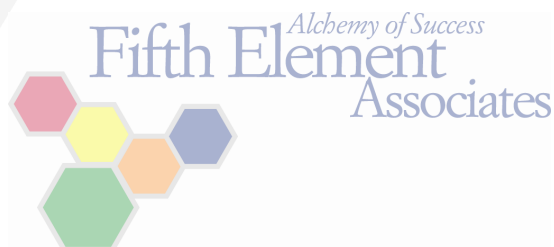


# Parent Involvement & Magnet Schools

## Gauging Parental Involvement in Fall 2009

*Research Results*

*By Claudia Eisinger and Glenn Ravdin*



# Background



- ◆ Burlington School District (using required grant funding) hired Fifth Element Associates to conduct qualitative and quantitative research to
  - ◆ Better understand levels of parental involvement in the Sustainability Academy and Integrated Arts Academy
  - ◆ Identify ways to increase parental engagement
- ◆ Focus groups and surveys were conducted with parents of children currently at both Academies
- ◆ Surveys with parents of children currently attending Champlain, Edmunds, Flynn & Smith were conducted as a control group

# Research Objectives

- ◆ Understand parents' overall perceptions of and attitudes towards each Academy (qualitative)
- ◆ Measure parental involvement across Burlington's elementary schools (quantitative)
- ◆ Gauge perceived levels of communication among parents, the schools, and community (qualitative and quantitative)

# Qualitative Implementation

- ◆ **Two** insight groups were conducted at **each** school
  - ◆ One group with parents who **lived in** the neighborhood (Old North End)
  - ◆ The other group with parents who **lived outside** the neighborhood (Old North End)
- ◆ All four groups were held during the first two weeks of September 2009
- ◆ BSD and parent involvement coordinators aided in successful recruitment
- ◆ Total of 22 parents participated in the groups (tended to be more engaged parents)

# Quantitative Objective

- ◆ Purpose of the Research
  - ◆ To develop a baseline/benchmark against which we can measure future progress towards encouraging more parental involvement in the schools and with their child on school related issues

# Quantitative Implementation



- ◆ Initial baseline measures taken in October and November, 2009
- ◆ Measured each Academy individually
- ◆ Measured Champlain, Edmunds, Flynn & Smith (C-E-F-S) as control group
- ◆ Survey designed for periodic updating

# Quantitative Implementation



- ◆ Sampled 200 parents with children in kindergarten, 1st, 3rd, and 5th grades
  - ◆ 50 interviews in each magnet
  - ◆ 25 interviews in each non-magnet
- ◆ Telephone survey
  - ◆ In-person interviews with non-English speaking parents (conducted by liaisons)
- ◆ Survey timed to be completed before first report cards arrived

# Quantitative Implementation



- ◆ Data was weighted
  - ◆ To match proportions of free and reduced lunch in all schools

- ◆ This quantitative study is about ***PERCEPTION***
  - ◆ Data is self reported
  - ◆ Reflection of their thoughts and beliefs
- ◆ ***Requires this perspective if we are to understand the factors that drive a parent's involvement***

# Executive Summary

Qualitative Insights



# Executive Summary



- ◆ Highlight **qualitative** research insights first to set a context
- ◆ Focus of the research was to dig deep and understand how parents are feeling about their children attending one of the Academies
  - ◆ What hopes and expectations did they voice?
  - ◆ What questions and concerns surfaced?
  - ◆ What really matters to these parents?

# Executive Summary



- ◆ Parents are **hopeful** and want to see the Academies **succeed**
  - ◆ Genuine enthusiasm and accessibility of principals
  - ◆ Sense of teachers embracing programs
  - ◆ Welcoming attitude of the schools
- ◆ As this is the first year of the magnet rollout...
  - ◆ Out-of-neighborhood parents are cautiously optimistic
  - ◆ In-neighborhood parents are in a wait-and-see mode; changes create some sense of loss

## Parents' Hopes and Expectations

- ◆ Want evidence that new approach has value
- ◆ Express desire to help shape/participate in different types of school projects and events
- ◆ Expect integrated learning approach utilizing creativity/art at both schools
  - ◆ Math/science still emphasized at IAA
  - ◆ SA focus on all three pillars of their mission not just the environment

## Parents' Concerns and Questions

- ◆ In-neighborhood parents are worried that their choices and rights are being eroded
  - ◆ Surprised that they needed to register
  - ◆ Don't necessarily feel part of the process
- ◆ Out-of-neighborhood parents have unanswered questions
  - ◆ What if this year doesn't work out?
  - ◆ What happens when my child gets to middle school?

