

A Critical Analysis of School Community Councils in Saskatchewan

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Abstract

In 2006, School Community Councils came into existence in Saskatchewan. The purpose of School Community Councils (SCCs) is to “develop shared responsibility for the learning success and well-being of all children and youth; and, encourage and facilitate parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005, p. 8). Though these structures have been around for over 10 years, the data to determine their effectiveness in achieving this goal is limited, and what evidence is available suggests a sense of a mandate not achieved (Carlson, 2013; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011; Stelmach & Preston, 2008).

In 2016, the member Boards of Education of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) passed a resolution calling for a review of SCCs. In 2018, I undertook this learning-oriented evaluation (Dahler-Larsen, 2009) of SCCs in collaboration with the SSBA. The purpose of the review was to determine the current state of SCCs in relation to achieving their mandate, and to recommend to SCCs and education partners in Saskatchewan, areas for improvement. This evaluation sought dialogue with approximately 120 participants, and found that SCCs are not achieving their mandate. Actions by education partners in Saskatchewan are required, and were identified under four broad recommendations.

To achieve a critical analysis of SCCs in Saskatchewan, a culturally responsive evaluation (Hopson, 2009; Mertens & Zimmerman, 2015) was also conducted, and four non-SCC parents (Indigenous, newcomers, and visible minority) were interviewed. By utilizing Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2009) throughout, and including the perspectives from these four non-SCC parents, valuable insights for education partners in Saskatchewan were raised with respect to welcoming and hospitality in schools, and how beliefs and assumptions of educators

and SCC members can affect the SCC. This study includes discussion on how SCC roles can be redefined to attend to relationship-building between home and school. This research study provides SCCs and the education partners in Saskatchewan with research upon which they can draw to make conclusions about the benefits and successes of SCCs and/or to implement changes to support SCCs to achieve their mandate.

Acknowledgements

This research was conducted in the province of Saskatchewan in the traditional territories of First Nations, and the homeland of the Métis. As a Métis researcher/writer, I respect and honour the Treaties that were made on all territories in Saskatchewan, acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past, and commit to moving forward in partnership with First Nations and Métis in the spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

I wish to thank and acknowledge boards of education in Saskatchewan for their foresight in reviewing School Community Councils (SCCs), and by providing the mandate for the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) to conduct this evaluation by adopting a 2016 resolution. In particular I wish to thank the Board of Education of Regina Public Schools, and specifically Trustee Cindy Anderson, for putting forward this resolution.

With great appreciation, I thank the SSBA Executive and Management for their direction, encouragement, support, and engagement throughout all of the processes of this evaluation. Your support was invaluable and meant so much to me. An extra shout out to Jill Welke for walking alongside me through the data collection processes of this study, and for your insights in the data analysis. To my friend Darren McKee, thank you for saying the right words to me during moments I wrestled with the seemingly overwhelming nature of this task, and for your encouragement for me to be bold in the recommendations.

I acknowledge the engagement and advice of education partners in Saskatchewan in this endeavour – the Ministry of Education, the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials, and the SSBA. This partnership is critical for the success of Saskatchewan's education sector, and all hold important roles related to supporting SCCs.

I thank each of the approximately 120 research participants who so willingly shared their gifts of time, insight, and advice that form the data for this review. It was my honour to sit with you and document your experiences. Your passion and commitment to SCCs is so evident. I am confident that your voices are honoured in this report. Special thanks to the four women who contributed their voices to this study with their experiences as non-SCC parents. You have provided me and those reading this with a great deal of insight.

A thank you to each of the members of my doctoral committee – Dr. James McNinch, Dr. Michael Cottrell, Dr. Jay Wilson, and Dr. Dirk Morrison for your ongoing guidance, questions, and expertise through this process. I am also grateful to Dr. Jennifer Tupper for agreeing to participate as the external. In particular, I thank my advisor, Dr. Debbie Pushor, for your leadership, passion, and commitment to parent and community engagement in schools. Your friendship and considerable support, guidance, and direction was paramount in this work. I could not have done this without you. Thank you!

Thank you to my friend Yves Bousquet who has taught me so very much about leadership, and parent/community engagement over more than two decades. I value our friendship dearly. To the very many friends, colleagues, Elders, and traditional knowledge keepers left unnamed here, know that I appreciate the generosity of your time, insight, and friendship which has enabled me to undertake this endeavour.

Finally, thank you to my family for your many supports – my cousin Jennifer, a gifted educator in her own right, for your encouragement throughout this work; my sister Rebecca and family (Brian, Rachael, and Cameron); and my mom Lorraine. Lastly, my son Joel – being your Dad has always been, and remains, the best part of my life.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of my uncle, the late Alan George Tremayne. He was devoted to family and faith, and a passionate leader and advocate for Indigenous education and equitable opportunities for the Métis. Indigenous educators and scholars stand on the shoulders of giants such as him, who blazed a trail for those of us who continue today to strive for a high-quality education system that foundationally includes Indigenous ways of knowing, and results in successful outcomes for First Nations and Métis students. His commitment to education always inspired me, and his request to me in his final days to pursue this work is what kept me motivated throughout.

I also dedicate this to my son and best friend, Joel. May this work inspire you to continue your pursuit of lifelong learning.

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Introduction

Literature demonstrates the critical importance of ensuring parents, families and community members have opportunities and mechanisms for [engagement] in children's learning and in school planning, including improved student attitudes, behaviours and outcomes, academic achievement, higher graduation rates, improved homework completion, improved attendance rates, and greater enrolment in post-secondary education. As well, the literature notes benefits to parents, teachers, school–family relationships and communities. (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005, p. 4)

Saskatchewan's provincial K-12 education system has a rich history of community education, beginning with the introduction of Community Schools in 1980. Grounded in the belief that students do better in school when their parents are engaged in the school, a variety of policy directions in the province have set the framework for this engagement.

Situating Self

I found my way into community education about 25 years ago, as a young man applying for a job I saw in the paper as a Community School Coordinator. My experience at Princess Alexandra Community School significantly shaped my professional career. As that school and community began to work more closely together, check assumptions and create new shared beliefs, families became more engaged in the school which resulted in improved student achievement (Amendt & Bousquet, 2006; Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005).

Following my employment at Princess Alexandra Community School, I went to work with the Ministry of Education (formerly Saskatchewan Learning) in 2002. During this time, community education was on the rise and School^{PLUS} emerged on the scene. My work during

this time included facilitating workshops about the adoption of community education principles in schools; writing provincial policy frameworks for community education; and, involvement in the development of the legislation, regulations, and policy directions for SCCs.

In 2005, I began my Masters of Continuing Education program at the University of Saskatchewan. Being immersed in community education writing during this time, I set out to complete a thesis on the topic. I conducted my research alongside the staff and SCCs of a community school and an upper-middle class suburban school as they developed their understanding of community education principles and created new practices.

I later went on to a leadership role in the Ministry of Education which was responsible for First Nations, Métis, and Community education. This role was very rewarding as I was able to bring together community education philosophy which aligns so well with Indigenous worldviews of education. As I worked with a team of Indigenous leaders, a number of initiatives occurred – partnerships were formed between First Nations, Métis and school divisions; Indigenous languages immersion programs began to be offered in provincial schools; the *A Time for Significant Leadership* resource was implemented; mandatory treaty education was instituted; an examination of Grade 6 students' knowledge of treaties was initiated; and finally, a revised policy framework for First Nations and Métis education in Saskatchewan, *Inspiring Success*, was launched.

I continue to remain engaged with the education sector, now in an educational leadership role with the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA). My professional experiences and Master's research and thesis have significantly shaped me. They have afforded me the opportunities to work and learn from many community education practitioners and policy-makers and traditional knowledge keepers. I also approach this subject as a Métis man and a

father of a recently graduated son. I submit this context to situate myself in the writing as a researcher, educational leader, practitioner, parent, and learner. These experiences equip me to consider the implications of parent and community engagement in a broad policy as well as structural context for the Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 12 education sector in Saskatchewan.

My interest in SCCs arises from my experiences and research into parent and community engagement in schools. The mandate of SCCs includes facilitating parent and community engagement in schools, and they offer one mechanism to do this. My current employer, the SSBA, has the responsibility for providing supports to Boards of Education and SCCs in Saskatchewan, as it relates to their governance and operations, and this research may provide an opportunity to re-evaluate those supports and resources that the SSBA provides in this regard. With a SSBA mandate from Boards of Education to review SCCs, I am also interested in aligning my work commitment with my experience and research interests, to accomplish this task. SCCs have been in existence for over 10 years, however, the evidence to demonstrate their effectiveness in achieving their mandate is limited. Finally, in view of the mandate of SCCs to support improved student achievement, in the context of Saskatchewan's education sector plan and its targets for improved student achievement, it is important that a review shed light on the effectiveness of SCCs in this regard.

Situating School Community Councils

A **school council** broadly refers to any school level structure that includes a combination of school staff and parents and/or community members who are mandated to work together on school level actions, which often focus on improving student achievement. These school councils can be referred to in various ways depending on jurisdictions – home and school

associations, parent councils, school councils, community and school associations, and SCCs, to name a few.

In Saskatchewan, a School Community Council is mandated for every school in the province. The membership consists of both elected and appointed persons. Five to nine parents are elected, and must have a child(ren) attending the school. The other appointed members include the principal, one teacher, one or two students (Grades 10-12) if applicable, and a First Nations representative, if the school has students who live on-reserve. SCCs “work with parents and community members to share responsibility for the success and well-being of all children and youth; and encourage parent, community and youth engagement in school planning and improvement” (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d., unpaginated).

In 2006, SCCs came into existence in Saskatchewan. Their creation was set in an important context that occurred in Saskatchewan which, on one hand, heightened the expectations for youth, parent, and community engagement in schools and, on the other hand, occurred during a time of forced school division amalgamations in Saskatchewan.

The context for this is set within the 1999 Role of the School Task Force. In their final report, their number one recommendation was that a Community Schools philosophy be adopted for all public schools in the province. This recommendation set the stage for an upswing in developments related to community education in the province, including the emergence of School^{PLUS} and foundational policy documents from the Department of Learning.

At the same time in the province, work was occurring that eventually led to forced amalgamations of school divisions, reducing the number of school divisions from 82 to 28. Government was wrestling with how to retain parent and community voice in the new education

landscape, and SCCs were created. In 2005, Saskatchewan Learning released *Toward School^{PLUS}: Policy Directions for School Community Councils – Provincial Response to the Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel, Final Report*. In this report, the authors proposed that a School Community Council be formed within each school in the province. In this document, the authors note that the term School Community Council was deliberately selected over other terms, such as advisory council, to reflect the importance of parent and community engagement in the role of the new structures. Expectations were set for schools to engage parents and community in the learning program, through these new SCCs.

The purpose of SCCs is to “develop shared responsibility for the learning success and well-being of all children and youth; and, encourage and facilitate parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005, p. 8). As noted above, although these structures have been around for over 10 years, the data to determine their effectiveness in achieving this goal is limited.

Purpose and Significance of the Research

Justification for a research study should attend to three elements – the personal, the practical, and the social (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). Program evaluation attends to the practical and the social justifications as it utilizes social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of a program “in ways that are adapted to their political and organizational environments and are designed to inform social action to improve social conditions” (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004, p. 16). Indigenous knowledge is relational, and this knowledge is created from place (land/community) and our relationship to place and to each other. As Wilson (2008) outlined some of the values which guide Indigenous research, she included respect (deep listening to learn from community), and purposeful research (a plan that

supports the community's interest), elements which also attend to the personal, practical, and social justifications for research.

The personal, practical, and social justification come together in this research study because the education sector in Saskatchewan is currently interested in reviewing SCCs. With the publicly identified interests of the education partners to review aspects of SCCs, a review is timely and practical, and perhaps best accomplished through a collaboration of these interests. My own history with SCCs, and my continued interest in parent and community engagement in schools, also presents an opportunity to situate my doctoral research within the interests of the education partners. This extensive history and personal interest require "situating one's position in the research" (Yeh & Inman, 2007, p. 371), an important pillar in qualitative research. Finally, a review of SCCs is conducted in a social construct with a goal of improving the engagement of youth, parents, and community members within schools with a view to improve student outcomes.

Research questions.

The research study I conducted addressed the following questions:

- How can a School Community Council facilitate parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes? What are the characteristics of a School Community Council that is facilitating parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes?
- What supports, considerations, or other critical elements are important for schools, school divisions, and the various education partners in the province to attend to, in order to assist School Community Councils in implementing their mandate?

- How do the roles of Boards of Education and SCCs inter-relate? What role may SCCs play in major education initiatives in Saskatchewan such as the Education Sector Strategic Plan, or Reconciliation?
- What is the educational and social significance of well-functioning School Community Councils that are achieving their mandate?

Research significance.

When SCCS were created over 10 years ago, in part due to school division amalgamations, they were intended to retain local voice in larger school boards. They also were to focus on supporting student learning. Engagement of parents and community in schools remains a policy directive of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. Literature confirms that this engagement leads to improved student outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kirby & DiPaola, 2011; Saskatchewan Learning, 2005). The Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) in Saskatchewan, agreed to by Boards of Education and the Ministry of Education, is a plan that contains ambitious goals to improve student outcomes, particularly for First Nations and Métis students.

Considering the SSBA 2016 adopted resolution, the ongoing educational policy directive for youth, parent, and community engagement, and the ambitious goals of the ESSP, the findings of this study will provide valuable information to the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, to Boards of Education and their senior staff responsible for SCCs, to school staff and principals as they implement SCCs, and for SCCs across the province as they reflect on their roles.

Definition of terms.

The following definitions are provided to inform the use of terms in this dissertation.

Community – Baum (1997) defined community as:

both a social and a psychological entity. Socially, it is constituted by a web of relationships through which members interact frequently, for various purposes, and as whole persons. Psychologically, it is a sense of unity shared by persons who identify themselves with some combination of real and idealized aspects for the collectivity created by these relationships. (p. 45)

Engagement – Pushor & Ruitenberg (2005) defined engagement as follows:

An engaged person is an integral and essential part of a process, brought into the act because of care and commitment. By extension, engagement implies enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, of teaching and learning, with teachers' knowledge. (p. 13)

Parent(s) – An inclusive term referring to “any adult who has a significant caring role in relation to a child, particularly those with an interest or involvement in the child’s learning” (Goodall, 2017, p. 6).

School council – broadly refers to a school-level structure that includes a combination of school staff and parents and/or community members who are mandated to work together on school level actions, which often focus on improving student achievement. A variety of terms are used to describe these structures such as School Council, School Advisory Council, or, Parent School Support Committee. In Saskatchewan, the term School Community Council is used.

Composition of the Dissertation

The first part of this dissertation includes a collaborative research study I conducted with the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, evaluating School Community Councils in Saskatchewan. It also includes my collection of counter narratives from parents, Indigenous, visible minority¹, and newcomers², who are not currently engaged with SCCs. In this section, I include the historical timeline leading to the creation of SCCs, a literature review, a description of my methodology, a cross-country environmental scan, my research findings, and recommendations for the education sector in Saskatchewan. In the second part of this dissertation, I conduct a critical analysis of SCCs in Saskatchewan, and re-imagine SCCs in the province. Through this dissertation, I critique the current state of School Community Councils in the province of Saskatchewan, and make recommendations to enhance the alignment between SCC practices and their intended mandate.

¹ Visible minority, as used here, refers to a person of colour who is not First Nations, Métis, or White, and who has been in Canada for five years or longer.

² Newcomer, as used here, refers to an immigrant or refugee who has been in Canada for less than five years.

Part I

Evaluating School Community Councils

Part I of this dissertation includes a literature review, the methodology for this evaluation, and a cross-country scan of school council type structures across Canada. Also included is a report I prepared for the Saskatchewan School Boards, *Evaluating School Community Councils*, which provides data and findings related to an evaluation of School Community Councils that was conducted in 2018. This section further includes additional data from interviews I conducted with non-SCC parents, primarily Indigenous and newcomers, to provide a more complete picture of SCCs in Saskatchewan. The section concludes with recommendations I make for the education partners in Saskatchewan, and my responses to the research questions I posed for this study.

Chapter 1-I

Literature Review

Timeline and Foundational Documents as Context for School Community Councils

To provide a historical timeline of events in Saskatchewan's K-12 education sector which led to the formation of SCCs, and which continues to impact them, I highlight important reports and policy documents which served to inform the formation of SCCs. Fitzpatrick (2012) reminds us of the importance of context in evaluation. SCCs were designed in a particular context – the upswing of community education and during a time of forced school division amalgamations in the province. These events and policy directions impacted significantly Saskatchewan's K-12 education sector and provide important context, as well as specific language of the day, that was a factor in arriving at SCCs.

Much of this work is situated in a context of community education based upon a philosophy that is grounded in principles of inclusion, shared responsibility and shared leadership.

Community education seeks to build authentic and respectful connections among the school, the family, and the community to ensure success for all. ...In a community education environment, a learning community is created when school staff, students, parents, community members, and human service providers plan, make decisions, and evaluate outcomes together. (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004, p. 38)

Community education philosophy foregrounds the connection between home and school and the education of children as centered in a context of family and community.

Community education and School^{PLUS}

In 1999, the Government of Saskatchewan set up a 12-person Task Force to study the role of the school in Saskatchewan. The Task Force, chaired by Dr. Michael Tymchak from the University of Regina's Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit, conducted a variety of consultations and visited many schools during the period of 1999-2000. In *Task Force and Public Dialogue on the Role of the School: School^{PLUS} – A Vision for Children and Youth – Final Report to the Minister of Education, Government of Saskatchewan* (Tymchak, 2001), they used a metaphor relating the expanded roles of schools to the surface of the earth, earthquakes, and the “movement of tectonic plates” (p. 5). The school, like the surface of the earth, can be taken for granted until it is disturbed through tectonic factors that lie below. The Task Force described a host of “tectonic factors” that were having significant impact on schools, factors such as poverty, demographic shift, rural depopulation, violence, student attitudes and behaviour, and curriculum reform to name a few (p. 6). Among the numerous recommendations made by the Task Force, their number one recommendation was “that a Community Schools philosophy be adopted for all public schools in the province” (p. 47). This recommendation set the stage for an upswing in developments related to community education in the province.

In 2002, the Government of Saskatchewan responded to the Task Force in the document *Securing Saskatchewan's Future: Ensuring the Well-Being and Educational Success of Saskatchewan's Children and Youth. Provincial Response – Role of the School Task Force Final Report*. The Government of Saskatchewan accepted many of the recommendations, including the primary recommendation for the community schools philosophy to be adopted by all public schools in Saskatchewan. The province launched School^{PLUS} and secured the commitment of

Government's support across Ministries. The number of Community Schools was expanded in the province to 98, representing 12% of all schools in Saskatchewan at that time.

School division amalgamations.

In 1990, the Minister of Education announced a review of School Finance and Governance in Saskatchewan, appointing Dr. Herve Langlois and Dr. Murray Scharf as consultants. They conducted an extensive review over the course of a year. In December 1991, they released the *School Finance and Governance Review Final Report*. In their final report they made a number of recommendations, including “that larger school divisions be established” (1991, p. 232) within certain established criteria, and “that a school council for each school be established within each larger school division” (p. 233). They noted that some of the duties of the council would include “religious education and language of instruction,” “consideration of educational and budgetary proposals for the school,” and to “review school level initiatives under the Adaptive Dimension of the Core Curriculum and locally-developed courses” (p. 233). Following the release of the report “there was no consensus on the recommendations” (Melvin, 2006, p. 54). Melvin added this further analysis:

Complicating this situation was the change in government in 1991. The new NDP [New Democratic Party] administration may have recognized the value of the work but had no political commitment to it. As well, the larger problems for the government centred on the budget deficit and delivery of health care which commanded a greater share of provincial resources. (p. 54)

Over the next decade in Saskatchewan, there was a period of voluntary school division amalgamations, albeit limited in scope.

In 2003, the Government of Saskatchewan created the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education and named Ray Boughen as Commissioner. Over a period of eight months, the “Boughen Commission,” as it is referred to, engaged the education community, municipal governments, provincial government, and public in a dialogue surrounding the key question, “What is the best way to finance K-12 education in Saskatchewan?” (Boughen, 2003, p. 12). The Commission released their final report in December 2003, *Finding the Balance* (Boughen, 2003). Among its many recommendations related to equity and educational financing, the Commission recommended that “the province establish a task force to recommend to the Minister of Learning revised Saskatchewan school division boundaries to increase equity among school divisions and maintain local responsiveness and accountability” (p. 109). As a result, the K-12 landscape in the province was soon to look significantly different.

In May 2004, the Minister of Learning established the Education Equity Task Force to recommend a map of restructured school division boundaries. The Task Force met with education stakeholders in Saskatchewan over a period of five months. Their final report, *Restructured Saskatchewan School Division Boundaries – Report of the Education Equity Task Force to the Minister of Learning* was submitted in November 2004 (Herron, Batters, & Klassen, 2004). The report noted that Government and school divisions had been working together on voluntary amalgamations for many years, however this resulted in few voluntary amalgamations. In their report, they recommended reducing the number of school divisions from 82 to 34 (p. 13). The Government of Saskatchewan eventually determined there would be 28 school divisions in Saskatchewan as of 2006. Decisions of this nature are highly political and it was not documented as to why 28 was determined as the number.

Community education foundational documents.

In 1999, Saskatchewan Education released the document *Parent and Community Partnerships in Education - Policy Framework*. This policy framework set an expectation for the provincial education system to build partnerships with parents and community as a way of schooling to support students, noting:

Effective parent and community involvement and partnerships are qualitatively different than a single program or activity. They require a committed perspective that permeates all activities in the school and school division. The overall attitude and culture is welcoming and inclusive. (Saskatchewan Education, 1999, p. 12)

In 2004, *Building Communities of Hope: Effective Practices for Meeting the Diverse Learning Needs of Children and Youth – Community Schools Policy and Conceptual Framework*, was revised to align with School^{PLUS} (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). The revised framework highlighted the importance of parent and community engagement in all areas of the school, including the learning program, and became relevant to all schools in the province as they learned to implement community education principles in their practices.

In 2005, the Department of Learning released the new high school policy framework, *Toward School^{PLUS}: Empowering High Schools as Communities of Learning and Support* (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005). Within this document, youth, family, and community engagement is the foundation for all the effective practices described to rethink teaching and learning, enhance the culture and climate of high schools, and improve educational outcomes.

The development of School Community Councils.

In January 2005, the Minister of Learning announced the formation of the Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel. The purpose of the Panel was to ensure that parents and community continued to have a strong voice in schools and in newly restructured school divisions. The Panel's task was to recommend a framework for "local accountability, community involvement and partnerships at the school level" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, np). The Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel released their final report to the Minister of Learning in May 2005. The report recommended the creation of a School Advisory Committee for each public school in the province whose purpose was to "encourage and facilitate parent and community engagement and develop shared responsibility for the learning success and well-being of all children and youth" (Melvin, Gange, & Shaddock, 2005, p. vi).

In November 2005, Saskatchewan Learning released *Toward School^{PLUS}: Policy Directions for School Community Councils – Provincial Response to the Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel, Final Report* (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005). In this report, the authors proposed a framework for SCCs to be formed by each public school in the province. The report authors were purposeful in using the term School Community Council as opposed to School Advisory Committee as recommended by the Local Accountability and Partnerships Panel, noting that "while the Panel used the term **School Advisory Committee**, **School Community Council** is being adopted in Government's Response to reflect the importance of parent and community engagement in the role of the new structures" (p. 2), and to "ensure[e] authentic engagement of parents and community in learning success" (p. 4). The report stated:

Saskatchewan’s educational community has been well aware of the value and importance of family and community engagement for some time and Saskatchewan Learning has promoted authentic parent and community engagement through policy and programs, such as the Community Schools Program and School^{PLUS}. However, these efforts have not ensured consistent practice across the province, nor have they ensured that parents and community members are involved in activities that will have the greatest impact on student learning. (p. 4)

The SCC purpose is to “develop shared responsibility for the learning success and well-being of all children and youth, and encourage and facilitate parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes” (p. 8). The document lays out the governance structure, operations, and composition of the SCC, highlighting a need for it to be representative of the community and to pay particular attention to First Nations representation. It also includes school staff on each SCC, with representation by one teacher as well as the school principal. The *Education Act* and *Regulations* were subsequently updated in 2006 to reflect these changes.

