
- Parent Teacher Fellowship
- RenWeb electronic grade book/lesson plans Parent Teacher Fellowship

- Renweb
- RenWeb
- Required parent orientation program for all new families.
- We use a formal program called LEAD. This is an acronym for L - Love God, E - Encourage, A - Actively Involved, and D- Disciple. There are action points under each topic that charge parents in their partnership of training their students. (We are a high school only).
- Family Connection Program
- Success Partners - this is in the development process. This year was teacher training and next year implementation with the parents.
- Parent Partnership SUFS
- "It Takes A Village," Is our PTO sponsors a Volunteer Program and encourages each parent to volunteer at least 5 hours.
- Give-Raise-Serve
- VIP (Volunteers In Partnership)
- We have a Parent Partners Organization
- We are a covenantal school
- Connect for Success
- Thrive
- Schoology
- SALT. Serving and Laboring Together
- Sycamore Education
- Parent Club
- Parent Participation
- Project Serve
- VIP - Very Important Person Program
- P3 hours, Parent Partnership Series and Parent Partnership Council
- Coming Together Event by AXIS
- PALs-Parent action Leader PAT-Parent action Team
- Parent Education Program
- Effective Parenting in a Defective World
- Parent Service Organization
- Into Horizon

Appendix I

Additional Responses for Communication Practices

- Class mom representatives
- athletic meetings, chapels,
- Annual State of the Academy Address
- Daily written or printed communication as mentioned earlier.
- personal verbal communication
- School visits
- Daily parking lot interaction...informal but important!
- Daily Face to Face Communication
- social media
- Facebook
- Facebook, Twitter
- Daily Blog
- A "Hub" - parent portal for communication from school, to/from teachers, among parents, etc.
- Facebook, Twitter, Direct mailing, Phone calls
- Social media
- YouTube or Vimeo videos
- We have One Call, Edline and a Facebook page
- Facebook
- Parent Coffees by Grade Level
- Principal coffee
- Coffee Klatsch
- Breakfast with the Administrator- informal conversation
- Community support groups/Church fellowships
- Parent education and training
- Parent Night each September
- Parenting in the 21st Century Seminars: Topic hot buttons
- Strategic Planning/Action Team Planning AND P.A.C.E. - Parents Assisting in Christian Education
- Workshops
- P/T conferences
- PTSA Meeting, Focus Groups
- Parent -Teacher Conferences
- conferences/care plan meetings
- 3 family nights per year when parents come to classrooms to see their students' work
- Parent-Teacher Conferences twice a year

- mentoring program for new families
- New Family Partnership Program
- Focus Groups and Phone Calls
- Phone blasts
- Grade level teacher web pages
- School Reach

Appendix J

Additional Responses for Parent Training Practices

- I think the church has the responsibility for Christian discipleship. While that is most important for parenting, it's the responsibility of the individual's pastor, not the school.
- Christian discipleship is important, but I believe it is primarily the role of the church and the Christian school is a para-church organization that should not confuse its role with the church. Ours is a supportive role.
- It is always a wrestling match with what our role is in training parents vs. the local church. We believe that Parenting and Christian Discipleship are very important, but grapple with our role in it.
- Christian School Philosophy of Education
- Christian Parenting skills
- We do not believe it is our purpose to train parents unless we are asked. Parents are given the primary role of educating their child and we do this in trust.
- Main strategy is individual.
- Parents will not come out for parenting skills or discipleship. We put parenting skills on Facebook and newsletter.

Appendix K

Additional Responses for Decision Making Practices

- uncertain of question..
- I don't really understand this question.
- While parent input is important, we intentionally don't have formal parent 'committees' or delegation in driving any of the above items other than the oversight of our school board. Parents have a say formally through the parent survey, and more informally through discussion and feedback. While those things might inform the above items, there is no formal decision making of the above outside of our school board's oversight role.
- We do not use parents directly but their perceptions and needs are counted when considering all.
- Do not have a perceived understanding of importance for this area of parent assisted decision making
- They need to be but are not.
- uniform selection and dress code
- special events, security
- Scheduling
- 1-Projects that enhance the school program
- Two Parent Representatives on the School Board
- We listen to our families in all areas.
- Only in the sense that parent decisions to enroll impact budget and personnel.

Appendix L

Additional Responses for Parent Volunteer Practices

- We consider building and grounds stewardship to be an important part of community and have many parents on yard crews and inside routing cleaning tasks such as cleaning windows and "white glove" before important events.
- Light building maintenance
- Missions and Outreach
- scholarship parents do extra duties such as organizing our uniform closet, cutting and sending in soup labels and box tops
- Transportation
- school maintenance; driving for field trips, sports event; help in office; substituting;
- chaperones - mission trips, student travel
- Intercessory Prayer & Prayer Walking
- Prayer - 1st, most important
- We would be glad to use parents for other things, but most of them work and will not help even in the evenings.
- New Family Partners