# What Matters Most

- ◆ A sense of community and deeper connection
  - ◆ Strengthening relationships with those living close by (in neighborhood)
  - ◆ Reaching out and becoming part of the school community (out of neighborhood)
- ◆ Positive learning environment
  - ◆ Reinforce positive behaviors (compliment system)
  - ◆ Children can be their best selves
- ◆ Enriching multi-cultural environment as an important equalizer
  - ◆ Honoring families' cultural histories (in neighborhood)
  - ◆ Having globally-prepared students (out of neighborhood)
  - ◆ Having a multicultural teaching staff

# Choice of School

- ◆ Based on parents' sense of their child's needs and learning styles
- ◆ In-neighborhood parents link child's wellbeing with school being **close** to home, family, and friends
- ◆ Out-of-neighborhood parents link child's wellbeing with the **educational** programs offered and **teaching** approach that suits their learning style

# Enhancing Relationships



- ◆ These parents want to feel a part of the school and wider community and to see efforts to engage all parents
- ◆ Welcome regular and responsive communication (newsletters, email, phone, face to face) to **build trust**
  - ◆ Want to be heard and understood
  - ◆ Invite parents' input
- ◆ Have multiple opportunities for involvement
  - ◆ Invitations and reminders of school events
  - ◆ Use of technology to help parents feel a part of child's school day (videos, online forums, emails)

## Conclusions & Recommendations

- ◆ Increase engagement by having high level of communication
- ◆ Create a genuine, ongoing dialogue where
  - ◆ All voices feel heard
  - ◆ Input and feedback is listened to and valued
  - ◆ Common ground is sought
- ◆ Draw on principals' and teachers' power to attract parents and make them feel a part of the school
- ◆ Involve engaged parents to help less connected parents and families feel more involved

## Final Thoughts...

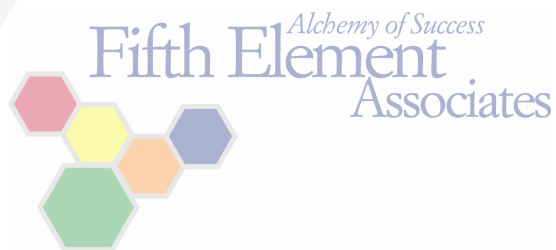
- ◆ Important questions to hold
  - ◆ What is at the heart of the matter of engaging parents in the school community?
  - ◆ What kind of future possibility do we want to create together, one that works for all?

## Final Thoughts...

- ◆ Parents hold a common vision...
  - ◆ Seeing children happy and thriving
  - ◆ Learning in creative educational environments
  - ◆ Where...
    - ◆ All cultures are honored
    - ◆ Unique and diverse perspectives and role models are celebrated
    - ◆ Positive behaviors are highlighted
  - ◆ All happening within a strong school community of friendship, respect, and cooperation

# Executive Summary

Quantitative Insights from Parent Surveys



# Executive Summary



- ◆ By all indications, Academy administrators, educators and staff have done an excellent job
  - ◆ Academy parents reported that their children are more interested in school than last year
  - ◆ Academy parents reported that their children are doing better in school than last year
- ◆ Academy students and parents feel welcome at the schools

# Executive Summary



- ◆ **The Parent-Teacher relationship is the most important contributor to, and indicator of, parental involvement**
- ◆ In general, the level of parental involvement is somewhat lower at the Academies than at the other four elementary schools
  - ◆ Integrated Arts Academy parents had the lowest overall involvement

# Executive Summary



- ◆ Academy parents tend to visit the school more often than non-Academy parents
- ◆ The most involved parents talk to their children about school, their child's teacher and help with homework more than less involved parents
- ◆ The least involved parents tend to be non-English speakers
  - ◆ The language barrier is likely an obstacle to deeper parental engagement, especially at the IAA

# Executive Summary



- ◆ Less involved parents want more contact with the teacher
  - ◆ Indicates that they would like to be more involved
  - ◆ Less involved parents are reticent to engage
- ◆ Staff diversity and more interesting school activities are likely to attract some less involved parents to schools
- ◆ The most popular events/communications from schools are Open Houses, weekly newsletters and the monthly calendars

# Executive Summary



- ◆ Most parents want
  - ◆ To be heard
  - ◆ To be empowered
- ◆ Empowering parents to contribute to, and have some control over, their child's education is critical
  - ◆ Listen and respond to concerns and ideas
  - ◆ Include in decision making processes