The SSBA (n.d.) created the document *School Community Councils: A Handbook for School Community Councils and Principals*. This handbook provides operational support to SCCs and principals, such as how to establish a constitution, conduct elections, communications, and evaluate their work. The document contains language that reaffirms the focus on the engagement of the SCC in the learning improvement plan.

An evaluation of School Community Councils.

An evaluation of SCCs was conducted in 2010, led by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education with the support of an advisory committee of education partners. The evaluation

methods included interviews with individuals involved in the policy development, design, and implementation of SCCs; three focus groups with SCC members; and a web-based survey with 1009 respondents. The evaluation focused on implementation of SCCs since their inception in 2006, and identified supports they were receiving from school divisions, communication matters, and their effectiveness as it related to supporting learning improvement plans.

In 2013, *The Education Regulations, 1986* was updated to address concerns raised in the 2010 evaluation. This update included attention to the former section that required the majority of SCC members to be parents of pupils who attend the school, so that this requirement no longer applies if the majority of the pupils are 18 years of age or older and do not live with a parent. The Regulations were also amended to grant Boards of Education the ability to give administrators responsibility for approval of the SCCs constitution. In 2015, *The Education Regulations, 1986* was amended and the term “learning improvement plan” was replaced by “school level plan” in response to concerns from school division personnel. The revised terminology is consistent with language in the provincial Education Sector Strategic Plan³.

Recent interest in School Community Councils.

In November 2016 Boards of Education in Saskatchewan adopted the following resolution at the SSBA annual general meeting:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Saskatchewan School Boards Association Executive establish a working advisory group to evaluate the effectiveness of the current School Community Council framework in supporting the educational needs of schools and their

³ The Education Sector Strategic Plan is a province-wide plan developed by education partners in Saskatchewan, approved by the 28 school boards and accepted by the Government of Saskatchewan. The plan sets priority actions to produce short and long-term outcome goals for education.

communities and make recommendations to the government based on its findings.

(Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2016)

At that same meeting, the Saskatchewan Minister of Education announced that Dan Perrins, a former Deputy Minister to the Premier and long-time civil servant in Saskatchewan, had been appointed to provide a paper to the Minister of Education on Educational Governance options. Included in his report, Perrins (2016) identified the critical role that SCCs provide for parents and community members to have a voice. He noted that “recent conversations suggest that boards have different relationships with their school community councils” (p. 17) as based upon a review of school division annual reports where varied levels of participation are documented. Perrins concluded that some school divisions actively engage SCCs in planning and development of priorities, while others merely present the plan to SCCs for review and feedback.

Following the Perrins report, the Saskatchewan Minister of Education appointed an Educational Governance Advisory Panel in 2017. The task of the Panel was to consult with educational partners and the public on education governance in Saskatchewan, and submit a report to the Minister of Education outlining the summary of the consultations. Among the findings in their final report, the Educational Governance Advisory Panel concluded that “there is opportunity for greater engagement with SCCs [School Community Councils] and students in planning and policy” (Educational Governance Advisory Panel, 2017, p. 29). In response to the Panel report, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education established an Education Governance Renewal Office in March 2017. Further to this recommendation, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education communicated their desire for a “strategy to develop consistent capacity for all School Community Councils” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2017, np).

Given that SCCs were created to reflect Saskatchewan's rich history in community education and youth, parent, and community engagement in schools, there was intentional effort to avoid using language such as "advisory" in establishing their mandate, and to highlight the value of authentic parent and community engagement within these structures. There was also purposeful intention to focus their mandate on improved student learning. As there is evidence from the 2010 SCC evaluation that SCCs are not consistently achieving their mandate, it is important that research include an analysis of critical elements that foster youth, parent, and community engagement in schools, and the systemic barriers and practices in K-12 education that may be getting in the way of SCCs achieving their full mandate. In what follows, I examine the literature supporting parent and community engagement in schools to determine elements that schools attend to that facilitate effective engagement. Attending to these critical elements has the potential to support school councils to effectively carry out their mandate related to improved student learning.

Parent and Community Engagement

In this section, I lay out the case for parent and community engagement and its correlation to improved student achievement. Prior to outlining the literature, I begin with an important concept for consideration that is beyond pure semantics as it relates to the use of the terms 'involvement' and 'engagement.' Comprehending this concept is important as one considers the literature and the frame that writers hold as they discuss parent engagement.

Involvement or engagement.

An important consideration in the discussion of parent and community engagement in schools is the importance of identifying and defining the language used. It is of note that I

conceptualize parent ‘involvement’ and parent ‘engagement’ differently, while the literature may use these terms synonymously. In my previous work (Amendt, 2008), I define **involvement** as:

students, parents and community members being invited to participate in the school. At this stage, the invitation is extended based on the needs and ideas of the school staff. The invitation is unidirectional and the agenda is determined by the school staff. (p. 3)

In contrast, I define **engagement** as:

students, parents, and community members are actively engaged in the life of the school and community. Together the school staff, students, parents, and community members create the agenda, make decisions, and take actions that affect many aspects of the school community. (p. 3)

This distinction between involvement and engagement is also made by others (Goodall, 2017, Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Pushor, 2010, Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005; Warren et al., 2009).

As I reflect on my analysis of the literature for my Master’s thesis (Amendt, 2008), in comparison to the literature I have read to prepare for this dissertation, I observe that there remains inconsistency in the use of these terms. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will rely on my definitions throughout to enable consistent reading of the literature review. If someone is using the term “involvement,” but I perceive they are referring to the concept of “engagement,” I will substitute the term engagement. If I perceive they are referring to the concept of “involvement,” as defined above, I will stay with the term involvement. Changes will be noted through my use of square brackets.

The case for parent and community engagement.

A body of literature in support of parent and community engagement in schools has emerged over the past five decades (Mapp, 2013). These studies demonstrate that engagement of parents and community members has a positive impact on student achievement. The literature also identifies important characteristics that enable this engagement, including school staff building relationships of trust with families, creating a welcoming school environment, examining their beliefs about parent and community engagement, and including parents and community in collaborative processes to focus on student achievement.

In their examination of research studies across the United States of America, Henderson & Mapp (2002) found:

Students with [engaged] parents, no matter what their income or background, were more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs; be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits; attend school regularly; have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school; and graduate and go on to postsecondary education. (p. 7)

Arising out of this extensive meta-analysis, Henderson and Mapp concluded that parent engagement ultimately leads to improved student achievement.

Using similar methodology for studies in the United Kingdom, See and Gorard (2015) and, Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) found strong support for parent engagement and its correlation to improved student outcomes. See and Gorard (2015) examined studies with claims that parent involvement caused improved educational outcomes for students. After their examination they concluded there “is considerable evidence that parent interest and involvement in their child’s

education are associated with, and appear in the correct sequence to cause, educational outcomes” (p. 13). In a similar style, through examining websites and databases for studies and interventions related to parent engagement in children’s learning, Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) concluded that “[parent] engagement has a large and positive impact on children’s learning” (p. 3). Their review included analyzing parent engagement interventions, approaches, and practices to identify the features of these interventions that support parent engagement and improve children’s outcomes. Among their findings was that a whole school approach to parent engagement in schools is required for parent engagement to be effective. The importance of training teachers for parent engagement, attending to cultural norms and diversity in communities, and developing reciprocal relationships between the home and school were also notable findings in their study. All of these studies continue to make the case for parent engagement, and identify important considerations or the conditions within which parent engagement must be situated, in order to be effective.

In a study of 35 urban elementary schools in Virginia (Kirby & DiPaola, 2011), teachers identified that “trust in students and parents...is a crucial characteristic that has been found to enhance learning” (p. 545). The study found that “trust in clients was strongly correlated with student achievement in reading and math,” noting that “in schools where teachers trust students and parents, students tend to achieve at higher levels” (p. 556). This study demonstrated how educators must attend to building trust relationships with parents, as a necessary precursor to achieving parent engagement required for improved student improvement.

The study also found that “community engagement was strongly correlated with academic optimism,” implying “that in schools where there are high levels of community engagement, there tends to be high levels of student achievement” (p. 557). Academic optimism

here refers to collective efficacy of the educators and the trust educators have in their students, joined with academic press, or having high expectations of students. The study suggested that “practitioners may need to examine their beliefs and attitudes” (p. 555) when it comes to engaging families and communities. The concepts of beliefs and assumptions of educators, building trust relationships, and parent engagement leading to improved student achievement are common concepts that emerge in the body of literature surrounding parent engagement.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) conducted a literature review to verify the claims that parent involvement, parent support, and family education had a positive impact on student achievement. This study is particularly interesting as it appears the authors approached the research looking at what I would describe as parent involvement activities (what the authors described as school-led interventions), yet they came to find that it was parent engagement (what the authors described as parent-led spontaneous activities) that in fact had impact on student achievement. In their conclusion they note the importance of “distinguish[ing] between research on spontaneously occurring parent [engagement] in their children’s education and research on attempts to intervene to enhance such [engagement]” (p. 84). Spontaneous parent [engagement] was characterized as being voluntary, or parent-led, which among other activities included “taking part in school management and governance” (p. 85), while school-led interventions, such as establishing parenting programs, were often designed to solve a perceived problem. What Desforges and Abouchaar found is that the evidence for school-led interventions is weak, however spontaneous parent [engagement] “has a significant effect on children’s achievement and adjustment even after all other factors (such as social class, maternal education and poverty) have been take out of the equation between children’s aptitudes and their achievement” (p. 86). While using different language than I have outlined, I perceive Desforges & Abouchaar to be

strongly making the argument for parent engagement as opposed to parent involvement to reap the benefits of improved student achievement. Desforges & Abouchaar also introduced the concepts of educators' beliefs and assumptions, and deficit theorizing by educators where they think of parent involvement activities as intended to fix perceived problems of parents, rather than considering parents as an asset, and powerful partners who bring knowledge. These concepts will be further discussed in this literature review.

Further affirmation of the impact of parent engagement can be found in the work of Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy (2009). They examined three case studies of parent and community engagement in schools: the Logan Square Neighborhood Association in Chicago, Illinois; the Camino Nuevo Charter Academy in Los Angeles, California; and the Quitman Street Community School in Newark, New Jersey. What they found is that “there is some evidence that the collaborations and parent engagement efforts we studied have led to gains in student learning in these three cases” (pp. 2237-2238). These schools used approaches that included building relationships between parents and educators, focusing on leadership development of parents, and an intentional effort to bridge the power and culture gap between parents and educators.

There remains strong evidence to support the claims that parent engagement has a positive impact on student achievement as identified through the research above. It is also clear that a discussion of parent engagement must include a surfacing of educators' beliefs and assumptions about parents, and include a strategy for educators to build trust relationships with parents. In particular, attending to the gap in power and culture between educators and parents is noted. Rejecting deficit theorizing, and instead viewing parents as important partners in education, also emerges in the literature. Finally, understanding the difference between parent

involvement and parent engagement is necessary so that engagement activities are put into place to lead to improved student achievement. The SCC mandate, to engage parents for improved student achievement, is premised on literature such as I have outlined here. Attending to these concepts in an evaluation of SCCs is therefore relevant.

Evolving Research and Practice in Parent Engagement

While the case for parent engagement is clear, the approaches to parent engagement in schools are situated within varying understandings of the concept. Earlier I provided definitions of parent involvement and parent engagement, to distinguish these two concepts, often misconstrued as one and the same. The interpretation and application of varied understandings of parent engagement, and the beliefs about parents and community and their place in schools, results in varied models or approaches to parent engagement across schools. I outline some of the models below, and identify how the practice varies and has evolved over time.

Community engagement.

Parent engagement is often linked with community engagement. Paulo Freire (1970, 1973) stands out as a leader in this regard, and I have previously placed my own work (Amendt, 2008) in alignment with his explanation of community education. Freire's work is significant in that he challenged the typical models of education and facilitated the engagement of communities in new ways. As a community developer, he identified that the principles of community development work to create a new philosophy of education upon which community education is based. True community education authentically engages community within the school. A reciprocal relationship of respect is created where schools respond to community-identified needs and work with communities in non-judgmental ways. Through Freire's work in

Brazil, he successfully engaged marginalized families and community members in improving their communities.

Goodall (2018) explored the concept of parent engagement alongside Freire's work, drawing important underpinnings for consideration – considerations of power and relationships, educators' beliefs about parents, a model of partnership between school staff and parents. Goodall argued that while models of schooling have evolved, the relationships with families are stuck in an earlier paradigm. Still today, schools and educators view themselves as the experts, the holders of power, and the decision makers, while parents are positioned as voiceless and powerless in this paradigm, with the job of complying with the direction provided by the school and educators.

A notion of parent and community engagement, in line with Freirean thought, forms the foundation for the model and mandate of School Community Councils (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005). It is also the foundation of the Community Schools model in Saskatchewan, which I describe next.

Community schools.

Furman (2002) described the terrain of school community literature and helped to distinguish between different concepts of parent and community engagement, some in which schools essentially remain the same but more services are accessed and available from the school, and other models which are more transformational in nature as educators are asked to work with parents in new and different ways. Furman argued that the literature tends to focus on two camps: school-community connections and school-as community. Supporters of school-community connections are concerned with the relationship between the school and surrounding

community. Shared governance, coordinated services, and community schools fall in this category. School-as community tends to focus on the school as a community unto itself. Professional learning communities, democratic community – social justice, and students’ sense of community in schools – fall in this category.

Furman (2002) proposed a more “ecological model” which incorporates aspects of both categories. Within this ecological model, the relationship between school and community is so organically intertwined and reciprocal that it is impossible to discuss without considering these linkages. The Community Schools model in Saskatchewan aligns with Furman’s notion of an ecological model, where school is the hub of the community, where community partners and interagency supports such as health and social services are offered and available, and where a learning community is created of staff, students, parents, and the community who work together in the interests of the school community (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004).

Dryfoos (2002) surveyed the field and collected 49 published and unpublished research documents that fit into the broadest definition of full-service community schools. According to Dryfoos, the model of full-service community school is primarily about community agencies partnering with schools to overcome barriers to learning. Her documented benefits of community schools included improved student achievement and attendance, reduction in high-risk behaviours, increased parent involvement, improved family functioning, increased access to services for families, and safer communities.

The Coalition for Community Schools similarly described this model, with schools as the hub of the community, and where schools engage community partners so they are not left alone in the work with students and families. The Coalition for Community Schools (2003) released a research report in which the impact of 20 Community School initiatives across the United States

was analyzed, with a particular focus on outcomes that directly affected student learning. They also found that Community Schools improve student achievement, have increased parent engagement, help schools to function effectively, and add vitality to communities.

Constantino (2003) described the school as the center of the community approach and outlined the various models used by schools in the United States for this approach, including Community Schools and community learning centres. In these models, schools establish partnerships with business, human service agencies, and community groups to address identified needs. These approaches are primarily a full-service community schools model where the vision is one of the school as hub of the community and where community-based agencies are brought in to support students and families. Constantino, who values the importance of school-family relationships, has described strategies such as asset mapping employed by schools to facilitate meaningful parent engagement, thus moving to a model beyond that of the full-service community school model. With asset mapping, “the individual capabilities within a community” are surveyed (Constantino, 2003, p. 26). Upon identifying these assets, the school community can then mobilize them to improve outcomes. McKnight & Kretzman (1993) pointed out that asset mapping is conducted within a belief system held by those leading the process. It may be conducted with a view to identify the needs, deficiencies, and problems in a community in order to address these issues, or it may be conducted with a clear commitment to discover the community’s capacities and assets. Conducted within a belief system of the latter, asset mapping is not simply about needs identification, nor is it about rescuing families, but rather it is about honouring and mobilizing youth, family, and community assets – their strengths, resources, knowledge, beliefs, values, traditions and cultures. Amendt & Bousquet (2006) described how Princess Alexandra Community School utilized the approach advocated for by McKnight &

Kretzman, where educators rejected deficit theorizing and began working with families in a strength-based fashion, which ultimately led to improved student achievement.

In Saskatchewan, Community Schools emerged onto the scene in 1980. They were created by the provincial government as a means to address urban Aboriginal poverty (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). Eleven Community Schools were designated in the core neighbourhoods of Saskatoon, Regina, and Prince Albert. By 1996, there were 26 designated Community Schools in Saskatchewan. When the province launched School^{PLUS} in 2002, the provincial Government also increased the number of designated Community Schools to 98, representing 12% of provincial schools in Saskatchewan at that time. As previously noted, the model was intended to include aspects of the full-schools model, and to create a learning community of staff, students, parents, and community who worked together in new ways to transform the school and community. Over its tenure in Saskatchewan, however, the model has more often been implemented with a full-service community school or interagency approach in mind, seeing schools as places to engage other human services agencies and partners to support students and families in need. When implemented in this fashion, the model is not reflective of parent and community engagement as envisioned by Freire or set out in policy (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004), but rather parent involvement at best, based upon deficit-theorizing about students and families.

Through changes to the education funding formula over the years, Community Schools are no longer a distinct budget line item, but rather have been included in a budget line that is referred to as Supports for Learning. Since this change in about 2009, many boards of education have removed the staffing supports, such as the role of Community School Coordinator, that were previously a required component of a Community School. While some school divisions

retain the Community School designation and model, many have moved away from this model and removed this designation. As a result, in recent years, there has been relative silence in the education sector regarding Community Schools or community education.

Epstein's model of parent involvement.

Beyond the community schools models, historically, perhaps the most popular and widespread conceptualizations of parent involvement have been promoted by Joyce Epstein. She is credited with the requirement in the United States for school districts and states to organize parent involvement programs and communicate with parents about student achievement (Epstein, 2005), as established in the *No Child Left Behind Act*. According to Epstein (1987), parent involvement focuses on how schools assist all families by helping them create home environments that will enable them to support children as students. This support may include school and classroom volunteer programs, workshops for families on how to parent, nurture, and support their children, reading nights, and school board councils. While Epstein does describe a role for parents in decision making, this represents a small part of her framework, in what is otherwise predominantly parent involvement notions, including parents supporting school events, and doing things at home to support the learning of students at school. As such, I believe her work is appropriately described as parent involvement, not parent engagement.

Epstein's work has been widely used in parent involvement efforts, along with her framework to assist schools in building partnerships. Epstein (1995) outlined six types of involvement and caring: (1) parenting (assist every family with establishing home environments to support children as students), (2) communicating (design successful forms of communication between home and school in regards to school programs and children's progress), (3) volunteering (create and recruit parent help and support), (4) learning at home (provide material

and concepts about how to help students at home with school work and other curricular decisions), (5) decision making (incorporate parents in school decisions and creating parent leaders and representatives), and, (6) collaborating with community (identify and incorporating resources and services from the community to increase school programs, family practices, and student learning and growth).

Critiquing the Epstein model, Greene (2013) noted that many studies and parent involvement models fail to acknowledge how families define parent involvement, the roles and responsibilities of parents and teachers, the resources parents possess, or how schools view certain families through a deficit lens. Within this conceptual model, race is absent, and the model focuses on how parents need to work with the schools. Further, it does not focus on the roles and responsibilities the school has to the students' families. Greene argued that Epstein's model surmises the educational field to be an equal playing field between families and schools. It does not acknowledge the roles that ideology and hegemony play in decision-making and policies. Bower and Griffin (2011) explained that the typical definition of parent involvement includes activities in the school and at home including such things as volunteering at the school, communicating with teachers, assisting with homework, and attending school events such as performances or parent-teacher conferences. They argued that, viewed through this lens, African American and Latino families demonstrate low rates of parent involvement. Typical definitions of parent involvement require investments of time and money from parents, and those who may not be able to provide these resources are deemed uninvolved. Lopez & Stoelting (2010) agreed and similarly critiqued Epstein's work as it relates to parent involvement and Latino families. They noted that "her typology also engenders culture- and class-specific renderings of involvement that not only privilege particular involvement acts but render marginalized parents

as “uninvolved,” when they fail to perform them” (p. 26). Two strong critiques of Epstein’s model include: 1) the fact that it is a parent involvement model, rather than one of parent engagement, and, 2) that it does not surface educators’ beliefs and assumptions about parents, including parents from different cultures and socio-economic circumstances than their own.

Without such an examination of beliefs and assumptions, teachers can engage in deficit theorizing. Deficit theorizing occurs when people “blame the victims and collectively see the locus of the problem as either lack of inherent ability, lack of cultural appropriateness or limited resources; in short, some deficiency at best, a ‘pathology’ at worst” (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003, p. 6). Educators blame the family, community, or the culture for challenges faced by students, and develop beliefs that families do not have the skills and capacities required to help their children (Mapp, Carver, & Lander, 2017). In the minds of educators who deficit theorize, cultural differences, limited English language skills by parents, or effects of poverty, become impossible barriers to overcome. Left unchecked, these conscious or unconscious racist discourses are continually reproduced leaving educators blaming those oppressed for their situation (Noguera, 2003; Schick & St. Denis, 2003), rather than addressing their own racist thinking, or engaging in a staff and/or school level discussion about power and privilege.

Johnson (n.d.) described critically responsive parent [engagement] practices that welcome parents’ stories and experiences in relation to schools, and also challenge educators to address important questions about the roles they play in promoting school practices and policies that continuously oppress parents and students of color. Capturing the parents’ voices and lived realities illustrated a rare depiction of parents and communities’ relationships and barriers with schools. Johnson appeared to align with Freire’s stance (1970, 1973), noting that critically

responsive parent [engagement] practices can provide healthy, corroborating, supportive, and emancipatory ways to engage and to connect families and communities to schools.

Further, scholarship that deepens our understanding of critically responsive [parent engagement] practices in K-12 schools which have demonstrated success with working with families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may offer models for programs, schools, and colleges dedicated to building two-way relationships with parents (e.g., parents take on leadership roles and contribute to curricular decisions). Therefore, schools need to create robust relationships and partnerships with parents and community members. These relationships can serve as potential avenues for discussing pressing and difficult issues such as race. (Johnson, n.d.)

Revisiting the Epstein model is important as her work has been widely used to inform both historical and current parent involvement efforts, both in policy development and practice. As just outlined, however, as the field has progressed, current researchers have found her work to be absent on important considerations for parent engagement efforts, including race, class, and bias. Epstein's work is also situated in a parent involvement framework, where teacher knowledge is seen to be expert and the school's agenda is prioritized, as opposed to parent engagement frameworks such as identified in the mandate of School Community Councils, where the emphasis is on shared responsibility for teaching and learning.

Parent engagement around the globe.

Research into parent engagement extends over five decades (Mapp, 2013) and is globally situated. To highlight key contributions by influential scholars worldwide, I have surveyed researchers who are influencing thinking in the field of parent engagement and I have examined

the contributions they are making. These researchers embrace the tenet of engagement rather than involvement, and advocate for engagement that is pervasive, rather than single acts of engagement. What follows is not intended to be an exhaustive list of researchers in the field, but a demonstration of the global conversation surrounding parent engagement.

In the United States of America, Henderson & Mapp (2002) are noted for extensive research in this area, in terms of both meta-analyses of the research to foreground the positive impact of parent engagement on educational outcomes for students, as well as for offering practical strategies and ideas for educators interested in pursuing parent engagement in schools (Henderson et al., 2007). Their work is strongly related to concepts of building trust relationships, surfacing beliefs and assumptions of educators, and creating strong family-school partnerships.

Mapp (2013) outlined a dual-capacity framework for family-school partnerships with five process conditions: 1. That family engagement is linked to learning. 2. That family engagement is relational and requires building relationships of trust and respect with families. 3. That family engagement is developmental and based upon a belief that all families have strengths and knowledge that schools can benefit from, as opposed to being seen by schools as deficits. 4. That family engagement is collaborative, meaning the relationship between the parents and the school is reciprocal where both partners receive benefit. 5. That family engagement is interactive and should be fun. Bryk's (2010) research affirmed the importance of school staff building relationships of trust with families. In his organizing schools for improvement model, Bryk identified strong parent-community-school ties as one of five essential supports for school improvement. Bryk described how with variables such as race and class and the inequities that occur with students from vulnerable and marginalized families, strong leadership is required to

build trust relationships with these families, as is a belief that vulnerable and marginalized students can succeed.