Appendix M

Additional Responses for Community Collaboration Practices

- fellow directors
- Public School Administrators
- Area Youth Pastors
- Educational Diagnosticians (private practices)
- other Christian School Professionals / School Attorney
- Special needs professionals
- Other local Christian schools

Appendix N

Additional Comments

- I think you have to know the parents before involving them, they can be very helpful or very destructive
- It is both good and bad...there is a balance.
- When parents are involved student learning and positive behavior evident
- Word of mouth is your best promotion and that doesn't happen without parent partnerships.
- I view the role of our preschool as a parent partnership, but am always willing to learn more and do more to grow and strengthen that partnership, even in our limited scope as a small school.
- Thank you for the survey. Parent partnership helps with building communication, collaboration and trust within the school.
- It is important for a successful experience, that parents are able to serve in the area(s) where they are fulfilled.
- The impact of partnership is strong. The desire for parents to get involved overall has decreased over the years.
- In Latin America, parents want to take the whole control of the school if there is any other important reason to have a partnership.
- The more involved parents are in the life of the school their children attend, the more effective instruction and discipleship efforts become.
- A statement of faith support statement, I believe, is very important to consistency for the child enrolled. Obviously, background checks are imperative if any possible time will be devoted to other student oversight or other student access by the design of the school
- We need to do a better job and that is why we are working on this project.
- However, it can be the best of times or the worst of times. Overall very positive, but parents can also be very negative and difficult to work with at times.
- Parent involvement is so critical to the survival of our school. Some parents get that fact very well and support the school with their time, talents, and money. However, most of our parents do not grasp the importance of this relationship, and our school struggles yearly meeting our financial obligations.
- Without the parents' partnering with the school it is impossible to help the students to reach their full potential. Parent partnership is critical to a successful school.
- Our Board is made up of mostly parents. They are great at fully supporting me the Head of School and empowering me to take care of all the day-to-day operation of the school.

- The importance of discerning where and when to involve parents
- Involving parents builds trust and relationships. Boundaries will have to be set at times because parents who are very involved sometimes feel they should have their opinions weigh more than others.
- #15 is difficult to answer. Parent partnerships can be very healthy or VERY negative... it depends on the level of "control" the parents feel - which can be problematic when a parent does not understand the context of decision making for the entire community vs. 1 student or family.
- They must be well organized in order to be leveraged fully.
- It is imperative!
- Parent /Christian Home is the priority in education
- We are a covenant community. We work very closely with parents.
- At this point, I feel the meaning of "partnering with parents" has become too broad with parents feeling that because they pay tuition they should also have a say in school policy and hiring decisions.
- Would love to learn how our school can do a better job helping parents become strong spiritual leaders.
- Frankly, they don't exist outside a small minority of parents who have the time and interest to get involved. They don't come to meetings in the evening, either. And none ask us how to parent better, etc. The best approach is for the classroom teacher to relationally connect with the parents of her students and to have personal, two-way communication with them. IE Informal (but pro-actively established) is better than formal.
- We need to formalize these partnerships.
- Parents appreciate a Principal's open door policy; teacher availability; friendly and helpful office staff
- Since we are a young school. Parents were given too much freedom through the PTF.
- The positive and proactive interaction we experience with our parents is the lifeblood of what makes our school a close community.
- We try to foster a school family atmosphere.
- We have been able to gauge the effectiveness of some of our teachers with parent interviews. This has been a tremendous help in hiring of teachers.
- getting more and more difficult to have formal organizations or training for parents... lots of individual meetings, lots of positive relationships, but in our school community, little interest in a ptf or parenting seminars... they simply don't participate
- It is wise to require background checks for anyone working with or chaperoning students on field trips. We use Protect My Ministry for this requirement.
- Our mission statement says that we assist Christian families and their churches

in equipping students for lifelong learning and service to Christ. Parent partnerships are key to our mission.

- They can be challenging if parents don't want to go the established routes for setting policy, etc.
- We are an independent parent-led school so our school board is all parents. This has its positives and negatives.
- Parent partnerships are at the heart of our success. We call them the "first and foremost educators" of their children. We honestly function as a family unit here, and our parents come and go freely within their "school home," and perceive themselves as welcomed, active, and vital.
- Our parents are amazing and are very open to receiving support & encouragement as they raise their children with a Kingdom mindset. Many of our parents were not raised in Christian homes, so they are grateful for every book we give them and every speaker we bring in to help add tools in their parenting toolbox.
- Parent involvement is the key to a successful school.
- All prospective parents are interviewed by board members to reinforce the partnership aspect of our mission.
- It can always be stronger. We live in a me focused society, and trying to teach parents that is not always all about them and their child can be difficult. We are constantly trying to help parents to "Think Like Christ".
- I'm a second year principle and the second semester of this year I started meeting with our parent representatives from our JH & HS weekly and it's been a blessing to hear from them and get their perspective. They even reviewed our next year's school calendar
- We are a small facility and value our face-to-face time with our parents as extremely important.
- We sincerely would like our parents to be more involved! We do have parents who come in and count the lunch orders as we order from different places.