# Events



- ◆ Open Houses seem to be both popular and well attended
- ◆ Most parents are informed of events
- ◆ Many parents intend to attend several events but can't find the time

# Year to Year Change

- ◆ Most families report that children are having a better year this school year over 2008-2009
  - ◆ Greatest positive change in the Academies
  - ◆ Especially with regard to Interest and Learning
- ◆ Feeling more welcome
- ◆ Have more friends

# Input Into Decision Making

- ◆ All parents feel like they have some say in classroom and school decisions that impact their child
  - ◆ Parents feel respected and heard
  - ◆ Response from schools is generally good
- ◆ Fewer parents feel well represented on school governance committees that set policy
- ◆ In general, Champlain, Edmunds, Flynn & Smith parents feel like they have less say across the board than do Academy parents

# Parent Involvement Indicators (PII)



## Top 10 contributors to a high PII (Higher (scores) indicate higher correlations.):

1. Helping your child with homework. (.530) **C P**
2. Your child's teacher pays attention to your concerns and suggestions. (.424) **P**
3. You feel that you have a say in decisions about the school that affect your child. (.419) **P**
4. Talking to your child about their teacher. (.415) **C P**
5. You feel that you have a say in decisions about the classroom that affect your child. (.397) **P**
6. Talking to your child about school. (.383) **C P**
7. Your child's teacher cares for your child. (.374) **C**
8. Your child's teacher tells you about things that are going well for your child. (.358) **P**
9. Your child has friends. (.355) **C**
10. You feel comfortable contacting School Board members if you need to. (.317) **P**

Please note the juxtaposition between the **P**arent's needs and the **C**hild's needs.  
Also: the lower the PII the higher the score for "I wish I could connect more with teachers"

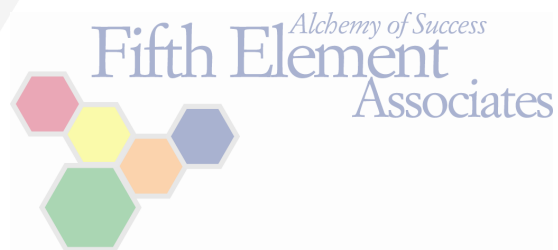
# Parent Involvement Indicators

- ◆ Parental involvement is as much about parents' involvement with their child as it is involvement with the school
  - ◆ Parents want a voice
  - ◆ Parents want some control/power
- ◆ Helping a child with homework is the biggest contributor to a high PII
  - ◆ Stimulates other involvement
  - ◆ Education's three legged stool: student, teacher and parent
    - ◆ Two legged stools are less stable

# Contact with Teachers

- ◆ More contact with teachers drives everything from PII scores to whether or not the parent helps with homework
- ◆ More teacher contact would pay especially high dividends with non-English speaking parents at the IAA
- ◆ It appears that more contact with teachers would reduce contact with the district and School Board

# Summary Recommendations



# Improving Parent Involvement



- ◆ There is no substitute for teacher outreach to parents
  - ◆ Single biggest factor in parental involvement
  - ◆ Drives every other factor, including school-related involvement with their child (including helping with homework)
- ◆ Parental empowerment is second
  - ◆ A parent's input into, and control over, their child's education is key
  - ◆ Parental control over education has to extend beyond the ballot box

# Recommendations

- ◆ Parents may not know how to support their children in school
  - ◆ Create a “Parenting the Student” class
    - ◆ What to expect from the school
    - ◆ How to interact with the teacher
    - ◆ How to help with homework
    - ◆ How to communicate with the community outside the school
- ◆ Overcome language barriers
  - ◆ Liaison Day twice a month where liaisons are at the school in the afternoon to interpret
  - ◆ Create a telephone hotline parents can use

# Parental Involvement

- ◆ More advance notice about upcoming opportunities
- ◆ Childcare during school visits
- ◆ Host wider range of events
  - ◆ Understand what is high-interest to families that are not currently involved
  - ◆ Continue appealing to current attendees
- ◆ More teacher/staff diversity

# Recommendations

- ◆ Teacher involvement correlates with parent involvement
  - ◆ The greater the contact with teachers, the higher the Parent Involvement
- ◆ Playgrounds are great places to connect with parents informally
- ◆ Host informal “mixers” for families and the community at large
  - ◆ Let them get to know one another