Constantino (2003) focused on the importance of creating a positive school culture for family engagement to thrive. To make the argument for understanding how school culture impacts family engagement, Constantino described his own experience walking into a school as the new principal. He described an unwelcoming physical environment, and his first sight of students waiting to see the principal for discipline matters. He further described meeting the school front office administrative staff who did not greet him, but rather appeared busy and disinterested with him as a guest. He summarized the experience this way:

Welcome to our broken-down school where we hope we will make you feel as if you are imposing on us. Please take a seat in the mis-matched uncomfortable plastic chairs while we decide if we are going to help you or not. (p. 17)

Assessing school culture and creating a welcoming school environment are important considerations (Amendt, 2008). Constantino's work affirmed that parent engagement cannot take place or thrive in an unwelcoming school environment.

In more recent work, Constantino (2016) identified the promotion of family efficacy, what Constantino defines as the belief of parents that they can help to produce positive educational outcomes with their child, as an important consideration for schools. When educators believe that all parents, regardless of race, colour, creed or economic status, have efficacy and can support student learning, Constantino claimed that this belief reattaches families to student learning and builds relationships between the school and families. Embedded in this notion of promoting family efficacy is a role for educators to move beyond such tasks as posting

homework assignments, or hosting a math night, in favour of intentionally reaching out to all families to build a trust relationship, and engage in dialogue with families about student learning. Constantino described home visits, for example, as a way for educators to demonstrate their schoolwide commitment to outreach with parents and community for such relationship-building.

In the United Kingdom, Goodall (2017) has done extensive research into parent engagement in schools. While her work echoes important concepts already described by others, she additionally described parent engagement as moving beyond the concept of engaging parents within the school, to create a definition inclusive also of all the ways that parents engage in their children's learning in out of school times and places. While this concept is broad, Goodall primarily described it in terms of "care," as well as the "home learning environment" (p. 76). Care refers to the emotional attachment that parents have with their child, including wanting the best for their child. Goodall argued this is the reason parents send their children to school, and begin the relationship between home and school. In terms of home learning environment, Goodall identified these as all of the learning opportunities created by parents for their children that occur outside the school. These opportunities could be such activities as taking their child to the library, or attending a cultural celebration. With this approach, she foregrounded how parent engagement occurs beyond the school landscape, as it is situated in an authentic partnership between educators and parents, understanding the role each plays to support student success. For Goodall, this means not relegating parents to a subservient role to educators, but honouring the role of parents in children's learning. "While it is true that school staff are indeed professionals, their area of expertise is schooling, not the totality of education and certainly not of learning overall" (p. 78). This claim is supported in Pushor's body of work as described next.

In Canada, Pushor (2001, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2018) has conducted research and written extensively in the area of parent engagement. Her work challenges the positioning of parents that exists on the school landscape, and focuses on the importance of educators to surface their beliefs and assumptions about parents that may be harmful to building authentic relationships with parents. In tracing her research into parent engagement, Pushor (2012) identified, in her early work, the positioning of parents on the school landscape as a problem to meaningful parent engagement. She observed schools in the role of protectorate (2001), asking parents to participate in the school's agenda, and in activities at the school, in ways they prescribed. She outlined the difference in critical attributes between involvement and engagement (2005) during her research at Princess Alexandra Community School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where she observed meaningful relationships between school staff and parents, and reciprocity in the relationship between school staff and parents. Her research from that point progressed to identifying "parent knowledge" (2010) as a critical attribute of parent engagement, in which parent knowledge is honoured and placed alongside educator knowledge in the interests of student achievement. Pushor (2015) contended that understanding parent knowledge includes an understanding that parent knowledge is situated off the school landscape in nurturing parent-child relationships, in cultural learning, and in other home, family, and community learning. Pushor (2013) described this knowledge as being foregrounded within a "curriculum of parents," in which educators learn to identify, honour, and situate parent knowledge alongside their own expertise in order for authentic parent engagement to occur. Pushor's (2018) more recent work examines the process of moving parent engagement from a random act, to a systematic model within schools and the education sector more broadly.

My own work (Amendt, 2008) aligns with the work of Pushor as I also agree that examining educators' beliefs and assumptions, and building trust relationships with parents are the starting places for authentic engagement. My experience at Princess Alexandra Community School also solidified my position, as it was singularly the staff rejecting deficit theorizing and building new trust relationships with parents that resulted in significant student achievement, over a relatively short period of time. Finally, as an Indigenous person, I have come to see how community education practices resonate with Indigenous ways of knowing. It is in this space where educators can incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing by utilizing community education practices in which optimism can be created for successful outcomes for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan and, indeed, an improved equitable system of education for all learners.

The body of research in parent engagement continues to evolve over time. Researchers began to differentiate between involvement and engagement, noting that it is only with engagement that student outcomes are positively impacted. Researchers began to identify parent engagement as occurring on and off the school landscape. Researchers began to honour parent knowledge and situate it alongside educator knowledge to inform parent engagement that is reciprocal, relational, and occurring in support of student success. This evolution moves the field from a schoolcentric (Lawson, 2003) model to a familycentric (Pushor, 2015) approach, and similarly moves parent engagement from a random act to a systematic practice in schools. It is evident that parent engagement and models to implement parent engagement in schools are occurring around the globe. Parent engagement research continues, and scholars identify and evolve important considerations for parent engagement based on their understandings. Concepts such as building trust relationships, shifting school culture and environment, and interrogating

educators' beliefs and assumptions about parent engagement are important concepts for schools and jurisdictions to consider when implementing parent engagement approaches.

School Councils Research

As the case for parent engagement has been extended and enriched by new understandings, it calls for an examination of the research on school councils. Stelmach (2016) reviewed Canadian studies on school councils and found that these “studies have shown school councils to be ineffective at encouraging parents to participate in educational decision-making, increasing parent [engagement] in schools, or helping parents develop confidence in the educational arena” (p. 273). She concluded that the challenge identified with school councils is the marginalized positioning of parents in the school, and the beliefs and practices of educators and school administrators that limit the role of parents and the school council to, at best, advisory in nature. Stelmach offered optimism for school councils in the work of Pushor (2012) where honouring parents' expertise may provide possibility for increased engagement for school councils.

A sense of a mandate not achieved.

There have been studies undertaken in Canada that have reviewed the status of school councils. What follows surfaces three such studies and identifies the purposes for the studies, as well as key findings.

Stelmach & Preston (2008) conducted a study of two SCCs in Saskatchewan to identify the experiences of the principals and School Community Council members a year following implementation of the SCCs. In their interviews with SCC members, they found identify confusion over parents' role in the SCC, noting that most had an “incomplete understanding

about the purpose of the SCC” (p. 63). In terms of the supports they received, the SCC members found the SCC handbook “overwhelming” (p. 64). In discussion with the principals of the two schools, the researchers noted that “in practice the principals did not strongly identify with the policy vision of having parents directly contribute to the Learning Improvement Plan” (p. 65). In an article considering the context of international examples of educational reform through school councils, Preston (2009) detailed political contexts in countries that have given rise to decentralized governing bodies such as school councils. The political context in Saskatchewan’s case is not dissimilar as it relates to the creation of SCCs, however, as Preston notes, the Saskatchewan model is an advisory body “with limited power” as compared to international school councils that are “powerful decision-making bodies with far-reaching responsibilities” (p. 41). Given the political context for their creation, within a construct of limited power, it is not surprising to find identity confusion of SCC members, and the mismatch between principals’ vision for SCCs and the policy vision (Preston, 2009; Stelmach & Preston, 2008).

In the 2009-10 school-year, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education conducted an evaluation of SCCs to determine their effectiveness and the success of implementation after three years of these new structures. One of the findings was “that a move to a more formal structure and way of operating...intimidates many people” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 5). The study also found that SCCs “are making a difference in achieving learning success and wellbeing through LIP [Learning Improvement Plan] initiatives” (p. 5), however it appears they require more support to understand their role in this regard. The study found that areas for improvement included a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of SCCs, as well as “boards of education and school division staff acting on the advice” (p. 5) provided by the councils. This study suggested inconsistency in implementation of the mandate of SCCs across

the province and that further supports are required at school division, school, and SCC levels to foster full implementation of the SCC mandate.

Carlson (2013) examined the relationships at play in three Ontario school councils in order to determine the effectiveness of school councils in achieving their mandate. The author identified important factors which can impact the effectiveness of school councils, including the leadership styles of the principal and Chair, the context of the school community, and the dynamics of power relationships at play. Among the tensions described was a “business-like approach to cover agenda items” which left parents on the school council unable to “establish a depth of interpersonal relationships with each other to develop an understanding of the interests and concerns of other school council members” (p. 107). Paying attention to not only the structure, but also the environment and relationships at play, and creating a shared sense of purpose appear to be important elements in creating the conditions for school council success.

Despite the extensive research evidence on youth, parent, and community engagement in schools and the promise it holds for improved student outcomes, there continue to be only “random acts of parent engagement” (Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010) occurring in schools across the globe. Though it is evident in the legislative and/or regulatory or policy frameworks that school councils in Canada have some responsibility for improved student learning, is the school council simply another random act of parent engagement? If not, how are school councils being authentically engaged in supporting student achievement?

Family school partnerships are intended to be at play in the structures of school councils. In fact, it is assumed in the legislative and regulatory frameworks that these partnerships will work effectively. Research has determined that this is not always the case (Carlson, 2013; Preston, 2009; Preston & Stelmach, 2008; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011), and

therefore the mandate for school councils is not being achieved. A body of literature affirms the importance of family-school partnerships and describes elements of these relationships that enable them to work effectively together (Amendt, 2008; Bryan, 2005; Bryan, Griffin, Kim, Griffin, & Young, 2019; Bryan & Henry, 2012; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Mapp, 2013; Pushor & the Parent Engagement Collaborative, 2013; Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005). This partnership approach is briefly discussed next.

Business approach vs. partnership approach.

Researchers have demonstrated that, in order for school staff to form effective family-school partnerships, the staff must hold a number of foundational beliefs: parents and community members can support student achievement; families have strengths that can support teaching and learning; building trust between school staff, parents, and community members is essential; and a trusting relationship fosters shared decision-making between school staff, parents, and community members in matters that affect the school and community.

While there are varied levels of supports to school councils in Canada, provided by some provinces/territories as well as associations, most often these supports include resource materials about the operation of a school council (i.e. effective meeting management, agenda setting, role of Chair, etc.), rather than about the foundational beliefs which underpin school councils. While no doubt these supports are useful in helping school council members understand the logistics of the operations, they do not necessarily support school councils in achieving the mandate of engaging families and communities in student learning nor do they address the development of beliefs required for successfully facilitating parent and community engagement. A focus on logistics can lead to the SCC simply being too “business-like” (Carlson, 2013) or “intimidating” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011), as opposed to building trust and collaboration

through shared decision-making on initiatives linked to learning (Mapp, 2013). Such a structure may also perpetuate hegemonic notions of family and deficit thinking about race and class (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Greene, 2013; Lopez & Stoelting, 2010), or worse, blame marginalized or vulnerable parents or families for not engaging with the SCC (Bishop et al., 2003; Johnson, n.d.; Mapp, Carver, & Lander, 2017; Noguera, 2003; Schick & St. Denis, 2003). A SCC may then serve to disengage parents and community members, working contrary to their purpose as described in the legislative and/or regulatory framework.

In contrast, the parent engagement guidebook created by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (2012) is an example of an effective resource for school councils, as it focuses on the mandate of school councils – parent engagement. It contains practical tips and examples of ways to engage parents, as well as strategies to support ongoing parent engagement such as through developing an annual planning calendar, forming welcoming committees, and providing childminding and transportation to parents to attend school council meetings. The writers of this document acknowledge that parent engagement can occur beyond the formal structures of a school council or parent involvement committee and they highlight examples to do this, such as keeping the library open for parents, or providing access to a computer and internet. A few examples are provided for parents to engage, such as organizing workshops with parent and community members as presenters. Finally, the writers also describe the importance of organizing parents and the community and getting parent voice. To that end, a sample parent survey is included to measure parent satisfaction with services provided, gauge parent attitude about the school, assess the sense of belonging, identify community issues, and determine the parents' needs and interests to plan for future programs and initiatives. The document also includes information on how to analyze survey data. A document of this nature, created by the

educational leaders in the province, the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, sends a strong statement that these educational leaders believe in and value the role of parents in the education system, and that they understand the impact that partnerships with parents can have on improved student achievement.

To move a SCC from a business approach to a partnership approach requires intentional work from school staff to build partnerships with parents. Bryan & Henry (2012) proposed a seven-stage partnership model for school staff to build partnerships with parents. Such a model could be used just as effectively by a SCC. “The seven stages include (a) preparing to partner, (b) assessing needs and strengths, (c) coming together, (d) creating shared vision and plan, (e) taking action, (f) evaluating and celebrating progress, and (g) maintaining momentum” (p. 411). While Bryan & Henry’s writing was intended for school staff, these same reflective questions could be asked by a SCC that includes staff and parents. For example, in stage one, “preparing to partner,” the authors identify the tasks that include becoming familiar with the diversity of cultural groups in the community, and using research-based evidence to demonstrate to school personnel the value of school-family-community partnerships on student achievement. The reflective question they offered is, “What are your beliefs, attitudes, and values about families?” (p. 412). This road map can be very helpful to school personnel to consider as they develop and sustain school-family-community partnerships broadly, as well as in the more focused structure of a SCC, as described next.

Henderson et al. (2007) adopted a ‘practical’ approach to creating family-school partnerships. The authors articulated the necessity “for school staff to hold a set of positive beliefs about family engagement” (p. 27) as a starting place to building effective partnerships with families. A tool, provided in their resource, intended to help a school staff determine where

their current practices are on a progression of four versions of partnership could be used with a SCC just as effectively: (a) fortress school, (b) come-if-we-call school, (c) open-door school, and (d) partnership school. In their rubric, the authors identified characteristics in each of the four versions of partnership regarding building relationships, linking to learning, addressing differences, supporting advocacy, and, sharing power (pp. 14-19). A SCC could utilize this tool and undertake an activity for the SCC members to individually complete the tool, and then collectively review and discuss their scores to understand where the SCC members see the school on the progression of fortress to partnership school. When used, this tool can lead to a productive and focused conversation on the data, and identify areas of strength to build upon, and areas in the school practices that require improvement in order to move further along the progression. Situated in a supportive environment such as this, the relationship and conditions can be put in place to facilitate SCCs to more likely be effective in carrying out their mandate, and more likely to feel supported to engage in conversations about teaching and learning.

Summarizing the Literature

I began this Chapter by identifying how the creation of School Community Councils was situated in an important context – during an upswing of community education activity in Saskatchewan, as well as during a time of forced school division amalgamations. SCCs were also created with an intentional effort to move schools further along the continuum of engagement to include parents in the real work of schools – teaching and learning. To demonstrate this intent, the province rejected an “advisory” role for SCCs.

Through this literature review, I highlighted an important consideration when reviewing parent engagement literature, that being to distinguish between parent involvement as opposed to parent engagement concepts. Five decades of literature continue to make the case for parent

engagement, noting that it is engagement, and not involvement, that produces the strong correlation to improved student achievement. Jurisdictions around the globe have implemented various models to enact parent engagement, including full-service community schools, and partnerships between the school and families. These models are implemented within a paradigm, or a belief system that influences the practices that arise from them. This belief system either positions parents as assets or as problems to be fixed. Understanding this positioning foregrounds teachers' considerations of parents' race, privilege, class, and surfaces beliefs and assumptions of educators as to how they afford parents a place and a role on the school landscape. Finally, the beliefs and assumptions of educators have significant implications for the implementation of School Community Councils and their opportunity to achieve their true mandate.

Chapter 2-I

Research Methodology

This study is an evaluation of SCCs, primarily related to whether or not they are fulfilling their mandate for youth, parent, and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes. The study is a response to a mandate provided by Saskatchewan's boards of education to review SCCs. It includes a theoretical perspective grounded in Indigenous methodologies through a qualitative evaluation research design in order to end with a product that provides education partners in Saskatchewan with fulsome findings upon which they can draw conclusions about effectiveness of SCCs in implementing their mandate, and/or implementing change. The evaluation research in this study sheds light on the current state of SCCs in Saskatchewan, and provides recommendations that can be implemented to chart the course for SCCs over the coming years.

This collaborative evaluation research study engaged approximately 120 participants who provided important perspectives on the state of SCCs in Saskatchewan. All 120 participants however, shared one attribute – they are all currently engaged in SCCs in the province from a variety of vantage points. A critical analysis of SCCs is therefore incomplete without hearing from the voices of those who are currently disengaged from SCCs in the province. Additional interviews were conducted with non-SCC parents, Indigenous, visible minority, and newcomers, in order to undertake a critical analysis of SCCs. When taken together, a more complete picture of SCCs in Saskatchewan is presented for discussion.

Research Collaboration

Just as the *Task Force and Public Dialogue on the Role of the School* described a host of “tectonic factors” that were having a significant impact on schools at the time (Tymchak, 2001), it seems evident that “tectonic factors,” both political and educational, are at play in our current provincial education context as well. In view of a resolution adopted at the SSBA annual general meeting in November 2016 to evaluate the effectiveness of the current School Community Council framework in supporting the educational needs of schools and their communities, the interest from the now complete Educational Governance Advisory Panel in SCCs, the ambitious goals of the Education Sector Strategic Plan, and the interest of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education to develop consistent capacity for all SCCs, a review of the effectiveness and impact of SCCs in Saskatchewan, was both warranted and timely. Research can be “a political tool” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 25), and evaluation purposes can include empowering stakeholders, developing learning organizations, creating forums for democratic dialogue about educational policy, and enhancing practice (Mark, 2009). As school boards in Saskatchewan publicly committed to a review of SCCs, it was important that this evaluation attended to these interests, and was conducted in a collaborative manner with the Saskatchewan School Boards Association.

This evaluation reflects collaborative research between me as researcher, and the SSBA. Collaborative evaluation, or participatory evaluation, is relational, bringing together the evaluator and stakeholders to produce findings. Patton’s (1986, 1997) utilization-focused evaluation emphasized close collaboration with those who will use the findings. This approach ensured “that the evaluation is in response to their needs and produces information that they can and will actually use” (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004, p. 51).

The potential for process use, in addition to use of findings, is enhanced as evaluators bring evaluation logic knowledge and skill and standards of professional practice to the table, whereas nonevaluator stakeholders bring their knowledge of the evaluand and the context within which it is to be implemented. Evaluation questions and methods are jointly decided in this context. (Levin-Rozalis, Rosenstein, & Cousins, 2009, p. 204)

The SSBA Executive Director was consulted as part of the process to gain approval for the scope of the research, including the research questions and methods. The SSBA Executive Director also provided guidance and support throughout this collaborative research. Further, the SSBA Executive participated in this study, and were provided updates at their Executive meetings throughout the research. Finally, from a political perspective, the SSBA Executive supported the engagement of education partners in this process, adding credibility to the study, and ultimately supporting implementation of the recommendations of the evaluation. My doctoral committee comprises educational leaders in Saskatchewan who provided scholarly and practical guidance and support, as well as challenged me throughout the research within this collaborative approach. Such an approach required me as researcher to effectively use good communication skills and negotiation to act as the conduit between the interests of the SSBA, the expectations of my doctoral committee, as well as my own interests in the topic, while responsibly carrying out the research in an ethical manner.

Indigenous Framework Theory

As an Indigenous researcher, it is important that this research study was situated within a context that respects and reflects who I am as Métis, and was carried out in a way that honours Indigenous approaches. Indigenous framework theory provides the foundation that describes this in an appropriate way. Indigenous knowledge is valid in its own right. It is derived from

“peoples and collectives and related to place” (Battiste, 2013, p. 74). Indigenous theory is based on values such as respect and reciprocity. “The term ‘respect’ is consistently used by Indigenous peoples to underscore the significance of our relationships and humanity. Through respect the place of everyone and everything in the universe is kept in balance and harmony” (Smith, 1999, p. 120). Indigenous knowledge is collectivist orientated and based upon place and relationships (Battiste, 2013; Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999). Indigenous theory is highly contextual. It respects and recognizes that knowledge is connected to place, thereby adding credibility and validity to the knowledge. “Stories connected to place are both about collectivist tribal orientation, and they are located within our personal knowing and conceptual framework of the world” (Kovach, 2009, p. 62).

Stories as “data” are important, and one key to collecting these data is “hearing” the stories. ...Hearing stories means that value is attributed to them and both the authority and the nuance of stories are understood. (Brayboy, 2006, p. 440)

Similarly, Maori protocols of introduction name “the mountain, the river, the tribal ancestor, the tribe and the family” (Smith, 1999, p. 126). That context situates the person, acknowledges their kinship, and provides understanding and credibility that their knowledge is situated in a specific place or context.

Indigenous research is relational and also values reciprocity, where the researcher and community benefit from the process (Wilson, 2008). As a Métis researcher who has spent much time working with First Nations and Métis Elders, and with First Nations and Métis communities in Saskatchewan, I drew upon the lessons I have learned through these experiences to guide this research with a view to putting the principles of respect, relationality, and reciprocity into action. This included respecting and honouring the voices of research participants and acknowledging

the strengths, gifts and knowledge they have to share. In regard to this research, the community included education partners in Saskatchewan, as well as School Community Council members across the province. It respected this knowledge and the community's right to determine aspects of the research and ultimately approve the research. It engaged the broader education community in Saskatchewan in a relationship throughout the study to provide their advice and support. It valued relationships, and many relationships were drawn upon as this research was conducted. It recognized that knowledge is shared through stories, and the research methods captured the stories and experiences of School Community Councils in Saskatchewan, as well as those parents not currently engaged with their SCC. It further honoured those stories by checking with research participants to confirm the accuracy of their stories as documented by the research. It honoured community's voice in the interpretation of the data, and processes were put in place to get the education community's assistance with the interpretation of the data, and analysis of the findings. It honoured the principle of reciprocity and provided education partners in Saskatchewan as well as SCCs in the province with important findings from which they may learn, adapt, or draw. In particular, this research included sharing the voices of those currently disengaged from SCCs in Saskatchewan with the education partners in Saskatchewan, so that educators may learn lessons from these stories, and adapt where possible, to move towards engaging those currently disengaged from SCCs in the province.

Theoretical Framework

This study is a qualitative research study. This decision reflects my familiarity and experience with qualitative research, as well as my belief that reviewing aspects of SCCs is better achieved through qualitative research methods, such as interviews or focus groups, using conversational methods to learn from the experiences of people connected to SCCs, as well as

from those parents not currently engaged with the SCC. Being Métis, I am drawn to Indigenous research methodologies⁴ within a qualitative research framework. The research purpose, approach, methods, and dissemination conducted within Indigenous methodologies reflect my belief in why research is to be done, and how it is to be conducted. Qualitative research does “offer space for Indigenous ways of researching” (Kovach, 2009, p. 24). Further, with a solid academic background in qualitative research methodology and with former experience conducting qualitative research, I felt strongly situated as a researcher to design and conduct this qualitative research study into the effectiveness of SCCs in Saskatchewan.

Evaluation research.

Centered within Indigenous methodologies, this research is situated within an evaluation research tradition. Evaluation research was utilized as its purpose is to review programs and policies to improve student learning (Ryan & Cousins, 2009).

Evaluators use social research methods to study, apprise, and help improve social programs, including the soundness of the programs’ diagnoses of the social problems they address, the way the programs are conceptualized and implemented, the outcomes they achieve, and their efficiency. (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004, p. 3)

SCCs are a policy intervention – a structure with a regulatory framework. This study, in essence, was a review or an evaluation of the current state of these structures in the province, one that included an analysis of their effectiveness and their implementation.

There are many evaluation models and yet there is not general consensus on how to categorize these models (Dahler-Larsen, 2009). The role of evaluation may be formative or

⁴ The term “methodologies” is used to acknowledge and respect that there is no one Indigenous way of knowing, and therefore there is not one Indigenous methodology.

summative. Formative evaluation is used for improvement, while summative evaluation is used to demonstrate transparency or accountability (Scriven, 1967). In other words, formative evaluation is a method for judging the worth of a program while the program activities are in progress in order to help improve performance. Summative evaluation involves making judgements about the efficacy of a program or course at its conclusion. Both formative evaluation and summative evaluation leads the researcher or decision makers to a judgement. The purpose of evaluation may also be sociopolitical, neither wholly formative nor summative, but rather to increase awareness of specific activities (Nevo, 2009). When considering evaluation models and approaches, Stake (1981) argued that what evaluators cling to may be persuasions rather than specific models. This study is centered in Indigenous methodologies, as already outlined, and, therefore the evaluation model had to align well to an Indigenous framework in order for me to effectively carry out the research. The notions of relationship as a fundamental principle in Indigenous theory serve as a “persuasion” for me in the evaluation research model. This study was conducted in a collaborative manner that respected the relationship and roles of education partners in Saskatchewan, and honoured the voices of SCC members. In so doing, I selected a “learning-oriented evaluation approach” (Dahler-Larsen, 2009, p. 312) which offered space for aspects of formative, summative, and sociopolitical evaluation purposes. Characteristics of this approach included a belief that learning is the most important purpose of evaluation; that the evaluation should be relevant; that there should be ownership or deep involvement of practitioners in the evaluation process; and there should be a degree of trust in relationships through the evaluation process (Dahler-Larsen, 2009). These characteristics served as markers for success of this study for me as researcher, and were implemented throughout the research design as described herein.

Evaluation research has a “practice oriented purpose” to “pursue understanding that illuminates specific problems and improves specific practice” (Haverkamp & Young, 2007, p. 274). To this point, the research sheds light on the current operations of SCCs as compared to their original mandate, and identifies practices that facilitate parent and community engagement. Evaluation research typically assumes a value-neutral approach to the research. This is not the case in this research study as I was the researcher conducting the research within a political context that was not value-neutral. Evaluation research was rather selected as an appropriate methodological approach to utilize in order to conduct a review of SCCs, complete with a template that led to a report with findings and recommendations for education partners in the sector. As the researcher hearing directly from SCCs members, I found this approach aligned with Indigenous theory as it honoured the belief that knowledge is contextual and relational.

Culturally responsive evaluation.

A critical analysis of SCCs in Saskatchewan was accomplished by conducting a culturally responsive evaluation study (Hopson, 2009). Hopson described culturally responsive evaluation as residing “at the intersection of the union of decolonizing/indigenous positions, critical race theories, and social agenda and advocacy approaches” (p. 435). Hopson went on to describe the theoretical roots of culturally responsive evaluation as “associated with indigenous, minoritized, and subjugated ways of knowing, appropriating, collecting, and interpreting knowledge that challenges the dominant, Western, and colonizing information and knowledges” (p. 435). Essentially it raises different ways of knowing, valuing and judging within an evaluation construct. While responsive evaluation, as coined earlier (Stake, 1975; 1991), is a participatory evaluation approach that values multiple positions, interests, and perspectives, Hopson (2009) described culturally responsive education as extending “responsive evaluation to

matters of power, race, equity, and culture” (p. 432). Mertens & Zimmerman (2015) acknowledge that evaluations conducting a culturally responsive evaluation, “must establish respectful relationships based on trust with members of the community” (p. 286). Given that matters such as power, race, equity, culture, and building trust relationships were surfaced in the literature review of this dissertation, a culturally responsive evaluation, therefore, was appropriate.

A decolonizing or Indigenous theoretical framework involves a decolonizing stance, and provides space in scholarly work and process for valuing Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing (Smith, 1999; Kovach, 2009). A core principle of Indigenous research is relationality and relational accountability (Wilson, 2008). This principle includes carefully telling the stories of those with knowledge in communities, as opposed to merely viewing the storytellers as research participants. “Indigenous research seeks to establish relationships between researcher and local peoples by developing a high degree of trust as a priority to ensure openness, honesty and integrity” (Dei, 2013, p. 32). Indigenous research foregrounds the voices of those often oppressed by those with power, centralizing these voices in the research in order “to come to know and understand the lived experiences of the researched” (p. 34). Such research is transformative and can “offer a social and political corrective” (p. 36) to communities.

Critical race theory “presumes that race matters and...that racism seeps into the everyday fabric of our lives” (Hopson, 2009). Milner (2007) also described the ingrained nature of race and racism, as well as the importance of narrative and counternarrative perspectives as told by people of colour as important tenets of critical race theory. Tribal Critical Race Theory goes beyond critical race theory and attends to Indigenous ways of knowing and important contexts such as colonization.

TribalCrit emerges from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and is rooted in the multiple, nuanced, and historically- and geographically-located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities. Though they differ depending on time, space, place, tribal nation, and individual, there appear to be commonalities in those ontologies and epistemologies. (Brayboy, 2006, p. 427)

Stanfield and Dennis (1993) suggested that epistemological considerations need rethinking in the social sciences in view of race and ethnicity in research methods. Stanfield (1999) later went on to articulate how evaluators have neglected to account for issues of power and privilege in the discipline, while being overly concerned with method, technique, and/or approach.

The practice of evaluation research is meant to judge. Evaluators typically serve the interests of decision-makers, and hold special methodological expertise to answer the questions of those with power (Mathison, 2009).

For educational evaluation to serve the public interest, this relationship and purpose of evaluation must be disrupted. Such a disruption can occur when evaluators work with all stakeholders in schools and communities, with much greater attention paid to parents, children, and local community perspectives on what counts as good schooling. (p. 533)

Culturally responsive evaluation therefore emerged as an appropriate approach to the portion of the study for which the purpose was to engage voices and perspectives from Indigenous, visible minority, and newcomer parents who are currently disengaged from SCCs. A culturally responsive evaluation study facilitated an exploration into the issues of race, power, and privilege, and it creates space, intentionally and respectfully, to surface and value these experiences. Coupled with the findings from the collaborative research evaluation study

conducted, a fulsome discussion can be presented as to the current state of SCCs in the province of Saskatchewan.

Logic Model

Guskey described an evaluation process of backward planning (2000) where one essentially begins with the end in mind. To ascertain the end goals/outcomes of a program, analyzing program theory is important in evaluation research to understand the intent for which the program is designed. A logic model is a visual depiction of the program goals, laying out the sequence of steps from program inputs to outcomes (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004).

From a research and evaluation perspective, an analysis of a program's theory and formulation of a contextualized logic model helps reveal the explicit and "hidden" causal pathways by which variables influence a program's workings and effects. (Chatterji, 2009, p. 106)

As part of this evaluation, I developed a logic model based upon the SCC mandate as expressed in policy, legislation, and regulations. I shared the logic model I developed with officials at the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education for feedback, which I received and incorporated. I also shared the logic model with my advisor, Dr. Pushor, for her insights given her expertise in the field of parent engagement, and her working knowledge of SCCs. If one begins with "a clear idea of the destination, most evaluation issues are self-evident" (Guskey, 2000, p. 36). I used this logic model in this evaluation to understand the intent of SCCs, and to determine if they are effectively achieving that mandate.

School Community Councils Logic Model

In Saskatchewan, each school is required to have a School Community Council, which facilitates parent and community participation in school planning, and provides advice to the board of education and the school's staff. In co-operation with the school staff, the SCC develop and recommend to its board of education for approval a school level plan that is in accordance with the school division's strategic plan.

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes – Impact		
	Activities	Participation	Short	Medium	Long
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and talents of parents who attend and participate. • Youth perspectives (secondary school SCCs). • Professional development for school staff and SCC members. • School division financial resources (governance allocation) to support the SCC to achieve its mandate. • School division staff resources to support the SCC to achieve its mandate. • Education partners' resources to support the SCC to achieve its mandate. • Legislation, regulation, policy and information resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with parents and community members. • Community engagement forums. • Information sharing at SCC meetings. • Community visioning and establishing shared beliefs. • Community asset mapping. • Developing a school level plan. • Communicating school performance results with parents and the wider community. • Dialogue with school board members to provide advice and to recommend a school level plan for approval. • SCC actions to address the school level plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five to nine elected members who are parents or guardians of pupils or community members, and members appointed by the board of education: one or two secondary students, principal, one teacher, and in consultation with the other members, any other appointed individuals. • Number of parents and community members attracted to participate in SCC events and activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A school level plan which a core group of school staff, parents, and community members collaborate on and monitor for performance. • Improved student attendance. • Increased levels of student engagement in learning. • Improved student achievement outcomes evidenced through classroom and school division data. • Improved parent and community engagement in student learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A school level plan which a broad and dynamic partnership of school staff, parents, and community members co-construct and monitor for performance. • Improved graduation rates. • Narrowing the inequity in achievement of FNMI learners and non-FNMI learners in the publicly funded education system. • Improved student achievement outcomes evidenced through classroom, school division, provincial, and national data. • Improved public support for schools/education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A school level plan which a broad and diverse dynamic partnership of school staff, parents, and community members co-construct and monitor for performance. • Improved learning success and well-being of all children and youth. • Citizenship and engagement in public education reflective of the diversity of Saskatchewan.
Assumptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and community engagement needs to occur in the activities that have the greatest impact on student learning. Prior to 2006, there is an assumption that activities of school council type structures in Saskatchewan were primarily involved in activities that did not have the greatest impact on student learning. • That school staff, the Principal in particular, has the competency to work collaboratively with parents and community members, and believes that engagement is valuable in supporting student achievement. • The school staff believes that parents and community members can effectively contribute to student learning. • A school culture exists that is welcoming and valuing of parents and community members. • That school staff and parents/community members are aware of the SCC mandate, and will focus their efforts on improving student achievement. 			External Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varied levels of expectations and supports from the education partners to facilitate SCCs achieving their mandate. • Time available by school staff and parents/community members to commit to SCCs. • Distinct differences between communities – urban, rural, remote, Northern. • Legacy of residential schools in Saskatchewan and its impact as a barrier to engagement of some Indigenous people in the school landscape. • Varied comfort levels of school staff and parents with a formal SCC structure. • Disengagement of some communities – marginalized, Indigenous, newcomers. • Language barriers, both in terms of conversational use and understanding of the majority spoken English language, as well as understanding the education jargon and technical language often used by school staff. 		

Figure 2-I.1 School Community Councils Logic Model.

Sample

For the purpose of this study, a collaborative research project, it was important to seek the voices of School Community Council members, school board members, as well as Directors of Education, School Superintendents, school business officials with responsibilities for SCCs, principals and teachers who have firsthand experience with SCCs, and Ministry officials who have responsibilities for SCCs. In total, approximately 120 participants were engaged in this evaluation. To that end, purposeful sampling and convenience sampling methods were used. Purposeful sampling involves developing specific criteria for the sample to be selected (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 164). Convenience sampling is a method based on the researcher's ease of access to a sample (p. 165).

In addition to the approximately 120 voices of those engaged with SCCs in the province, the research also captured the voices and perspectives of those parents not currently engaged in SCCs, in particularly Indigenous and newcomer populations. In December 2015, Dr. Pushor, faculty member from the University of Saskatchewan, successfully engaged the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, the Government of Saskatchewan (as represented by the Ministries of Economy, Education, and Social Services), the Saskatoon Public School Division, and the University of Saskatchewan in a partnership focused on a parent engagement research initiative she leads. The partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2015 solidifying their commitment to this initiative. Dr. Pushor's research is conducted at Howard Coad School, a Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 8 public school in the Mount Royal neighbourhood of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Howard Coad School was purposefully selected as the research site because of its demographic profile. The student population at Howard Coad is diverse, with approximately one third of the student population representative of a majority Canadian population, one third

Indigenous, and one third newcomer. The Neighborhood Profile (City of Saskatoon, 2017) shows the labour force participation rate is approximately nine per cent lower than that of the city while the economic dependency ratio is more than double. The median total income in Mount Royal is listed at \$29,460. For those employed, sales and service is the major occupation with trades, transport, and equipment operation the second highest occupation. Many parents at Howard Coad work very hard, often with more than one job, but earning minimum levels of income. A context of poverty, low literacy rates and levels of education, English language needs, and unemployment and under-employment are challenges which present themselves at Howard Coad. Given the diversity of this community, what I potentially could learn through culturally relevant evaluation research in this site offered great possibility and original knowledge to inform SCCs in Saskatchewan, and therefore I selected Howard Coad for the sample.

As the Saskatchewan School Boards Association is a signatory to the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed, I was able to visit this site a minimum of six times over a two year period, having opportunity to observe, participate, and present professional development to staff and SCC, having opportunity to observe a SCC meeting, and having opportunity to observe and participate in two community gatherings of parents and staff. Through these interactions, I was able to develop relationships with SCC members and staff. Dr. Pushor has immersed herself in the community through her research project, and has formed many relationships with staff, parents, and families in the community.

It was unlikely that placing a recruitment poster in a school to engage those currently not engaged in the SCC, to engage in this research project on SCCs, would have had much chance of successfully recruiting research participants. Indigenous ways of knowing, particularly the

concepts of relationships, kinship, and place were put into action to successfully recruit Indigenous, visible minority, and newcomer research participants (Battiste, 2013; Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). I drew upon the relationships developed by Dr. Pushor, as well as the relationships I was able to develop at Howard Coad School, in order to invite parents who are not currently SCC members to participate in this culturally responsive evaluation. I also invited school staff, in particular the school administrators and the school community coordinator, to reach out and invite research participants. Invitations through personal contact with people from the community who have strong relationships with parents, including Indigenous and newcomer parents, was deemed the most appropriate tactic to result in research participants joining this study.

Data Collection

Respecting and incorporating Indigenous methodologies includes utilizing Indigenous methods. “To provide openings for narrative, Indigenous researchers use a variety of methods, such as conversations, interviews, and research/sharing circles” (Kovach, 2009, p. 99). Data was collected utilizing research sharing circles (Kovach, 2009), focus groups (Hays & Singh, 2012; Noonan, 2002), and interviews, particularly using conversational methods (Kovach, 2009). Agency records, focus groups, research sharing circles, and member checking are methods that can be used in evaluation research as well as other forms of qualitative research (Hays & Singh, 2012; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). In addition to the focus group and research sharing circles, a Canadian cross-jurisdictional scan of school council structures was conducted to determine how each jurisdiction utilizes and mandates these structures, and a document analysis of foundational documents in Saskatchewan leading to the creation of SCCs was conducted.

Research sharing circles.

Respecting and incorporating Indigenous methodologies includes utilizing Indigenous methods. “To provide openings for narrative, Indigenous researchers use a variety of methods, such as conversations, interviews, and research/sharing circles” (Kovach, 2009, p. 99). While such circles only “recently appeared as a formal data-collection method” (p. 128) due to the limitations of Western research, sharing circles are a common practice among Indigenous peoples. Two research sharing circles were conducted as part of this evaluation at existing annual events in Saskatchewan – the National Congress on Rural Education (Rural Congress), and the Saskatchewan School Boards Association Spring Assembly. These events were selected as they included attendees from two convenience sample targets for this evaluation, school board members and Directors of Education, as well as rural SCC members, and therefore there was ease of access to these individuals. A research sharing circle was selected for these events, as it was anticipated that the audience would be larger than a typical focus group of six-to-twelve participants.

Rural Congress is an annual event in Saskatchewan, of which a large number of rural SCC members historically attend. Rural Congress was held in Saskatoon in March 2018. One session offered for attendees to self-select was linked to this evaluation that I facilitated as researcher. Participants were informed that data would be collected from the session for this evaluation. Approximately 35-40 people attended the session, of which the majority of attendees identified as rural SCC members. I provided a brief history of the establishment of SCCs in the province and an overview of their mandate. After participants organized themselves into six groups, they were provided discussion questions (Appendix A). I also received written consent from participants to engage in the research sharing circle. Groups were provided flipchart paper

and markers to document their responses. During the table discussions, I circulated the room, observing, and taking notes of my observations. Following the circles, I invited tables to share highlights of their conversations with the larger group in the room. These flipchart papers were collected to form data from the SCC rural members' research sharing circle.

SSBA Spring Assembly is an annual event in Saskatchewan for school board members and Directors of Education. It was held in Saskatoon in April 2018. Here, too, one session offered for attendees to self-select, linked to this evaluation, was facilitated by me as researcher. Participants were informed that data would be collected for this evaluation. The process at the SSBA Spring Assembly followed exactly the process that I facilitated at Rural Congress. With approximately 45-50 people in attendance at the session, participants organized themselves into 10 groups. The groups' flipchart papers were collected to form data from the school board members and Directors of Education research sharing circle. Because participants documented aspects of their conversations on flipchart paper during the research sharing circles and then submitted them, they provided confirmation of key aspects that they desired to include within this research study.

Beyond contributing to the research study, in terms of relationship and reciprocity, the research sharing circles facilitated the sharing of effective practices and problem-solving amongst SCC members, school board members, and Directors of Education. Research participants expressed that the table discussions, and large group reporting that followed, provided them with the opportunity to dialogue with others and pause to reflect on their own experiences with SCCs, as well as to utilize the generated ideas learned from others in the room upon returning to their home communities.

Focus groups.

A focus group, involving “6-12 individuals” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 254; Noonan, 2002, p. 91), is a method “to discuss a particular topic of interest among a gathering of individuals...selected for their similarities with regard to at least one particular characteristic related to a study topic” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 252). In evaluation research, a focus group can “provide a wealth of descriptive information about the nature and nuances of a social problem and the service needs of those who experience it (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004, p. 128). “This reflection can be stimulated by the interactive researcher-participant dialogue” (Ponteretto, 2005, p. 129). In this research, focus groups created opportunities for reflection with the education partners and School Community Council members.

For the focus groups, I compiled a list of questions and distributed them to the focus group members in advance of the meeting to prepare them for the discussion. At the focus group, I utilized an “open-structured conversational method” (Kovach, 2009, p. 124), rather than walking through a list of questions in a rigid manner. Kovach described this Indigenous method as a respectful approach to honouring what participants have to share, while leaving them in control of what they want to share. I had another SSBA employee in attendance to record notes during the research sharing circles and focus groups, however I explained to participants that I would not be directly attributing quotes to participants. I am Métis and, over the span of my career, have spent a good deal of time learning from First Nations and Métis Elders and traditional knowledge keepers. Through this process, I have come to learn the value of oral tradition, primarily through sharing stories. As Elders and storytellers share their teachings, I have been taught not to take notes during this time, but rather to listen and reflect on what I have heard (Amendt, 2008, pp. 35-36). The purpose of this, as I understand it, is respectful listening

to the experiences/stories of people, and reflecting this by actively listening to them, as opposed to being perceived as too business-like or disinterested as I record notes. Journaling or notetaking what I have taken from the story occurs following the teaching, which includes reflecting on and writing down my observations of the experience. This Indigenous method aligns with “denaturalized transcription” where direct quotes from participants are not utilized, rather the researcher captures the “substance of the interview, that is, the meanings and perceptions created and shared during a conversation” (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005, p. 1277). Documenting the conversations from the focus groups was important in terms of accurately collecting data from the participants. As a way to respect Indigenous methodologies while blending with more Eurocentric qualitative methods (Kovach, 2009), I actively listened, facilitated, and engaged in the discussion, while another SSBA staff member attended the focus groups with me and recorded notes, while not identifying speakers in the recorded notes. The note-taker signed a confidentiality agreement to not disclose the data or the focus group conversations. I advised research participants that I was making reflective notes after the event only, and that the SSBA staff member documenting the discussion would not directly quote research participants. To ensure I captured the conversations and events correctly, I member checked and shared the summaries of my data with the participants of the focus groups for their validity confirmation and to check accuracy. Minor edits were made to the notes following this process.

For the purposeful sample, focus groups were conducted with Directors of Education, School Superintendents or other school business officials with responsibilities for SCCs, principals and teachers, as well as Ministry of Education officials with responsibilities for SCCs. Two such focus groups were held in order to engage representatives with unique and varied

experiences with SCCs from their local context, such as northern, rural, Catholic, public, elementary or secondary, and to engage individuals from across the vast geography of the province of Saskatchewan. One focus group was held in spring 2018 in Regina, Saskatchewan, and the other was held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in spring 2018. A letter of invitation was sent to the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents of Saskatchewan (LEADS) requesting that they name up to eight members (four at each location) with current responsibilities for SCCs. The invitation expressed an interest in achieving diversity of members, where possible, as described previously including such considerations as gender, race, and geography of the province. Similarly, an invitation was sent to the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials (SASBO) to name up to eight members (four at each location) with current responsibilities for SCCs. Another invitation was sent to the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF) to name up to eight principals or teachers (four at each location) with firsthand experience with SCCs. An invitation was sent to the Deputy Minister of Education to name two or three Ministry officials with responsibilities for SCCs to be invited to attend the focus group in Regina only as that is the city where the Ministry of Education offices are located. Finally, SSBA Executive members were invited to attend either of the focus groups to include their perspectives in the dialogue. Education partners each established their own criteria to invite members to participate, most issuing a voluntary call for representatives. Names of their selected members were submitted to the SSBA. Once named, focus group members were individually emailed the focus group questions (Appendix A) in advance of the session. At the onset of the focus group, I provided a brief history of the establishment of SCCs in the province, an overview of their mandate, and received written

consent from participants to engage in the focus group. In total, 20 participants attended these two focus group sessions representing education partners in Saskatchewan.

A third focus group of SCC urban members was conducted. A focus group of urban SCC members was required, as a format to engage rural SCC members was also conducted as part of this evaluation, as described earlier. Utilizing a purposeful sampling method, a letter of invitation was sent to two urban school divisions in Saskatchewan, requesting that they each name up to six SCC members (parents) to attend the focus group. Each school division established their own process to invite SCC members for the focus group, and names were provided to the SSBA. Once named, focus group members were individually emailed the focus group questions (Appendix A) in advance of the session. At the onset of the focus group, as I did in all previous gatherings, I provided a brief history of the establishment of SCCs in the province, an overview of their mandate, and received written consent from participants to engage in the focus group. In total, eight participants attended the urban SCC members' focus group, representing two public and Catholic school divisions.

Interviews.

For the interviews, I created a list of questions (see Appendix C) and disclosed those to participants prior to the conversation. During the interview, I utilized an “open-structured conversational method” (Kovach, 2009, p. 124), rather than walking through a list of questions in a rigid manner. Kovach described this Indigenous method as a respectful approach to honouring what participants have to share, while leaving them in control of what they want to share. Given the lessons I learned from Elders and traditional knowledge keepers that I described earlier, I explained to participants that I would not be directly attributing quotes to participants. Here again respecting Indigenous methodologies within a qualitative research paradigm (Kovach,

2009), I actively listened and engaged in the conversation, and I summarized the discussion immediately after the interview was concluded. To ensure I captured the conversations correctly, just as with the other data gathering methods I utilized, I member checked and shared the summaries of my data with the participants of the interviews for their validity confirmation and to check accuracy.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data collected from the research sharing circles, the focus groups, and the non-SCC parent interviews for pattern identification (Hays & Singh, 2012; Kovach, 2009) in order to identify issues or themes (Noonan, 2002). “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). I also involved an interpretation panel (Noonan, 2002), of education partners in the data analysis process. I had two purposes in establishing such a panel: to honour Indigenous methodologies grounded in a belief that knowledge is relational, and to respect the collaborative nature of the research, as it was education partners in Saskatchewan who created the impetus for this review and had an important stake in this. I extended an invitation to the Executive Directors of the SSBA, STF, SASBO, LEADS, as well as a Ministry of Education representative, to form an interpretation panel. These representatives were selected because of their positions of authority in the province and their ability to bring important views and perspectives to the analysis. Members of the interpretation panel were not directly involved in the data collection processes of the study, with the exception of the researcher and note-taker, in order to ensure the study was not compromised or perceived to have been influenced by any one education partner. In advance of the session I provided panel members with the data collected, as well as my draft analysis. After giving them some time to reflect on and review the data and my draft analysis, I

facilitated a two-hour meeting whereby each of these provincial education partners provided their input into the analysis. An interpretation panel may not always “reach consensus on the topic at hand” (Noonan, 2002, p. 92), however the interpretation panel is another way to provide credibility and validity to the process. The input from interpretation panel members enriches the interpretation of the data (Noonan, 2002), while attending to the relationships of the partners in the education sector, and considering their perceptions and views of the data in the analysis process.

Drawing upon evaluation research data analysis, I provided a description of the mandate of SCCs, and asked research participants to describe their experiences in carrying out their mandate, thereby analyzing the data for conformity of the program to its theory and design (Chatterji, 2009; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). Finally, I conducted an analysis and presented a report with findings and recommendations for education partners and SCCs.

I approached this task with humility as a grounding Indigenous principle for me in interpreting the data. My approach included sharing the data collected from research participants with the participants in order to check the validity of the data being analyzed. I also relied on the flipchart paper notes from the research sharing circles provided to me for data analysis. Further, I had conversations with SSBA members and my doctoral advisor to share my emergent thinking on what the review presented, and to get their feedback and/or their contribution to the analysis. Finally, document analysis was utilized in conducting a cross-jurisdictional scan of school council structures in Canada.

Trustworthiness

In efforts to maximize the trustworthiness of this evaluation, a number of steps were taken:

- The scope of the research was negotiated between the researcher and the SSBA, with the SSBA providing approval of the scope.
- Participation at the two research sharing circles (Rural Congress, and the SSBA Spring Assembly) was voluntary, as participants self-selected attending the session, and the data collected was restricted entirely to the notes that participants/groups submitted upon conclusion of the sessions.
- Participation in the focus groups was by invitation to education partners (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, LEADS, STF, SASBO, and SSBA), as well as to two urban school divisions for the SCC Urban focus group. Representatives from these organizations responded voluntarily to a call submitted by each respective organization. Focus group participants received the focus group questions a minimum of two weeks prior to the focus group.
- Notes were taken at each focus group, and the notes were submitted to the focus group participants following the session to confirm the validity of the notes as an accurate reflection of the focus group conversation. Minor edits were made to the notes following this process.
- A five-member interpretation panel, comprising senior officials of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, STF, LEADS, SASBO, and the SSBA, was formed to review all

the data collected through the evaluation and assist the researcher in the data analysis and identification of themes.

Collecting multiple perspectives within a qualitative study enables triangulation of data sources, and is “a common strategy for ensuring trustworthiness that involves using multiple forms of evidence at various parts of qualitative inquiry to support and better describe findings” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 207). Member checking the data with focus group participants, engaging an interpretation panel of education partners to participate in the data analysis, and sharing my preliminary observations and findings with the SSBA Executive and Executive Director throughout the research process, as a way to test my thinking and seek their feedback, were tactics employed to provide this research study with a high degree of trustworthiness.

As it relates to interviews with non-SCC parents, trustworthiness was gained through relationship between the researcher and those parents being interviewed. It was important that a relationship of trust was in place for parents to choose to participate in the interview, and it was through relationship and the valuing of the knowledge shared by these individuals that produced trustworthiness in the data collection and analysis. In particular, interviewees were provided with a summary of the conversation following the interview, as a way for them to confirm the accuracy of the conversation. No changes were identified by research participants. In addition, the themes that emerged from the data were analyzed and compared against themes from literature derived from other research examining race, power, and privilege, in efforts to maximize trustworthiness of the findings.

Delimitations.

The research sharing circles were delimited to the two existing annual opportunities outlined herein – namely Rural Congress and the SSBA Spring Assembly. The study was further delimited to data collected from the focus groups with representatives from the Ministry of Education, and school divisions with responsibilities for SCCs, as well as the SCC urban members from Regina. For non-SCC parents, the research was delimited to parents who are not currently engaged in the SCC at Howard Coad School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This delimitation was purposeful, as described earlier, in an intentional attempt to engage the voices of Indigenous, visible minority, and newcomer parents.

Limitations.

There are at least three limitations of the study – sample, time, and language. In terms of sample, the participants in the research sharing circles were limited to those individuals attending the two events who voluntarily agreed to attend the session. In terms of the focus groups, they were limited to two opportunities for school division and Ministry of Education officials with responsibilities for SCCs to attend, as named by the Ministry of Education, LEADS, SASBO, and the STF. They were also limited to the one urban SCC focus group. In terms of the sample, the data collection and analysis was based solely on this data, which may not have been representative of the experiences of all 700+ SCCs in Saskatchewan. In terms of sample for the non-SCC parent interviews, Howard Coad School was selected as the sole site for research participants to be invited. Parents voluntarily agreed to interviews. The data was therefore limited to one urban public school, and therefore may not be representative of the experiences of parents from across the province who do not attend SCCs. In terms of time, the study was limited to data collection which took place over a four-month period for the research sharing

circles, and focus groups, and limited to one month at Howard Coad School for non-SCC parent interviews. The final limitation was language, in particular for the interviews with non-SCC parents. As the interviews were conducted in English, limitations were placed on the research participants for whom English is not their primary language.

Assumptions.

Because of my experiences, I carry some assumptions into this work, including a foundational belief that schools that engage parents, families, and community, including those who may be marginalized, will have improved student achievement. I also assume that staff members carry a position of power, and it is the responsibility of the staff members to first reach out and build relationships with families that will lead to engagement. I also believe that engagement needs to occur in multiple ways and cannot be limited to one event or one structure – such as the School Community Council. Finally, through conversations with educators, and as evidenced by a 2016 resolution passed by the SSBA calling for a review of SCCs, I assume that SCCs may not consistently be operating as originally intended, particularly when it comes to their engagement in the learning program to support improved student achievement.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 for research involving humans (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014), and with the ethics approval of the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board, under the supervision of Dr. Debbie Pushor of the University of Saskatchewan. The study was conducted within the authority of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association through a mandate approved by boards of education in the province, and within a research scope that the SSBA

approved. In accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 critical inquiry guidelines, Saskatoon Public School Division was also contacted to obtain approval for the study, and approval was granted.

Participation was voluntary and participants signed consent forms prior to engaging in aspects of the study. Participant names were kept confidential, and secondary use of the data collected was not permitted. To add credibility to this evaluation and to mitigate any potential conflict of interest with me, an SSBA employee acting as researcher, a five-member interpretation panel of education partners in Saskatchewan was created to review the data collected and collaborate on the data analysis.

This research also included the perspectives of Indigenous and newcomer parents who are not currently members of their school's SCC. The Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 provided specific advice regarding research involving First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples of Canada as per Chapter 9. The advice included honouring Indigenous knowledge, being aware of community protocols, honouring Indigenous principles in the research, seeking consent, and ensuring reciprocity in the research. As an Indigenous researcher, this advice was particularly important to me, and I have established in this dissertation this importance for me by foundationally placing Indigenous knowledge throughout this research and identifying Indigenous academic scholars whose work guides mine (Battiste, 2013; Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). I have also described many experiences I have been afforded to connect with Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers over the past two decades. I have also further described my experience in successfully working with Indigenous and vulnerable communities throughout my career, including in my Master's research. Taken

together, these experiences positioned me well to undertake this research in a culturally responsive and respectful manner.

Chapter 3-I

Environmental Scan

A Cross Country Scan of School Councils in Canada

School council type structures exist across Canada, with variations on the nomenclature used to refer to them (e.g., Parents' Advisory Councils, School Community Councils, School Advisory Councils, etc.). In most instances, there is one school council for each school in the province or territory. The school council most often comprises parents of students in the school, a secondary student (in secondary schools), the school principal, and other staff and community members. The school councils are focused on school matters to varying degrees of autonomy, from participation to decision-making. Some jurisdictions have a district structure of school councils to provide advice to the board of education. In most jurisdictions, an association of school councils is in place that is independent, advocates to Government on behalf of school councils, and provides some level of supports to school councils.

This cross-country scan was drawn from provincial and territorial legislative and/or regulatory frameworks related to school councils conducted in 2017. Appendix B provides a more detailed Canadian cross-country scan of the legislative and/or regulatory frameworks as it relates to school councils, key words pulled from these frameworks regarding their purpose and mandate related to improved student learning, and language that describes the degree of authority granted to the school council to carry out its functions. In my examination, I analyzed the structures and the language used to describe the school councils' authority and presented the summary in tables depicting the models, mandates related to learning plans, and the spectrum of authority of school councils in Canada. My analysis was limited solely to the information

obtained through websites and the language therein, and is not intended to be an evaluation of the state of school councils across Canada or their practices as aligned, or not aligned, with their legislative and/or regulatory or policy direction.

British Columbia.

In British Columbia, a parents' advisory council may be created for each school in the province. It may advise the Board and the principal and staff of the school respecting any matter relating to the school. In addition, a district parents' advisory council may be created that comprises one representative from each parents' advisory council. The district parents' advisory council advises the board of education on any matter related to education in the district.

Alberta.

In Alberta, a school council must be established for each school in the province. The school council may advise the principal and the board on any matter relating to the school. A board must provide the school council with an opportunity to provide advice on the development of the school's mission, vision and philosophy; policies; annual education plan; annual results report; and budget. A board must also provide the school council with the school's provincial testing program results and other provincial measures and a reasonable interpretation of those results and measures. Given that the Regulations outline the responsibility of the board to provide the school council with student achievement results, it is assumed that the school council is to have a role in student learning and achievement.

Saskatchewan.

In Saskatchewan, each school is required to have a school council, formally referred to as a School Community Council, which facilitates parent and community participation in school

planning, and provides advice to the board of education and the school's staff. In co-operation with the school staff, the SCC develop and recommend to its board of education for approval a learning improvement plan that is in accordance with the school division's strategic plan.

The Saskatchewan School Boards Association (n.d.) *Handbook for School Community Councils* is a resource that provides operational supports regarding the logistics of the functioning of a SCC. It includes tips on such matters as setting agenda, conducting a meeting, and communications.

Manitoba.

In Manitoba, an advisory council may be established for each school. The advisory council may advise the principal on a number of school policies, activities, on organization, and participate in developing an annual school plan. The Manitoba Association of Parent Councils is an organization of school-based parent groups in Manitoba. There is a requirement for the Minister of Education to meet with this association at least once annually.

Ontario.

In Ontario a school council is an advisory body that is put in place for each school. Through active participation of parents, the purpose of the school council is to improve pupil achievement primarily by making recommendations to the school principal and the board of education. The board of education is required to solicit the views of school councils as it relates to policies, implementation plans, and accountability as it relates to pupil achievement. In addition to a school council, a Parent Involvement Committee is created at the board level. The purpose of a Parent Involvement Committee is to support, encourage and enhance parent engagement at the board level in order to improve student achievement. The role of the parent

involvement committee is to advise the board and the board's director of education on matters primarily related to communicating with parents.

The Ontario Ministry of Education has a parent engagement policy that outlines the vision, strategies and actions required by education partners to achieve the policy (Government of Ontario, 2010). The vision includes a statement that all educational partners in Ontario “acknowledge the positive impact of parent engagement on student achievement” (p. 7). In support of this policy, the Ontario Ministry of Education has a Parent Engagement Office that supports parent engagement through information and resources (e.g., fact sheets, information on school councils and Parent Involvement Committees, and tips for running effective meetings). A guide for school councils is also available. Not unlike Saskatchewan's document, it provides support to school council members regarding the logistics of school councils – establishing bylaws, elections, running meetings, assessing the council's effectiveness, agenda setting, meeting minutes, and consultation.

The Council of Ontario Directors of Education created a document that provides tips and examples of ways to engage parents, as well as strategies to support ongoing parent engagement such as through an annual planning calendar, forming welcoming committees, and providing childminding and transportation to parents to attend school council meetings (Council of Ontario Directors of Education, 2012). The writers acknowledged that parent engagement can occur beyond the formal structures of a school council or parent involvement committee and highlighted examples to do this, such as keeping the library open for parents, or providing access to a computer and internet. A few examples were provided for parents to engage, such as organizing workshops with parent and community members as presenters. Finally, the writers

also described the importance of organizing parents and the community and getting parent voice. To that end, a sample parent survey was included along with tips on analyzing survey data.

Quebec.

In Quebec, a governing board is established for each school that is granted considerable authority for oversight and decision-making. The governing board analyzes the needs and approves the school's "educational project," essentially a school plan, and annually evaluates the results and communicates this to parents. The governing board also approves the time allocation for compulsory and elective subjects. In addition to the governing board, parents may decide to form a parent participation organization, a body of parents who advise the parents' representatives on the governing board regarding any matter of concern to parents. The purpose of a parent participation organization is to encourage the collaboration of parents in developing, implementing and periodically evaluating the school's educational project and participating in fostering their children's success.

New Brunswick.

New Brunswick requires a parent school support committee for each school in the province. The parent school support committee advises the principal on the establishment, implementation, and monitoring of the school improvement plan. The parent school support committee can also participate, through the Chair, in the selection of the school principal and vice-principal, as well as review the results of the school's performance report. The parent school support committee can also communicate with the District Education Council.

Prince Edward Island.

In Prince Edward Island, parents may establish a school council or home and school association. Their role is to provide feedback to the principal on a variety of matters related to school operations. They can also advise, if required, on the school effectiveness plan, and advise, if requested by the education authority, on the selection of the school principal. A District Advisory Council may be created by the Minister of Education, which is a group that comprises one representative from each school council. The District Advisory Council advises the Minister on education issues, engages school communities in discussions on education issues, and fosters collaboration on education issues in the district that the Council serves.

Nova Scotia.

In Nova Scotia, a school board must establish a school advisory council when parents, the principal, or the home and school association make such a request. The school advisory council consults with school staff and develops and recommends to the school board, a school's improvement plan. They also participate in the selection of the school principal through a representative on the school board's selection committee.

Newfoundland and Labrador.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, a school principal must establish a school council for the school. The school council develops, encourages and promotes policies and practices to enhance the quality of the school program. The school council approves for recommendation to the school board, a plan for improved teaching and learning at the school, and assists in monitoring the performance reports of the school.

Yukon.

In Yukon, there is a school council for each attendance area established by the Minister of Education. A Council reviews, modifies if necessary, and approves the school objectives, educational priorities and courses of study by grade levels, as prepared by the school administration. They also participate in the selection procedures and appointment of a school principal. A school council may also propose locally developed courses of study.

Northwest Territories.

Northwest Territories does not appear to have a school council type structure for schools. Their Education Act includes a section on parent participation which primarily addresses a parent's responsibility to be informed of the progress of their child and to be involved in making decisions that significantly affect the education, health or safety of the student. Parents are also expected to cooperate with the education staff who deliver the education program to the student.

Nunavut.

Similar to the Northwest Territories, Nunavut does not appear to have a school council type structure for schools. Their Education Act includes a section on parent participation which primarily addresses a parent's responsibility to be informed of the progress of the child and to be involved in decisions that affect the student's education or the student's health or safety in the school. Parents are expected to encourage the student to learn and to support the teachers in their efforts to educate the student. The principal is directed to keep parents and the community informed of events and activities at the school.

School council associations.

Beyond the school councils and sometimes district councils, most jurisdictions have an association of school councils. It appears membership is voluntary in these associations, however most websites did not provide adequate information about their membership to determine if they truly are representative of the majority of school councils within the jurisdiction. Two jurisdictions, Manitoba and Ontario, include a reference to these associations in their legislative and/or regulatory frameworks. In Manitoba, the Minister of Education must meet with this association annually, and in Ontario there is provision for a representative of the association to be included on the Parent Involvement Committee. These associations are independent of government and school boards, and provide advocacy and supports for school councils. These supports can include operational resource materials such as effective meeting management, agenda setting, role of Chair, and so on.

School Council Models in Canada

Most of the jurisdictions allow for the creation of a school council for each school, or in some cases, a school council for more than one school, which advises on the school(s). Four jurisdictions (British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island) allow for the creation of a district-type structure, a representative body of a collective of school councils within a school district, which provides advice to the board of education. While the evidence to determine the effectiveness of this type of structure was not reviewed, a legislative and/or regulatory framework that provides for this structure may be evidence of the value placed on parent and community engagement in education by the board of education, and a support mechanism created for school councils to foster effective interaction among themselves and with the board of education. With their own unique variation on this, Quebec has a school council

(governing board) with extensive authority over the school. In addition to this, a parent participation organization may be formed at each school. The purpose of this structure is to engage parents in supporting and evaluating the school’s learning improvement plan (school’s educational project), and to provide feedback and support to the parents on the school council (governing board). This two-tiered approach to engaging parents in the critical aspects of the school at the local level signals a belief in the value of parents in improving student achievement. It also facilitates multiple avenues of engagement for parents as opposed to solely the school council. See Figure 3-I.1 for a visual of the models of school councils in Canada.

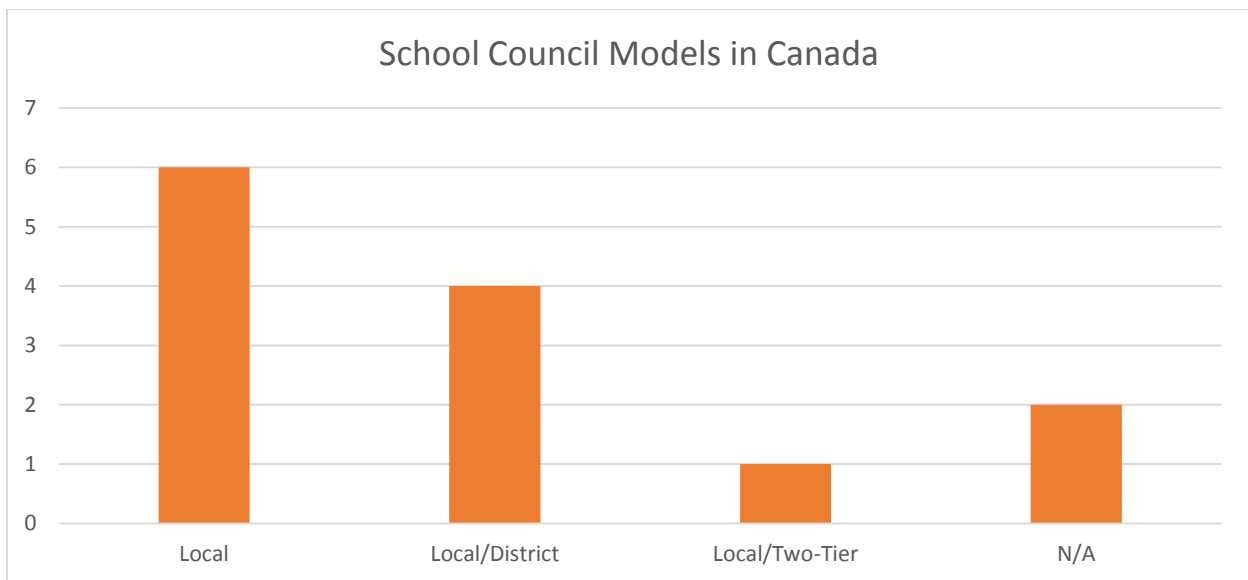


Figure 3-I.1. School Council Models in Canada.

School Councils in Canada and Their Connection to Learning Initiatives

It is important to connect parent and community engagement in schools to teaching and learning to have a positive impact on student achievement (Goodall, 2017; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kirby & DiPaola, 2011). One way to facilitate parent engagement in teaching and learning is for the school council to have some responsibility for a school annual plan, learning

improvement plan or a similar-type process linked to planning, monitoring, and reporting on student achievement. I differentiate between parent “involvement” and parent “engagement” based on the authenticity of the relationship – where “involvement” is school staff or system controlled, and “engagement” is co-constructed between parents and the school staff or system (Amendt, 2008). In the analysis that follows, I use the term “involvement” when there is not enough evidence or consistency in practices to demonstrate authentic “engagement” of parents.

As depicted in Figure 3-I.2, the clear majority of school councils in Canada have a mandate that provides them with some “involvement” in and responsibility for a school annual plan – recognition of the value of linking the school council to teaching and learning initiatives. Nunavut and Northwest Territories do not have school council type structures and hence parents are not “involved” in the school annual plan. In British Columbia, the parent council may advise on any matter respecting the school, however no specific reference to supporting or developing an annual plan is referenced, and therefore it is listed as “unclear” in Figure 3-I.2.

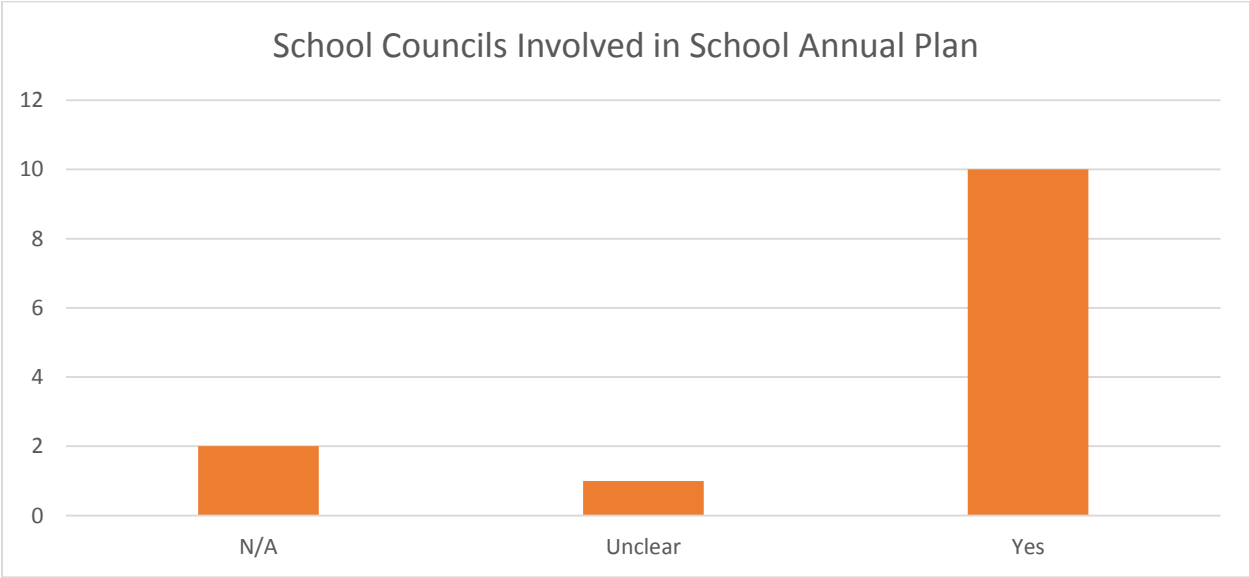


Figure 3-I.2. School Councils Involved in School Annual Plan.

School Councils in Canada and Their Spectrum of Authority

An examination of the language used in the legislative and/or regulatory or policy frameworks for school councils was conducted to identify the authenticity of the relationship of the school council with the school. For this analysis, language in the legislative and/or regulatory and policy frameworks that included “may” or “could,” as well as “advisory,” “provide feedback,” “participate in,” or “advise if requested” was deemed to be lower on the spectrum of authority of shared decision-making in a collaborative partnership, than language in other frameworks such as “review, modify and approve,” or “develop.”

As outlined in Figure 3-I.3, five jurisdictions (British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island) use language that places the school council in an “advisory” capacity to the school and/or school board. Three jurisdictions (Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador) include some elements that are similarly advisory in nature, but were separated out in this analysis because of language that provided the school council authority to “develop” learning improvement plans rather than simply advise on them. In these three jurisdictions, however, the school council “recommends” such plans to the school and/or school board for their approval. In contrast, three jurisdictions (Yukon, Ontario, and Quebec) include language that provides authority for the school council to “review, modify and approve,” or compels the school board to consult with the school council (“shall”) in learning improvement or school annual plans. As stated earlier, Nunavut and Northwest Territories do not have school council structures and so they are listed as N/A.

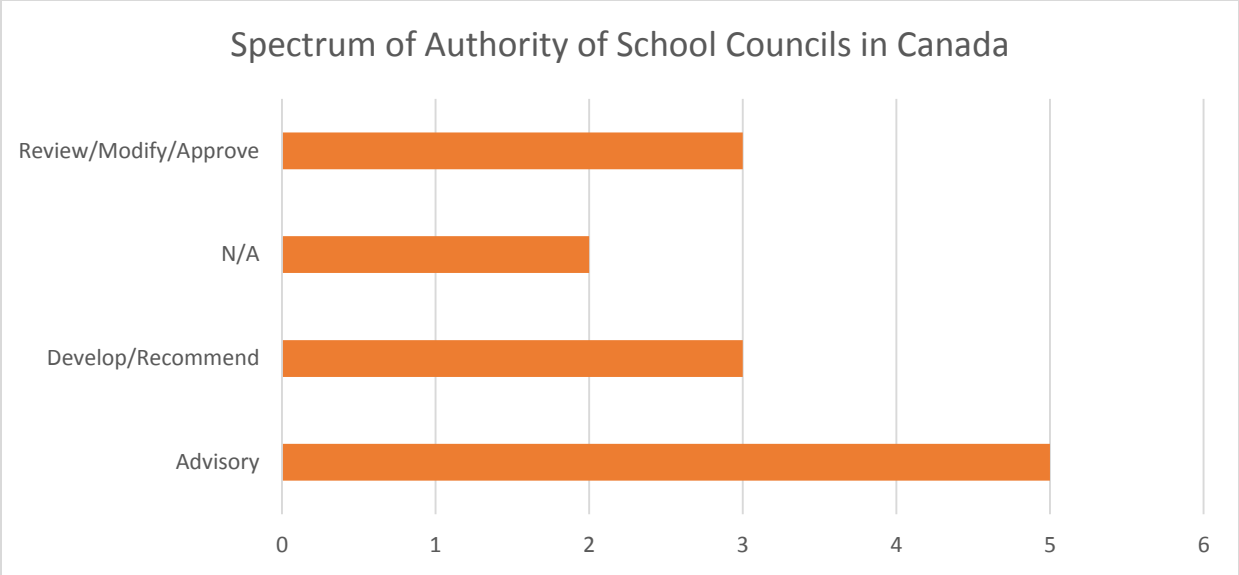


Figure 3-I.3. Spectrum of Authority of School Councils in Canada.

In the legislative and/or regulatory frameworks of the Yukon, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia, school councils are granted the authority to participate in the selection of the school principal. As the school principal plays a key role in school and its relationship with families and community members, this authority of the school council is deemed noteworthy.

An examination of school councils in Canada confirms that most jurisdictions have such a structure for each school in the province, and that they most often have a direct legislative and/or regulatory mandate to focus on student learning. An analysis of the legislative and/or regulatory or policy frameworks demonstrates a spectrum of authority, and divergent approaches to powers granted to school councils to carry out their functions – from advisory to decision-makers. If most jurisdictions clearly value a role for parents and community members in schools by having a school council structure, and most school councils have a mandate to focus on improved student learning, evidence suggests that the jurisdictions assume that parents have an

interest and a role in improved student learning. What, then, gets in the way of school councils achieving this mandate? That jurisdictions have divergent approaches to granting authority to school councils, from advisory to decision-maker roles, is interesting and perhaps evidence of the beliefs and assumptions inherent in the K-12 education system as it relates to the role of parents on the school landscape.

Chapter 4-I

Findings

Introduction

As described earlier, an evaluation of School Community Councils was directed through an adopted resolution of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) in 2016. The parameters of the evaluation were collaborated on and agreed to between the SSBA and myself as researcher. In spring of 2018, data collection was conducted as described in Chapter 2-I. Following the data collection process, a five-member interpretation panel was convened comprising senior officials from education partners in Saskatchewan – the Ministry of Education, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials, and the League of Educational Administrators, Directors, and Superintendents. Together with the researcher, this panel analyzed the data collected through this evaluation to identify patterns and themes from the data. It also provided opportunity to see convergence of perspectives, as well as divergence, both of which are noted in this section. This process acknowledges the important role each education partner plays in Saskatchewan’s provincial education system, including their roles with SCCs, and honours the perspectives each education partner brings to this topic. It also brings transparency into this evaluation and adds validity to the findings.

The SCC report was written and submitted to the SSBA for approval. The SSBA presented the report in September 2018 to Board Chairs’ Council, a council comprising the SSBA provincial executive as well as the board chairs (or designate) from each of the 27 school boards in the province. Following that meeting, the SSBA posted the report on its website, and

the report was circulated electronically to all school board chairs and Directors of Education in the province, asking them to review the report and distribute as they deemed appropriate. In addition, the report was circulated electronically by the SSBA to the education partners involved in the study – the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents of Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials – encouraging them to review the report findings and recommendations. School board members were also presented with a session at their 2018 Fall General Assembly regarding the report findings. Finally, discussions and presentations regarding the report have been delivered by the SSBA upon request to boards of education in Saskatchewan, including senior school division officials and SCC members.

What follows here are sections from the SCC report, *Evaluating School Community Councils*.

SSBA Report – Evaluating School Community Councils

A Sense of a Mandate Not Achieved

All participants were asked to respond to a scenario to determine the current state of engagement of SCCs in co-constructing the school level plan (See Appendix A). Scenario A – The SCC does not develop and recommend a school level plan, nor is the SCC aware that is their mandate. Scenario B – The school level plan is created by the school principal and staff, and is taken to the SCC for approval. There is limited discussion or input by the SCC into the school level plan, and there is a sense by SCC members that the school level plan is owned by the school

“You just bake things like back in the 50s.”

(SCC member)

“There is a lack of awareness of what the mandate is.”

(SCC member)

“Lack of understanding of what SCCs should be doing by Admin and members.” **(SCC member)**

principal and staff. Scenario C – The school level plan is created by the SCC through a process that includes the SCC, school principal, and school staff contributing to the development of the plan. The SCC monitors the plan, receives progress updates on the plan, and there is a sense that the SCC and school staff own the school level plan.

When responding to the three scenarios, ‘B’ is the most common scenario with which the groups identified. It is interesting to note that SCC Urban Members were nearly as likely to respond ‘A,’ indicating that they are not engaged in co-constructing the school level plan, while SCC Rural Members did not select ‘A’ at all, indicating they are more likely to have a role in co-constructing the school level plan. The Education Partners were more likely to respond ‘C’ than they were to respond ‘A,’ indicating they believe SCCs are engaged in co-constructing the school level plan. Figure 4-I.1 displays the responses by participant group.

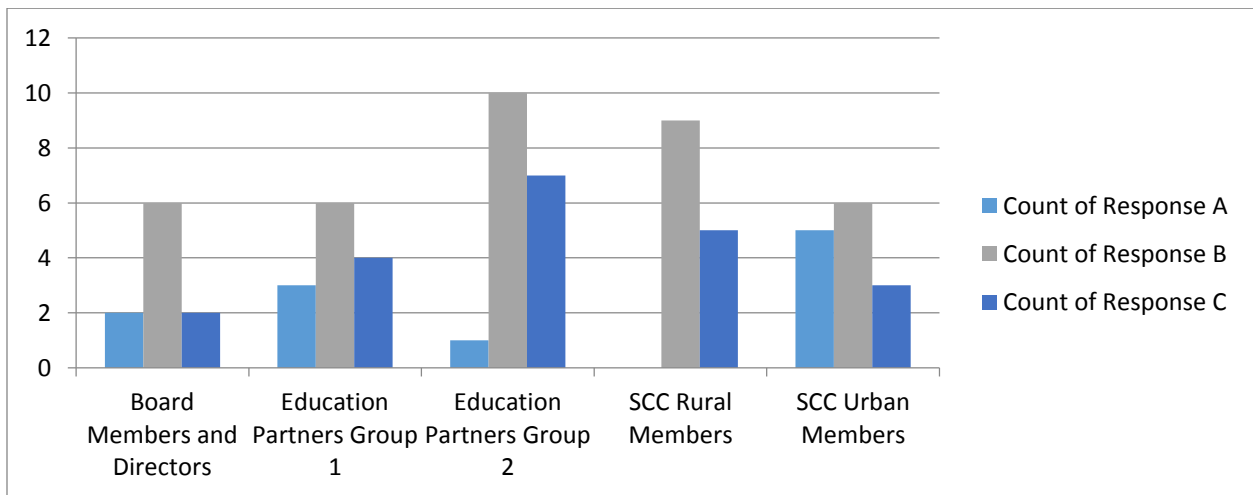


Figure 4-I.1. Responses to Scenario Question by Groups.

Many respondents were unable to select one response to the scenario question, but rather often identified with a spectrum of experiences (e.g., have experienced A through C at different times, or suggesting they are somewhere between responses ‘A-B’ or ‘B-C’.) Figure 4-I.2

displays the spectrum of responses by participant group.

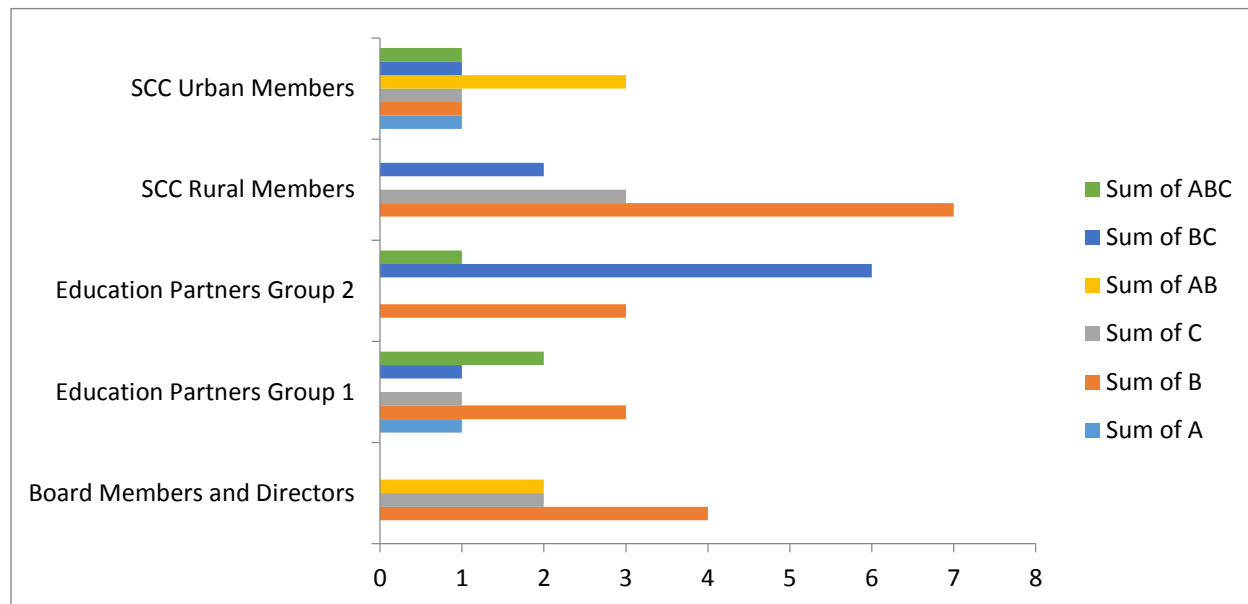


Figure 4-I.2. Spectrum of Responses to Scenario Question by Groups.

Most Urban SCC members were not aware of the SCC mandate and, in fact, were surprised when they were made aware of the Act, Regulations, and Policy regarding their role. They felt that their role, as prescribed for them by the historic and current practices played out in the school, was to fundraise. Though more Rural SCC members selected scenario C than Urban SCC members, an indicator that they were more likely to see themselves engaged in co-constructing the school level plan than Urban SCC members, the vast majority of Rural SCC members selected scenario B, with most often identifying that the school level plan is typically created by the school principal and staff, and the SCC members are involved “post decision by the school Principal,” and after the plan is “largely or completely set.”

There is evidence to suggest that the collaboration and co-construction of the school level plan envisioned for SCCs is not consistently occurring, and most often not occurring – a sense that the mandate for SCCs is not being achieved.

Beliefs and Assumptions Impact on SCCs Achieving Their Mandate

The diverse responses received to the scenario question signals the importance of ‘beliefs

“I haven’t found that the SCC can make that goal on their own – it is driven by the school administration.”

(Education Partners Group)

“Many are comfortable with Admin. presenting the learning plan and they determine their means of support.”

(Board Members/Directors Group)

and assumptions’ about parents and communities, and how these can either support SCCs to achieve their mandate, or impede their ability to do so. For example, some education partners’ statements seemed to indicate that they believe SCC parents/community members do not want to engage on the strategic plan, believing that they are not competent enough to understand the education jargon used in the plan development, and that SCC members just want to fundraise.

Comments mirrored a statement by a principal

documented by Stelmach (2016) in her SCC study when describing the SCC mandate and the role of parents, noting, “They don’t have the training to tell us what to do” (p. 286). It is also interesting to note how this belief interplays with those in marginalized groups (e.g., Indigenous or newcomers), reflecting a stance that new immigrants are not ready to discuss the strategic plan, for example, and comments that some SCCs are unable to get any Indigenous parents out. This echoes Stelmach’s (2016) findings that when parents “were invited to contribute to school improvement planning, it was to give feedback about decisions already made at the school or division level” (p. 278).

“I think it is asking a lot of new immigrants to weigh in on strategic plan – they are not ready for it – it is too much for my newcomers.”

(Education Partners Group)

“Unless SCC members are former teachers, administrators, learning coaches or reading, writing or math specialists, they have a difficult time giving their input on how schools should be teaching students.”

(Board Members/Directors Group)

If education partners, the holders of power in the system, do not believe parents and community members can contribute to student learning, then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby SCC members are not achieving their mandate. The reverse is also true in

that the data demonstrated that where administrators and staff value the relationship with parents and the voice of parents, those SCC members were more likely to see themselves as engaged in the mandate of SCCs.

It appears that the positioning of parents that lives out in schools and the philosophical and pedagogical stances of staff get in the way of the effectiveness of parent and community engagement, including the effectiveness of SCCs to carry out their mandate. The variety in how SCCs are deployed across Saskatchewan is very different, and often dependent on relationships.

The Key Role of the Principal

A common refrain in educational research emerges yet again in this evaluation – the critical role of the school principal (Bryk, 2010). All groups identified the key role of the school principal in this work. Most often participants identified that this person sets the tone for relationship and expectations for the SCC mandate. Principals were applauded for when it

works, and they were cited as the reason for the times it was not working.

“The administrator is the key to getting towards a C. Our administrative team is 3 lovely people. The tone, attitude, acceptance of the principal to invite and engage community to be involved.”
(SCC member)

Similarly in her study, Stelmach (2016) found that “the SCCs that demonstrated low levels of citizen participation were those in which the principal either did not take the SCC mandate seriously, or did not believe in it” (p. 284). There is work to be done by the sector to set the

expectations for school administrators to effectively engage SCCs in co-

constructing the school level plan, and providing them with the knowledge, strategies, and supports to be successful in this endeavour. The recommendations of this evaluation will address supports for the role of the Principal.

Fundraising

In Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice asked the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," the cat told her. "I don't much care," Alice said. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," the cat replied (cited in Guskey, 2017, p. 32). This story comes to mind when contemplating the fundraising saga in SCCs.

SCCs replaced a plethora of parent council type models in Saskatchewan that existed prior to forced school division amalgamations in 2006, including local boards, school and community associations, parent teacher associations, school councils – all with different compositions, mandates, and authority, but all sharing an interest in bringing community and school together. With the onset of SCCs, the Ministry of Education was deliberate and intentional in changing the focus from fundraising to improving student achievement (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005).

Fundraising, though well intentioned and helpful to school staff, is not the mandate of SCCs as these actions have low impact on improving student achievement. It is the engagement of school staff and parents in the real work of schools – teaching and learning – where important gains can be realized in improving student achievement (Goodall, 2017; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kirby & DiPaola, 2011).

"Most are at the fundraising level and not creating plans. Recently an SCC shared a recent experience that they felt the staff treat them as intruders, that they are in the staff's space – and the SCC was not involved – people attributed that to the leadership in the school."

(Education Partners Group)

The evidence through the data collected in this evaluation indicates that by and large most SCCs are involved in some level of fundraising. In fact, most SCC members and staff feel that is their primary purpose. Comments from SCC members also provided evidence that some SCC members like the fundraising aspect that occurs at SCCs, and others do not. One school

division has made intentional efforts to direct the efforts of the SCC solely on the mandate and thereby separating out the fundraising activities. This separation is done by having the SCC meetings with an agenda aligned to the SCC mandate. When that meeting ends, it is followed by a “Friends of the School Name” meeting, often with the same members, who then consider fundraising efforts. It is an interesting and deliberate effort to focus SCCs on their mandate, while creating space for those interested in fundraising. In conversation with staff and SCC members from this school division, however, there remain mixed feelings about this approach, with some parents feeling it is odd that they must conclude one meeting to have the other, and others who expressed some concern that the SCC meeting was not directed to the SCC mandate. How does the education sector focus the efforts of SCCs on learning? How does the education sector draw the lines more clearly on this issue and disallow fundraising at SCCs, or create some space for this practice to occur in a manner that does not take away the focus on student learning?

When discussing these questions with the interpretation panel, no agreement was reached on this matter, with some feeling it is a distraction from the mandate and misuse of the time and energy of SCCs, and with others feeling it is inevitable and perhaps it is best to allow fundraising to occur. Beyond the concern that this perpetuates inequity (Posey-Maddox, 2016) in schools for children, based on access to privilege and wealth (i.e. those who live in poor communities will not have the same opportunities to raise funds as those who reside in middle to upper middle-class communities), it also distracts attention away from the clear mandate. Some individuals critical of fundraising in schools called for a ban on such activity noting “that a ban would also enable school councils to spend more time on priorities other than fundraising” (Winton, 2019, p. 62). Returning to the passage from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*,

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” the cat told her. “I don’t much care,” Alice said.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” the cat replied.

Knowing that parent and community engagement leads to improved student achievement, and having evidence to suggest that SCCs are not achieving their mandate in this regard, it seems imperative that efforts are taken to refocus SCCs on their mandate, as opposed to “it doesn’t matter which way you go.” If the destination is improved student achievement, then it does matter which way we go, and where the efforts of SCCs are focused.

Providing Adequate Supports, and Creating New Supports

There are some supports put in place by school divisions for SCCs (e.g. handbook, technology, forums, professional development), but these are inconsistent across schools and school divisions. One example shared by an urban SCC parent was that the school division had created a template designed to collect financial reporting data from SCCs. Although this template was established as a reporting requirement, it was not completed by many SCCs, resulting in incomplete data for the school division, and incomplete understanding by SCC members in terms of how SCCs in the school division spend their dollars allocated by the school division. Education partners identified additional gaps, and noted the lack of awareness by SCC members, and even Principals, of the SCC mandate. They identified an opportunity to create awareness of the mandate. Education partners shared that they were aware that the school division has a SCC handbook, but education partners identified that this handbook should include strategies for the SCC to facilitate collaboration and engagement in developing the school level plan. Education partners also identified a need for supports or templates to be developed and available for Principals and SCC Chairs as tools to facilitate their work, as well as

support sharing amongst schools and SCCs. Some SCC members expressed dissatisfaction with the support that school divisions make available to disseminate information regarding the SCCs.

The posting of SCC meeting minutes was offered as an example, where some schools handle this

“If the school board wants the SCC to be more successful, have one website communications person for all to keep things updated and keep information flowing.”
(SCC member)

“Websites have inconsistent information for the parents. Can we not make it consistent?”
(SCC member)

quite quickly, other schools are months behind posting SCC meeting minutes. Some suggestions made by SCC members included better use of social media such as a SCC Facebook page, or utilizing a local community’s social media presence for SCC purposes, as opposed to solely relying on the school social media. Other SCC members described a school division change to the division’s web presence, which resulted in the loss of the SCC to have control over the SCC webpage. The SCC members noted that this loss of control has negatively impacted their

ability to effectively communicate with the community, and they can no longer personalize the SCC webpage.

Given that the design of this study did not include every school division in Saskatchewan, it did not become apparent through this research if all school divisions in Saskatchewan provide a forum for SCCs to network with each other and engage with the board of education and senior administration. Where this exists, school division staff cite this as an effective practice, and SCC members express appreciation for these forums. At one school division who hosted such a forum, one SCC member found that the forum was focused on how “SCCs can be more empowered and stronger” to work together. The SCC member who shared this experience noted that the forum created opportunity for SCC members to discuss transitions between schools (elementary to secondary), adding that “now we are going to start meeting with the feeder

schools...oh my god we didn't know we could do that." SCC members expressed a desire for these opportunities to include further time for networking and dialogue among SCCs in order to

"In BC, every district has a district SCC and you can send one vote per school. These meetings are about roundtable discussion and then we would bring in the superintendent, trustees, teacher association rep to speak and have dialogue., and then we take that information and share back with the individual SCCs." (SCC member)

share their experiences and identify effective practices that they can take back to their SCCs. Given that the data from this review suggests that SCCs are not focused on their mandate, these types of forums may prove an effective structure to empower and re-focus the efforts of SCC members on their mandate. Formalizing a SCC division-wide structure, similar to jurisdictions such as British Columbia, was suggested by SCC members as a possible structure worth further exploration in Saskatchewan.

Making the School Community Council an Inviting Structure

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2010 SCC evaluation identified that SCC members felt the structure was too intimidating for parents, in particular because of the election process and the formality of the meeting procedures (e.g., motions, voting). This structural concern was discussed in this evaluation to determine if a sense of intimidation is still the case. There was a feeling expressed by education partners that the structure (perhaps even calling it School Community Council) is intimidating for parents, however, according to the experiences of some education partners, the perception that the SCC is intimidating to parents only exists until parents become part of the SCC, and then they do not experience it to be intimidating. Other education partners expressed the opinion that the SCC remains intimidating, particularly with the elections and meeting formality. They felt such structure precludes many parents who are not accustomed to that meeting formality, or who would not become involved in an election

process, or run for a position. Education partners observed that SCCs do not engage those marginalized or otherwise disengaged in the community, and therefore SCCs are not fully representative of the community, particularly newcomers and Indigenous populations. Elections, meeting formality, and the education jargon used at SCC meetings were described as barriers. Through the course of the focus groups in this evaluation, participants came to the realization that the meeting formality that exists, which participants assumed was directed by the Act or

“Terminology is an issue. In my community, many parents are non-working – it can be very daunting....the business model scares people away. It is too formal. We need to pull back and create a less formal process. Every school is different, and every SCC is going to be different.”

(Education Partners Group)

Regulations of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, in fact is not imposed by the Act or Regulations of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. These “norms” are under the authority of the school division or SCC itself, often based upon SCC constitution/bylaws or a school division handbook for SCCs, or even sometimes directed by a school principal or SCC Chair. School division staff, school staff, and SCCs control their structures, processes, and ‘norms,’ and SCCs can feel

empowered to ‘relax’ the structure/formality if needed. The mandate of SCCs is to engage broadly staff, parents, and community to support student learning. The councils are a means to that end. If the SCC structure or formality gets in the way of this goal, then they are missing the point.

Answering the Research Questions

How can a SCC facilitate parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes? What are the characteristics of a SCC that is facilitating parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes?

Most participants in this evaluation identified that their SCC most closely reflects scenario B, a school level plan that is created by the school principal and staff and taken to the SCC for approval without opportunity for input by the SCC. The comments from participants suggested that a prerequisite for a SCC to facilitate parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes is a belief by school staff in the value of parent and community voice in such endeavours. Moving from scenario B to scenario C, with the school level plan co-constructed by school staff and the SCC, may only occur when relationships built on trust between staff, parents, and community members are created. Relationship building is most often led by the school principal, as research participants have expressed in this evaluation, whereby the progression of engagement of parents and community in the school level plan becomes achievable, and the norm. Scenario C is characterized by a focus on the SCC mandate (vision and goals of the school to improve student learning), by a collaborative and reciprocal relationship where the interests of the school staff and parents/community come together, and where the SCC is representative of the school community. Where SCC members experienced scenario C, the co-construction of the school level plan with the school staff, they described the “administrator as key to getting towards a [scenario] C.” SCC members used phrases such as “acceptance of the principal to invite and engage community,” “inviting us to participate and be involved,” and “we could make choices about what we want to focus on.” When SCC members described their SCC as scenario B, where the school principal and staff develop the school level plan and take it to the SCC for approval without opportunity for input, they advise that in order to move to scenario C (co-construction of the school level plan), the “administration needs to be open and willing to hear opinions.” The key role of the principal emerged as an important factor in SCCs achieving their mandate.

The data in this evaluation suggests that most SCCs are not aware of, nor focused on, their mandate. Most SCC members, as already identified in this evaluation, believe that their mandate, as established over time and in current practice, is to fundraise. Some principals in this evaluation also confirmed that they were not aware of this mandate. Some education partners noted that since a decade has passed since SCCs emerged, they can see how the SCC mandate is getting lost due to changes in school administration, SCC members, and school division staff with responsibilities for SCCs over that span of time. Education partners described the significant efforts at the onset of the change to SCCs in 2006, noting that the impetus for this work has waned over time due to competing priorities or perhaps due to SCCs being more established. Without an understanding of the mandate of SCCs by the principal and school staff, and a belief in the value of engaging parents and community in school planning and improvement processes, it is unlikely that a SCC will facilitate parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes. Without a clear picture of what this looks like, a principal and school staff are left adrift as one participant described, “I don’t even know what that would look like.” A vision for improving student learning, inclusive of a strategy that centralizes engagement of school staff with youth, parents, and community members, and grounded in beliefs and practices aligned with this vision, is required. As the accountable body through the legislation, boards of education play an important role in setting the expectation for such a vision and establishing the supports for such a strategy to be successful.

What supports, considerations, or other critical elements are important for schools, school divisions, and the various education partners in the province to attend to, in order to assist SCCs in implementing their mandate?

As with any strategy, coordination and alignment of efforts is necessary for success. In the case of SCCs, many partners throughout the education sector play important roles in creating success for SCCs. These roles are further delineated in the recommendations (see p. 106).

How do the roles of Boards of Education and SCCs inter-relate? What role may SCCs play in major education initiatives in Saskatchewan such as the Education Sector Strategic Plan, or reconciliation?

Through the focus groups and research sharing circles, this question was included, however it received very limited discussion. Focus groups and research sharing circles spent much of the time in their discussions on the first three or four questions in this research, whereas this question emerged as number six of seven. The evaluation has confirmed, however, that school board members have an interest in connecting with SCCs, and SCC members desire a relationship, and engagement, with school board members. Currently, there is inconsistency in how this is practiced, as confirmed by both school board members and SCC members, noting that in some instances this relationship is well established and, in other instances, not at all. If the mandate of SCCs is to provide advice to the board of education, then it is important that a relationship and practices be put in place by the holders of power in this relationship, that being boards of education, to enable this to occur. There is a risk that SCCs can become cynical of school board efforts to engage SCCs only in matters of interest to the school board (i.e. campaigns to support education funding, or local governance of education) if the relationship between school boards and SCCs is not reciprocal and meaningful beyond such efforts. As one SCC member expressed, “If the SCC feels the Principal values and listens to SCC voices, SCC members then feel the Board is responsive and aware. If the Principal doesn’t value the SCC,

the SCC members do not feel the Board values them.” This comment again confirms the meaningful role that school principals play in building relationships with the SCC.

A School Community Councils Logic Model was developed for this evaluation (see Figure 2-I.1, p. 59), which describes a long-term outcome for SCCs as “citizenship and engagement in public education.” This is indeed a lofty goal for SCCs and for the education system in Saskatchewan broadly. It is of note that in at least two instances in this evaluation, school board members expressed that their interest in pursuing trusteeship began through their involvement as SCC members. These experiences confirm that this outcome is achievable.

What is the educational and social significance of well-functioning SCCs that are achieving their mandate?

In Saskatchewan, as across Canada, there is an expectation, grounded in legislation, for youth, parents, and community members to work collaboratively alongside school staff to support improved student learning. This expectation undoubtedly comes from a belief in the need for the voice of parents and community within public education, and it is solidified with five decades of educational research that attest to the significance of parent and community engagement in schools (Mapp, 2013). To move the dial on improved student achievement, particularly with Indigenous and vulnerable students, the engagement of parents and community members is required. SCCs are structures created with a mandate for this very reason, and a well-functioning SCC built on relationships of trust between school staff, parents, and community members is one means to that goal.

Recommendations

Recommendation One: That every school in Saskatchewan adopt community education philosophy and practices, to create an environment in which SCCs can thrive, and communities can be engaged.

Harkening back to a similar recommendation from nearly 20 years ago for the provincial education system (Tymchak, 2001), it is imperative that this foundation be put in place to facilitate SCCs achieving their mandate.

- 1.1 That boards of education create a mandate for all schools to establish and sustain a school culture that is welcoming and inclusive to parents and community, and annually conduct assessments of such by parents and community members to determine such.
- 1.2 That boards of education engage school staff and SCCs in ongoing professional development opportunities focused on community education philosophy and practices.
- 1.3 That school division recruitment and selection practices be reviewed to ensure the processes adequately attract and reward candidates who value youth, parent, and community engagement, and whose practices demonstrates such.
- 1.4 That SCCs review their member election process and meeting structure, to determine if any of these formalities are impediments to the engagement of parents and community members, particularly for Indigenous and newcomers. If any impediments are found, SCCs are encouraged to revise their bylaws and meeting practices as necessary, to create a more inviting, inclusive, and representative structure.

Recommendation Two: That SCCs focus on their mandate to support improved student achievement.

SCCs are most often unaware of their mandate. A successful home-school collaboration program, among other elements, must include “a public awareness process [to be] enacted to help parents and teachers understand the need for the [strategy]” (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p. 56). An intentional and consistent approach is required to ensure school staff and SCCs are aware of their mandate and are directing their precious energy to that end.

- 2.1 That the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education and boards of education launch a communication strategy for the provincial Pre-K-12 education sector, including SCCs, parents, and communities, that clarifies the purpose of SCCs and their mandate.
- 2.2 That boards of education review, and revise as necessary, their SCC resources and supports to ensure they are grounded in, and aligned with, the mandate of SCCs.
- 2.3 That boards of education provide ongoing professional development opportunities for school staff and SCCs that focuses on their mandate to support improved student achievement.
- 2.4 That fundraising not be permitted within SCCs to ensure SCCs are focused on their mandate.

Where parents express an interest in fundraising, that school divisions create a separate structure (e.g., “Friends of the School Name”) for such purposes, and that this structure comply with financial accountability practices and operate within the set controls of the board of education.

Recommendation Three: That education partners in Saskatchewan provide adequate supports and create new supports for SCCs.

Education partners provide supports for SCCs. However, gaps were identified in this evaluation. Other jurisdictions' supports and models may serve as potential examples to enhance SCCs in Saskatchewan. SCCs and school staff must be provided with adequate supports to optimize their effectiveness.

3.1 That the SSBA, in conjunction with LEADS, update and revise its existing resource, *School community councils: A handbook for School Community Councils and Principals*, in a fashion similar to the Council of Ontario's Directors of Education parent engagement guidebook, to more effectively provide SCCs and school staff with the strategies, tools, and supports to focus on their mandate.

3.2 That education partners jointly develop and implement a strategy to support school principals to carry out their leadership role with SCCs.

3.3 That boards of education and SCCs review the school division's existing supports for SCCs (e.g., technology, templates, handbook, etc.) to ensure they are functionally meeting the needs of SCCs to effectively carry out their mandate. That these existing supports be updated and/or new supports be created as required.

3.4 That boards of education be encouraged to formalize a division-wide SCC body comprising at least one representative from each SCC in the school division. That this body be co-chaired by the Chair of the board of education, and by a SCC representative appointed or elected from the body. That the structure provide a forum for networking amongst SCCs, to focus on the mandate of SCCs, and for ongoing professional development to assist SCCs to focus on their mandate. Most importantly, that this body provide advice to the board of

education on improving student achievement, and facilitate networking between school board members, senior school division officials, and SCCs.

Recommendation Four: That the education sector prioritize youth, parent, and community engagement as a foundation of Saskatchewan’s Pre-K – 12 education system and hold itself accountable to this end.

This evaluation has highlighted a shared desire of SCCs and education partners in Saskatchewan for the engagement of youth, parents, and community in schools. Steps can be taken to move this desire to action, and “embed engagement” (Goodall, 2017, p. 132) as a foundation in Saskatchewan’s Pre-K-12 education system, from the SCC and beyond. If teacher training does not include development partnerships, and parent engagement, then it is little wonder that teachers do not know how to do it, nor see the value in it (Goodall, 2017).

4.1 That the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education prioritize youth, parent, and community engagement in its vision for education and subsequent strategic plan for the sector. That this strategy effectively enlists SCCs in a meaningful way, and creates the expectations for schools to facilitate multiple means of engagement for youth, parents, and community – both within the SCC and with the school in general. That the plan be monitored for evidence towards this end. That the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education establish a Parent Engagement Office to coordinate these efforts.

4.2 That the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education and boards of education advocate to post-secondary institutions in Saskatchewan with teacher education programs to develop required classes/curricula to support teacher candidates to be more familiar with engaging youth,

parents, and community in support of student learning. That graduate-level programs similarly foster educational leadership towards this end.⁵

4.3 That education partners advocate to the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board to revise its academic requirements for teacher certification to include a required class in youth, parent, and community engagement as described in recommendation 4.2.

4.4 That SCCs conduct an annual self-evaluation to determine their ongoing effectiveness in achieving their mandate. That they communicate these results to their communities, as well as the board of education. That the SSBA develop a template to support the self-evaluation process.

Evaluation Research Conclusion

This evaluation provided the opportunity to hear directly from those connected to SCCs in Saskatchewan, in a variety of roles. Through the generosity of their time, participants in this study have provided the education sector in Saskatchewan with significant insights into the current state of SCCs, and a window into what a renewed focus on SCCs could be. The evidence strongly suggests that after more than a decade in existence, SCCs are not achieving their mandate, and we see only “random acts of parent engagement” (Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010) occurring. When asked in the course of this evaluation if SCCs matter, however, there was an overwhelming response by all groups that, yes, SCCs matter. It is important for the education system to connect with parents and community, and SCCs can facilitate this.

⁵ Recommendations 4.2 and 4.3 are made based on analysis of the data from this study, whereby participants noted the limited understanding school administrators and teachers have regarding the mandate of SCCs and of the philosophy and pedagogy underpinning parent engagement. It is acknowledged that teacher educators were not invited to participate in this research, nor were teacher education curricula in Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions analyzed for this research.

If the lofty outcomes envisioned for SCCs as outlined in the SCC Logic Model (see Figure 2-I.1, p. 59) remain and are to be realized, then it is time to pause and hit the reset button on SCCs. Without an intentional and consistent approach to the inputs and outputs required to create success for SCCs, it is unrealistic to expect SCCs to achieve the short, medium, and long-term outcomes envisioned, particularly when many SCC members are unaware of their mandate. A renewal of efforts through a strategic focus and systematic plan to raise awareness of the mandate of SCCs and focus efforts to that end will set the course for SCCs for years to come. Guided by a shared belief in the education sector of the value of parent and community engagement in improved student learning, and built upon relationships of trust between school staff, parents, and community, SCCs can be set up for success to achieve their mandate.

The findings and recommendations from this learning-oriented evaluation are intended to provide SCCs and education partners in Saskatchewan with the research upon which they can draw to form conclusions about the benefits and successes of SCCs, and serve as a guide towards their renewal. The engagement of parents and community in schools is vital to improve student learning, and schools must create multiple pathways and opportunities for this engagement – SCCs being one of these important opportunities. It is acknowledged that educational policy is not created in a vacuum, and the engagement of parents and communities, including First Nations, Métis, and newcomers, is subject to the political interests and context of those who hold power. It is hoped that this study has shed light on the significance of parent and community engagement in schools, and that it will lead education partners to strengthening the position of parents on the school landscape in a more consistent and systematic fashion, ultimately leading to improved educational and social outcomes for students and families in the province of Saskatchewan.

Decision to Interview Non-SCC Parents

All those voices included in the evaluation of SCCs were from those individuals who were currently engaged with SCCs in some manner: parents, SCC members, principals, school division officials with responsibilities for SCCs, Ministry of Education officials, and school board members. The data collected reflects well their experiences, and the findings and recommendations were written based upon that data.

As this dissertation is a critical analysis of SCCs, it was important that the voices of those parents who are not currently members of the SCC were also consulted. In particular, it was important to capture the perspectives of Indigenous and newcomers in this evaluation, as they were identified in the evaluation as not being engaged in the SCC. The experiences of the non-SCC parents presented alongside the voices of those currently engaged in some form with SCCs presents a more complete picture of SCCs in Saskatchewan.

What follows here is the data collected through interviews with four non-SCC parents, as well as the findings from that data. It is followed by a return to the responses to the research questions, as well as the recommendations, based upon the new information learned through this culturally responsive evaluation.

Non-SCC Parent Interviews: What was Heard?

As described in 2-I, interviews were arranged with non-SCC parents at Howard Coad School using an Indigenous methodology of relationships. Staff, SCC members, and Dr. Debbie Pushor all reached out to parents personally to invite them to participate. Four parents responded to the invitation and participated in interviews. All interviewees were women and parents of a

child or children at Howard Coad School. Of the four women⁶, one was a visible minority (Kira), who has been in Canada for years, two were newcomers to Canada (Rahima and Anna), and one was a First Nation woman (Sophie). The interviews were conducted in November 2018. Three interviews were conducted on the school premises, while one interview was conducted at a local coffee shop at the request of the parent. Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes.

As an Indigenous researcher, who was meeting each of these women for the first time, it was important to me to thank them each for agreeing to participate in the conversation. I explained the purpose of the study, and the ethics, noting that I would not identify the women in my dissertation. I articulated that their experiences are important, and my intent was to honour their words in my study, and to share their insights with others.

First Interview

The first parent I interviewed was Rahima, a newcomer to Canada, and a young mother of one child who attended the school. The interview took place in a ‘community room’ at the school at the start of the school day. Children were in the room having breakfast as the interview was conducted. Rahima expressed immediately that she was very concerned about her limited English and was unsure how the interview would go. I explained that I would do my best to capture her thoughts and noted that her insights were a gift. Throughout the interview, I noticed Rahima struggle with English. I observed a parent who wanted to share, wanted to respond, but was confounded by the limitations of the interview being done in a language that was not her own. My own thoughts reflected to the experiences of Métis people through scrip, or of First Nations, and the limitations of using English during treaty negotiations. The limitations of English were definitely present in the interview with Rahima, however her generosity and desire

⁶ Pseudonyms are used for each of the four women interviewed for this research.

to share her thoughts were powerful. Yeh & Inman (2007) described such challenges posed to researchers because of language barriers, noting that “there are many emotion words in other languages that have no accurate translation in English that can pose challenges for data interpretation and analysis” (p. 380). I am left to wonder what Rahima may have further expressed if the interview was conducted in her language. I have no doubt that her confidence to participate was built through strong relationships at the school, and her wanting to engage and give back to the school.

When asked what the SCC does, she was unsure. However, she thought that they connect with families. When asked how the SCC communicates, she said they send home notes sometimes, and that the notes work well. During the interview she went on to describe how important it is for her to know about her child, and how her child is learning/progressing. She expressed that the school staff came to her home two times and she found that valuable. “I like that, it’s good for me.” Rahima concluded the interview by saying that the school is very friendly, and that the SCC is a good concept that brings together the “school, students, parents, and teachers to know about your child.”

Second Interview

The second interview took place in the ‘community room’ as well, though most children had finished breakfast and had left to class. The parent scheduled for the interview did not show up, however Kira, another parent at Howard Coad School, came to the room. Kira, a visible minority in Canada, was a parent volunteer in the school who was attending that day to support a school program in a volunteer capacity. A school staff member and I invited Kira to participate in an interview, and she agreed. She too explained her limitation with English but was willing to

participate. I thanked her for the generosity of her time and explained how important her insights would be to this study.

Kira was a mother of one child who had been in Howard Coad School throughout Kindergarten to Grade 8. When asked what the primary role of the SCC is, she described hosting events and fundraising. When asked about how the SCC communicates, she responded that they communicate through newsletters and Facebook, noting that both means were effective. When asked why she was not a SCC member, she responded that the Monday evening meetings conflict with her schedule as a student. Kira was quick to point out that she does help out with the school as much as she can. Not lost on me was the fact that she was there volunteering at the school on this morning. She did not think the SCC was too formal, and described it as very friendly and welcoming. Her advice to the SCC was to get more parents involved, as she noted “not too many are involved now.”

Third Interview

The third interview was conducted in the school later that morning, at a table outside the main office. Anna was with a young mother of two children in the school, also a newcomer to Canada. She is also connected to the school through a school led program⁷. Anna’s pride in the school, and confidence to share her insights was immediately noticed – among her first words were, “I love this school.” She described the teachers as friendly.

Anna did not require much prompting through my questions, which she read, but we engaged in a conversation where she spoke at length, and with great ease, about her insights as being connected with the school and her community. She answered questions from both a

⁷ The name and description of the school program is omitted to protect the anonymity of the interviewee.

personal place (her experience), but at times from a place of her community, identifying with other newcomers to Canada and what they experience with the school and SCC.

Anna described not initially understanding the mandate of the SCC but, through her involvement with the school she has come to understand their mandate. She was not currently a SCC member due to a busy schedule. She described how newcomers do not understand the SCC and what it does. She expressed that they do appreciate larger community events with food, noting the cultural importance of this. In that environment, newcomers do become involved and show up to those events at the school.

Anna described being nervous about English. However, I would offer, that her English was easily understandable throughout the interview, and she was able to confidently express her thoughts. When discussing English, she identified the language barrier as a very real fear to newcomers. Anna articulated that many understand English, but are not always able to speak or respond in English. She described the scenario of a newcomer attending a SCC meeting and perhaps being called upon in that forum to reply. That can be a very intimidating experience for a parent with limited English. She went on to describe that in the larger community events, they feel more comfortable to participate, perhaps observing or sharing in a safer or limited fashion. Contrasting the two scenarios, a more formal SCC meeting or an invitation to a larger community event, and explaining the language barrier fear, she was effective in creating an understanding and empathy for this barrier for newcomers, and this contrast explained why newcomers were not attending SCC meetings. Anna explained that this fear is unfortunate, because attending SCC meetings and getting involved with the school is what will help improve English skills, a personal benefit of engagement for newcomers. She spoke to this improvement

in English from her own personal experience and how getting involved with the school has helped her to improve her English.

Anna described the work of the SCC as improving things for students – communication with the home, behaviour of students. It is “how to work together and improve for students.” When asked about how the SCC communicates, she said by Facebook, but noted the limitation with this as many parents are not on Facebook. She suggested that the school newsletter may be better. She also offered that Monday evening SCC meetings are not effective. She explained that parents are very busy Saturday and Sunday attending to duties, and they simply forget about Monday evening meetings.

Anna concluded by saying that everything is good in the school. She encouraged the SCC to have childcare available when meetings are on. She reiterated that Facebook does not work for SCC communications, but that a newsletter or personal invite to parents works best.

Fourth Interview

The final interview took place later in the day at a local coffee shop, at the request of Sophie who was just completing her workday. Sophie is a First Nation woman, a mother of three (two adult children, and one school-aged child) who all have attended Howard Coad School over the years. She is also the grandmother of three children in the school. Sophie has a long history with Howard Coad School and the community.

When I asked Sophie what she thought the SCC does, she said “community involvement.” “I assume they talk about the children.” She went on to describe how she thought the SCC gets involved in things like the city passing bylaws regarding school zone speed, but she said she did not know if that is what the SCC does. When asked about how the SCC

communicates with parents, Sophie responded that she used to get emails, but does not receive emails from the SCC anymore. She did not know why. She explained that she is aware that the SCC uses Facebook to communicate, but she is not on Facebook so does not hear about the SCC.

When asked why she is not a SCC member, Sophie said it is just a choice, and not that she does not want to be part of the SCC or cannot. She went on to describe a long history of volunteer work with the daycare board over the years. For seven years, Sophie served diligently as a board member, noting the personal benefit of keeping her involved with the school community and with her children as a result of that volunteer work. She had served the school community in that capacity for many years, and now is just too busy to join the SCC. She explained how the school staff had personally asked her to join the SCC this year, but at this point she has not. She offered that she really liked that they made this personal invitation for her to join.

Sophie described the demographics of Howard Coad School as a school community of “new immigrants, First Nations, and Caucasians.” Given these demographics, she felt joining the SCC may be intimidating for First Nations and newcomers due to limitations with English. The language barrier “may be a worry of the parents,” and they may worry about “fitting in.”

She offered that she really likes that Howard Coad School is working on parent engagement. She described how the staff get to know families by coming to their homes, and then they invite parents to the school. The invitation is genuine and is extended when they first come to visit us in our homes, she noted.

Sophie went on to passionately describe her concern for youth in the community. Her long history in the community and her experience shone through while she described this

concern. She is knowledgeable about community resources and described one such youth program at the local Friendship Centre. She explained that the program is there, but youth cannot access it due to the distance and not having access to a bus pass. As she reflected on this challenge, she offered that perhaps her years of experience in the community and with the daycare board could help in this regard, as she knows the concerns of youth, she is aware of these community resources (like the youth program at the Friendship Centre), and she has connections. Sophie is concerned as she sees youth turning to negative behaviours, such as “smoking up,” due to boredom. She knows what youth are going through in the community because she hears directly from her son. She concluded by describing the effectiveness of the school library program at Howard Coad School, where families can access the school library Tuesday evenings and Sundays. She enjoyed connecting with her grandkids during those opportunities. She described this program as a good time, and a good use of the school facility which is in the community and, therefore, transportation is not a barrier.

Interviews – Concluding Thoughts

These four interviews provided informative insights into the experiences of newcomers, visible minorities, and Indigenous parents who are not SCC members. The generosity of Rahima, Kira, Anna, and Sophie in sharing their experiences, even with the limitation of the English language for some, was admirable. Data analysis of their interviews and themes that may inform SCCs throughout Saskatchewan is presented next.

Interviews Findings

The interviews of non-SCC parents presented new knowledge to the topic of SCCs. Within the construct of a culturally responsive evaluation, these interviews presented voices

from those parents not currently engaged in SCCs, as well as representing the voices of Indigenous, visible minority, and newcomer parents, voices most often excluded from SCCs, as noted earlier in the SCC evaluation.

General Observations

Two important observations were made through these interviews that are highlighted here with brief discussion. Following these two general observations, findings from the interviews are organized into themes for consideration.

Primary role of the SCC.

Participants were not able to clearly identify what they thought the primary role of the SCC was. One parent described fundraising and hosting events, another made assumptions about the role of the SCC in school/civic consultation. Similar to the findings of the SCC evaluation, it appears that non-SCC parents are also unaware of the primary mandate of SCCs.

Support for the concept of the SCC.

While there is uncertainty or ambiguity by non-SCC parents about the primary role of the SCC, there is endorsement by participants interviewed for the concept of a SCC. Participants made comments such as bringing together “school, students, parents, and teachers to know about your child,” and “community involvement.” These comments describe parent engagement in schools, that being the engagement of the staff, students, parents, and community members to support student learning. SCCs are a means to such engagement, and non-SCC parents confirm that they understand and support this concept.

The participants in these interviews were able to bring forward important points for consideration by education partners, as well as by SCCs in the province. These important points can be categorized as follows: a) reaching out to non-SCC parents, b) language and culture matters, c) relaxing the SCC formality, and, d) identifying and marshaling untapped community resources.

Reaching Out to Non-SCC Parents

Building relationships and trust with parents and community members is the foundation to parent engagement (Amendt, 2008; Bryan, 2005; Bryk, 2010; Goodall, 2017; Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005). The voices of non-SCC parents in this research, further solidifies this. SCC members and school staff have the responsibility to provide the leadership necessary for this practice. Notable among the purpose of SCCs is their requirement to engage the broader school community of parents/community members (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005). For SCC members to represent accurately the voices of all parents in the community in regards to co-constructing the school-level plan, as per their mandate, it is imperative that they develop a strategy and practices to do so. Given the findings of the SCC evaluation, this strategy must include particular attention to those parents and community members whose voices may be marginalized, including Indigenous and newcomers. The non-SCC participant interviews with Rahima, Kira, Anna, and Sophie presented valuable insights into one practice deployed by Howard Coad School in this regard.

Home visits.

At least two non-SCC parents interviewed in this research commented on the practice of home visits, speaking positively about the value of personal contact through a home visit by

school staff or SCC member. Henderson et al. (2007) have described this strategy and provided tips to conduct home visits by school staff. Among the reasons for conducting home visits is to build relationships between the school and the home, and set the stage for parent engagement. This is particularly important with low socio-economic communities, newcomer families who are not yet engaged in the community, and Indigenous families who have disengaged from schools due to historical injustices. Educators in the school, most often not representative of the diversity of the community, may come with their own beliefs and assumptions about families in the community. In examining student race, sex, and socio-economic status compared to that of educators, Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge (2016) found that educator bias can be detected in relation to teachers having low expectations for the educational success of students different from themselves. Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge noted that the “effect of racial mismatch on the probability that the teacher has low expectations for educational attainment was almost entirely driven by non-black (mostly white) teachers’ expectations for black students relative to the expectations of black teachers” (p. 220). This is not a new phenomenon in education. In a key study (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), teachers were given differing information about their students’ potential at the start of the school year in order to manipulate the teachers’ expectations. By the end of the school year, there were significant differences in student achievement levels as a result of the preset expectations.

In one study of the impact of parent teacher home visits, 11 principals, 96 teachers and staff, and 68 adult family members across four districts in the United States were included to determine any shifts in racial or cultural assumptions as a result of their engagement in home visits (McKnight, Venkateswaran, Laird, Robles, & Shalev, 2017). Among their findings:

Almost all the [Parent Teacher Home Visit] PTHV participants we interviewed related positive outcomes from the home visits and that the time invested resulted in unexpected benefits. In particular, both educators and family members described changes in their perceptions about one another that allowed for better understanding and, in turn, deepened existing or newly developed relationships. Educators and family members, regardless of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, reported shifts in their assumptions or perceptions. Even educators or staff with similar backgrounds to the school community reported changes. Educators realized that prior perceptions of families' and students' interest in and capability to invest in education did not align with reality. Through home visits, family members reported that they felt less "intimidated" by educators and schools and began to feel that educators were people with whom they could relate and begin to trust. (p. 11)

This research highlights the value in school staff conducting home visits as a method to build relationships with families, particularly with those different from themselves, in order to help them to set aside deficit thinking and begin to find strengths in the families with whom they work.

When discussing the reasons for the success of the home visits, two general reasons emerged:

Meeting outside the school, in a place that is comfortable for families, allowed school staff to see things they hadn't seen before in on-campus interactions. Meeting outside the school shifts the traditional power dynamic between schools and families to more equal footing. (p. 27)

Power dynamics are most definitely at play in school staff and parent relationships, including the SCC, and home visits are an intentional strategy to shift traditional power dynamics inherent in schools.

The non-SCC parents who I interviewed described Howard Coad School as “very friendly” and “welcoming.” These comments from newcomers, visible minority, and Indigenous families provided evidence of the relationship and trust building that is occurring at Howard Coad School resulting from home visits, identifying this as an effective practice they have appreciated. Also of note is that non-SCC parents described these efforts to reach out, through personal contact, as the most effective method to engage parents, particularly when compared with social media methods. Reaching out to non-SCC parents is important work of the SCC, and it is important that SCCs continue to do so, even if their efforts at first do not result in these parents attending SCC meetings.

Repeated invitation becomes particularly important in a neighbourhood in which there is a distance between the school and the community – perhaps because of cultural or language differences or because of individuals’ negative experiences with schooling. It takes a great deal of time and contact and repeated evidence that the school is truly a welcoming place to build trust and relationships. It is important not to take a lack of response to an invitation as a lack of interest but instead to see the interaction as an investment in building a relationship. (Pushor, 2007, p. 10)

It is evident that efforts to personally invite non-SCC parents are essential first steps for engagement, and are sincerely valued by non-SCC parents in terms of building relationships and confidence.

Language and Culture Matters

Communicating in the dominant English language, when English is not your first language, is a real and significant barrier identified by non-SCC parents representing Indigenous, visible minority, and newcomers. The insight provided by Anna, describing a scenario where a newcomer is placed in a formal setting such as a SCC meeting and asked to respond, conjured appreciation, understanding, and empathy for this very real fear. Deploying strategies such as utilizing translators (McKnight et al., 2017) or developing surveys for parents in multiple languages (Pushor, 2018) may prove useful in this matter. At minimum, such efforts demonstrate a sensitivity and understanding on the part of the SCC of the realities of language barriers, and may alleviate fears associated with this. SCCs may also wish to market the benefits of the SCC to non-SCC parents for whom English is not their first language, identifying it as a safe and meaningful way to engage with the school community while, in practical ways, creating opportunity to practice and hone their English capacities.

The willingness of Rahima, Kira, Anna, and Sophie to participate in this research, given their limitation with English in some instances, is perhaps indicative of their commitment to the school as well as the interests of their child(ren). Language and culture go hand-in-hand, and attending to diverse cultures is also an effective strategy, as will be discussed next.

Relaxing the SCC Formality

It is clear from the non-SCC parent interviews that these parents have aspects of a shared picture of a SCC meeting – a small group of parents and staff attending a formal meeting at the school that occurs monthly on Monday evenings. As already identified in the SCC evaluation, such notions of formality are most often not prescribed, but rather occur through historical

practice. While this picture of a typical SCC meeting may indeed be commonly played out across the province, there is no restriction which limits the ‘meeting’ structure of the SCC to this fashion. SCCs are encouraged to determine if their current meeting structure/formality is seen as intimidating to some parents, particularly Indigenous and newcomers.

An observation was made by one interviewee, Anna, tying back to the importance of language and culture that sheds light on a potential effective practice in this regard. Anna contrasted a formal SCC meeting setting with a more informal community event at the school, perhaps beginning with food or a meal and welcoming messages. Anna confirmed that newcomers are more likely to attend such an event as they associate that type of event with their cultural practices. Attending to cultural responsiveness is an important factor in creating a learning community (Allen, 2007; Amendt & Bousquet, 2006; Amendt, 2008).

Pushor (2018) documented such a setting at Howard Coad School that engaged families from the community, including Indigenous and newcomers. The event kicked-off with foods representative of the diversity of cultures in the community, followed by structured but informal table discussions, with translators available as needed, to facilitate discussion towards developing a school-level plan for parent engagement. When contemplating that the mandate of SCCs is to engage the broader community with the school to focus on student learning, this example was truly a SCC meeting in action. SCCs are encouraged to review their current meeting structures and practices, and feel empowered to innovate. SCCs may also wish to hold SCC ‘meetings’ at different times to see if this results in engaging new parents, noting the comments of interviewees that for some Monday evenings do not work.

Identifying and Marshaling Untapped Community Resources

Among the reasons to interview non-SCC parents was a desire to understand why they are not currently engaged with the SCC and/or school community. What emerged from the interviews with non-SCC parents is that three of the four were engaged with the school community in significant and important ways – Kira volunteering in the school, Anna engaged in a school-led program, and Sophie having served her community in a voluntary capacity for eight years. These stories shattered any myth that non-SCC parents, in particular Indigenous, newcomers or visible minorities, are disengaged. They also shattered myths that these folks are unwilling to become engaged in the school community, or are apathetic.

“Getting to know the community is a first step in marshaling valuable community resources” (Bryan, 2005, p. 224) and, to do so, it first requires the school staff to see the gifts of parents and community members, including minority and at-risk community members. Building collaborative relationships between parents and educators is the starting point (Warren et al., 2009). The non-SCC parent interviews underscored the value of such efforts by school staff and SCCs, and shed light on the untapped resources that are available in school communities.

Without much prompting, Sophie divulged her incredible experience serving for years on a daycare board. Such expertise is undoubtedly useful to any SCC in the province. She also described a long personal history with the school and community, understanding the changing demographics over the years, as well as the changes over time in the school. With turnover of staff in schools, it is important for school and SCC leadership to engage such historical knowledge, helping those new to the school community to understand the changing context over the years, how practices may have evolved, what community resources are available, and what barriers remain. Sophie described very passionately her understanding and connection to the

youth in the community, as well as an understanding of community resources available that could be accessed to support youth. Sophie is indeed an untapped community resource with much to offer the SCC.

Another non-SCC parent, Anna, described her personal growth over her few years in the community – becoming involved in a school-led program, getting to know parents in the community, improving her English capabilities, and becoming a knowledgeable and confident advocate on behalf of newcomers in the community. Her feedback and advice to the SCC is important, and she will be a good resource for the SCC.

These examples highlight the importance of getting to know parents and community members, including those who are not currently engaged with the SCC, as a means of identifying and marshaling the assets in the community (Amendt, 2008; Bryan, 2005; Henderson et al., 2007; Pushor, 2018).

Revisiting the Research Questions

With the inclusion of the perspectives of non-SCC parents, we can return to the research questions and the SCC evaluation recommendations to identify if the responses remain as they are, or if they need to be altered given this new knowledge.

How can a SCC facilitate parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes? What are the characteristics of a SCC that is facilitating parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes?

For SCC members to accurately represent the voices of all parents in the community in regards to co-constructing the school-level plan, as per their mandate, they must develop a strategy and practices to do so. Given the findings of the SCC evaluation, as well as the

comments provided by non-SCC parents, this strategy must include particular attention to those parents and community members whose voices may be marginalized, including Indigenous and newcomers. It is evident that efforts to personally invite non-SCC parents are essential first steps for engagement, and are sincerely valued by non-SCC parents in terms of building relationships and confidence. These interactions may include personal contact outside of the school, including home visits.

Another significant characteristic raised is the importance of attending to languages and cultures. It is critical that SCCs understand and show empathy for those for whom English is not their mother tongue. The fear described by non-SCC parents of being placed in uncomfortable positions in settings, such as a SCC meeting, are real and valid. Rather than accepting that the language barrier is an insurmountable limitation, SCCs are encouraged to employ tactics to rise above this challenge. These tactics could include providing translators at SCC meetings, or promoting SCCs as a safe place for non-English speakers to come to in order to practice their English skills. The findings from non-SCC interviews also identified that culturally responsive practices may also result in attendance of Indigenous and newcomers to school events, such as the SCC. SCCs and school staff can create the conditions for a welcoming, safe environment by hosting a meal, providing childminding, and facilitating table activities, as opposed to putting folks through what could be uncomfortable meeting formalities.

What supports, considerations, or other critical elements are important for schools, school divisions, and the various education partners in the province to attend to, in order to assist SCCs in implementing their mandate?

Interviews with non-SCC parents, particularly as they relate to engaging Indigenous and newcomers in SCCs, provide evidence that a specific strategy is required in regard to providing

supports to parents. Non-SCC parents provided helpful insights such as the importance of attending to language and culture, and relaxing the formality of the SCC. This insight will be reflected in revised recommendations to follow

How do the roles of Boards of Education and SCCs inter-relate? What role may SCCs play in major education initiatives in Saskatchewan such as the Education Sector Strategic Plan, or reconciliation?

The previous response to this question stands, though an important observation should be made. Major education initiatives, such as the Education Sector Strategic Plan, or engaging in reconciliation, include specific actions and outcomes for schools, often centered on Indigenous students/communities. As the SCC evaluation has provided evidence that Indigenous and newcomers are primarily not engaged in existing SCCs, it would seem that the starting place for boards of education is to create a call to action for SCCs to diversify their representation and equitably represent the Saskatchewan landscape – including Indigenous and newcomer parents. This will be further addressed in revised recommendations.

What is the educational and social significance of well-functioning SCCs that are achieving their mandate?

The previous response to this question holds true, and begs repeating here. In Saskatchewan, as across Canada, there is an expectation, grounded in legislation, for engagement of youth, parents, and community members to work collaboratively alongside school staff to support improved student learning. This expectation undoubtedly comes from a belief in the need for the voice of parents and community within public education, and is solidified with five decades of educational research that demonstrates parent and community engagement in schools

enhances student outcomes (Mapp, 2013). To improve student achievement, particularly with Indigenous and vulnerable students, the engagement of parents and community members is required. SCCs are structures created with a mandate for this very reason, and a well-functioning SCC built on relationships of trust between school staff, parents, and community members is a means to that goal.

A final additional response comes from non-SCC parents. When asked, they were unable to identify the primary mandate of SCCs. Like the participants in the SCC evaluation, they agreed that SCCs matter, noting that they believe that it is important for staff, parents, and the school to work together to improve student learning. These non-SCC interviews responses provide further endorsement for the mandate of SCCs.

Revisiting the SCC Evaluation Recommendations

The SCC evaluation recommendations remain as important actions for education partners to attend to in terms of supporting SCCs to achieve their mandate. Recommendation One – that every school in Saskatchewan adopt community education philosophy and practices, to create an environment in which SCCs can thrive, and communities can be engaged – stands out as particularly important in view of comments by non-SCC parents. As non-SCC parents, Rahima, Kira, Anna, and Sophie provided important insights for boards of education, schools, and SCCs. They confirmed that SCCs can be intimidating, particularly for individuals whose first language is not English. They advised that language barriers are not insurmountable, but rather SCCs can present a safe environment to hone language skills. They underscored that languages and cultures matter and that it is imperative that practices are employed to overcome language barriers, and utilize culturally responsive practices to engage Indigenous and newcomers. They also advised relaxing the formality of the SCC structure, and described safer environments

utilizing culturally appropriate practices in such settings. Importantly, they noted that relationships matter, and that personal contact by school staff and SCC members is an important factor towards engagement.

The SCC evaluation recommendation 1.4 reads that SCCs review their member election process and meeting structure, to determine if any of these formalities are impediments to the engagement of parents and community members, particularly for Indigenous and newcomers. If any impediments are found, SCCs are encouraged to revise their bylaws and meeting practices as necessary, to create a more inviting, inclusive, and representative structure. In light of the findings from non-SCC parents in this study, it is apparent that more must be done to effectively engage Indigenous and newcomers in the SCC. The following recommendation is added:

1.5 That SCCs develop a strategy to engage Indigenous, visible minority, and newcomer parents in the SCC. That the strategy attend to characteristics including personal contact and invitation by school staff and SCC members with Indigenous, visible minority, and newcomer parents, and that the SCC become aware of and utilize culturally relevant practices. Finally, that the SCC relax the formality of meeting structures to create safe and inviting environments for the engagement of Indigenous, visible minorities, and newcomers.

Part II

A Re-Imagining of School Community Councils in Saskatchewan

Part I of this dissertation represents a collaborative evaluation study that I led with the Saskatchewan School Boards Association. Through the engagement of education partners and approximately 120 research participants – SCC parents, principals, teachers, Superintendents, Directors of Education, school board members, and Ministry of Education officials, it captured their experiences with SCCs, and outlined recommendations based upon the data. Part I of this dissertation also includes a culturally responsive evaluation (Hopson, 2009; Mertens & Zimmerman, 2015), documenting the stories of four non-SCC parents who are Indigenous, visible minority, and newcomers. These voices provide valuable insights to SCCs who have identified challenges with engaging these communities within SCCs. When taken together, both parts of this dissertation comprise a learning-oriented evaluation (Dahler-Larsen, 2009), a complete snapshot of the state of SCCs in Saskatchewan with a view to influencing, enhancing, and changing practices. The discussion that follows, Part II of this dissertation, provides a critical analysis of School Community Councils in Saskatchewan intended to provoke and promote dialogue among education partners and SCCs in Saskatchewan, and re-imagine SCCs in the province. As per Recommendation One of this evaluation of SCCs, it is recognized that SCCs do not operate in a vacuum. It is only in an environment of community education philosophy and practices that SCCs can thrive and communities can be engaged. The discussion that follows hence, while intended in the context of SCCs as per this dissertation, is situated in a broader context of parent and community engagement that is critical in schools and, for which SCCs are an important structure.

Chapter 1-II

Provincial Context

The findings from non-SCC parents, particularly as they relate to Indigenous and newcomers, are important in light of the changing demographics of Saskatchewan. In this Chapter, I provide a brief discussion to situate the provincial context of Saskatchewan's population, student graduation rates in Saskatchewan disaggregated by First Nations and Métis students, and within the context of the available data regarding the demography of the workforce in Saskatchewan's K-12 education system. I also introduce the concept of hegemony to set the stage for in-depth discussion in the following Chapters, exploring how hegemony is experienced in Saskatchewan's K-12 education system, and what the impact of such hegemony is for students and families.

Diverse Students and Families Served by a Non-Representative Education System

According to 2016 Census data, the Indigenous population in Saskatchewan was 16.3 per cent of the total population (Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, 2017a). In 2016, 10.8 per cent of the Saskatchewan population identified as a visible minority, as compared to 3.6 per cent in 2006 (Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, 2017b). This data confirms an increasingly diverse population in Saskatchewan.

2016/2017 provincial data showed that Indigenous students were graduating on time (within three years) at a rate of 41.8 per cent, when compared to non-Indigenous students in the system who were graduating within three years at a rate of 75.6 per cent (Government of Saskatchewan, 2017). The graduation rate for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan has not changed significantly over time, which is why Indigenous educational leaders in Saskatchewan

have called for action on this matter for decades (First Nations and Métis Education Provincial Advisory Committee, 2013). The current graduation rate demonstrates that a majority of Indigenous students continue to be unsuccessful, by and large, in Saskatchewan schools.

At the same time that Saskatchewan's demographics are shifting, and Indigenous students are continuing to be unsuccessful in Saskatchewan schools, the provincial K-12 education system workforce continues to be non-representative of Saskatchewan. According to the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education's last publicly reported statistics on the matter, from 2006-2010, the number of self-declared Indigenous teachers remained steady at six per cent, and in the same period, the number of self-declared Indigenous school administrators remained steady at five per cent (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010). When I contacted the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education to see if more recent data was available, I was informed that for the 2018-19 school year, the number of self-declared Indigenous teachers was 6.5 per cent and the number of self-declared Indigenous school administrators was 6.4 per cent. The Indigenous teaching population, at a stagnant six per cent, is simply not representative of the diversity of the student population in Saskatchewan's schools.

To summarize the data presented above, Saskatchewan has become increasingly diverse, with a corresponding diverse student population, in an education system that predominantly employs a non-representative workforce, and that continues to produce unsuccessful outcomes for Indigenous students. Such demographics bring into play inherent bias in the provincial K-12 education system of predominantly white educators, particularly as it relates to students and families different from themselves. Research confirming such bias has already been identified in the literature review of this dissertation (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016; Goodall, 2017; Green & Waldman, 2018; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Stelmach, 2016; Warren et al., 2009).

These statistics are lived realities in Saskatchewan schools during a time when there are public commitments in the provincial K-12 education system towards honouring diversity, commitments to workplace diversity, and embracing inclusion. The evidence that these commitments are real and attainable, though, remain in question. Bryk (2010) noted, “To see race and class differences in rates of improvement and to just stop there without probing deeper simply creates more fodder for conflict among critics and apologists of the current state of affairs” (p. 30). Bryk’s cautionary remarks and advice to educational leaders, and arguably communities at large, can be wisely heeded in Saskatchewan’s provincial K-12 education system. Boards of education in the province are ultimately responsible for shifting these realities, and schools and SCCs can play an important role in these endeavours. This crucial role of SCCs is discussed in depth in the following Chapter.

Hegemony – Stories of Families

The concept of hegemony is an important consideration in the examination of schools and SCCs as it relates to beliefs and assumptions that may exist on the school landscape.

Antonio Gramsci (1971) is credited with the theory of hegemony.

By hegemony, Gramsci meant the permeation *throughout* society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an ‘organising principle’ that is diffused by the process of socialisation into every area of daily life. (Burke, 1999; 2005)

Hegemony permeates the social, cultural, ideological, and/or economic influence exerted by a dominant group.

To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalised by the population it becomes part of what is generally called ‘common sense’ so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things. (Boggs, 1976, p. 39)

A hegemonic construction occurs when the dominant society entertains a notion of some ideal state or predominant truth.

Family hegemony, for example, exists when a certain type of family “naturally” seems to be better (Heilman, 2008, p. 9). A two-parent family in a middle-class community may be perceived by an educator or a SCC as having more capacity than a single-parent family in a low socio-economic community. Those individuals similar to the dominant group of educators or SCC members, middle-class families for example, are often privileged, and those individuals not like the dominant group – Indigenous, newcomer, or families in poverty – are often marginalized by educators or SCC members. In a SCC for instance, this centering of the dominant group is then perpetuated as families like the dominant group join the SCC, while those marginalized are not welcomed into the SCC circle. Stories of families (Huber, Graham, Orr, & Reid, 2010) emerge as the “ideal” family and these fictitious constructs are played out in staff rooms and SCC conversations. Of note is that while this talk can create damaging stereotypes and prejudices, it also “can create negative self-judgments” (Heilman, 2008, p. 11) for families. In other words, hegemony perpetuates racist constructs, as well as causes families to begin to feel that something must be wrong with them as they do not measure up to this fictitious construct of an ideal family, and therefore do not fit in or belong on the school landscape or in the SCC.

Gramsci’s (1971) theory of hegemony carries to education, where he believed that schooling perpetuated the ruling class, and in particular their ideas and ideals. The risk of

hegemony is that it may shape an educator's assumptions about families who do not fit the 'ideal' and it may generate "stories of families" based on deficit thinking. For example, a teacher in an inner-city school may hold negative assumptions of families as being illiterate, dysfunctional, and living in a home that is unstable, therefore s/he may assume that the family is unable to support the child's learning. These stories of families often are untrue, and based on false assumptions that do not help educators form trust and relationships with families, nor do they serve them to engage parents in teaching and learning, or in the SCC. Hegemony is also at play in decision-making in schools and SCCs. Selecting Monday nights for SCC meetings, for example, presupposes parents work during the day, do not work shiftwork, and have or can afford childcare and transportation.

Turner-Vorbeck (2008) described hegemony in play in schools in the formal and informal ways that curriculum is lived out. Formal ways include the explicit messages foregrounded in curriculum and resources. Informal ways refer to what is conveyed through the dominant narrative or culture and thereby who is not included, absent, or not even referenced. The formal and informal curriculum can speak volumes about beliefs and assumptions and either create welcoming and inclusive spaces for all, or not. Turner-Vorbeck went on to explore how educators place their own values on "what to teach and what not to teach, about what gets in and what gets left out of the curriculum" (p. 181). As a practical example, not addressing Indigenous content, perspectives, or ways of knowing is a decision made by some educators. This decision presents only dominant ways of knowing and thereby can cause Indigenous learners to feel that their ways of knowing are invalid, simply by remaining silent on the matter. It also sends messages to Indigenous families that they are not welcomed, or included on the school landscape

and within such structures as the SCC. Schools and SCCs would do well to reflect on the messages conveyed in classrooms and throughout the school, as it relates to families.

Turner-Vorbeck described “hidden curriculum” lived out in schools in “teacher talk” where teachers may discuss “concerns from single-parent, stepparent, adoptive, foster, and biracial families, which are widely perceived as substandard”; in “dysfunctional labels” where teachers “are quick to blame a student’s poor academic achievement or slow social development on a substandard form of family rather than to explore their own pedagogy”; and in “moral judgments” where there is null curriculum or a rendering as immoral families that include gay, lesbian or transgender individuals (pp. 184-185). This negative talk and these moral judgments and inaccurate assumptions by educators, principals, and even SCC members, left unchecked, can quickly become a norm in a school culture where certain parents are viewed as a deficit with which the school must now deal. In such an environment, Indigenous, newcomer, vulnerable families, in fact any parent not fitting the hegemonic notion of the dominant group, are unlikely to become engaged in the school or the SCC.

To uncover this formal, informal, and hidden curriculum at play in classrooms, and in other ways on school landscapes, there is a need for educators to critically reflect on their practices, discover and make explicit their own biases, assumptions and beliefs, and personally develop awareness and understanding of family diversity (Turner-Vorbeck, 2008). Pushor & Amendt (2018) describe the key role of school leadership in this process of examining beliefs and assumptions.

In engaging school staff in examining, and potentially interrupting, their beliefs and assumptions about parents and about the voice and place of parents in relation to school landscapes, school leaders can be intentional in awakening staff to historical and taken-

for-granted thinking which has been foundational in the operation of schools, thinking which is ‘schoolcentric’ (Lawson 2003) in its focus and reflective of predominantly white middle-class beliefs and values. It can be a process intended to immerse staff in a new way of thinking in schools, one that is ‘familycentric’ (Pushor 2015) and focused on truly knowing parents and families in order to honour them as lifelong educators of their children and to partner with them by incorporating their knowledge, their hopes and dreams for their children, and their contributions to their children’s teaching and learning in all aspects of the schooling process. (pp. 4-5)

School leaders have an impactful role in helping school staff and SCC members examine the beliefs and assumptions, indeed the hegemony of family, which may be at play on the school landscape. By critically reflecting on the hegemony of family, it becomes apparent that the notion of an ‘ideal’ family is unrealistic and does not exist. Families are diverse, each coming with their own strengths and gifts.

Summarizing Provincial Context

SCCs do not operate in a vacuum. They exist within the provincial context described in this Chapter, including a non-representative education system serving diverse students and families. Schools and SCCs do well when they reflect on this diversity, acknowledge and embrace the diversity that exists in families who present themselves at schools, and reject hegemonic notions of families. Embracing the diversity of families and their gifts begins with our own assumptions and beliefs about the families.

When teachers think critically about their own backgrounds and values, they have a better capacity to recognize and address preconceived and prejudicial notions about families

they may have that could make it difficult for them to accept, understand, and effectively teach their students. (Heilman, 2008, p. 23)

If educators and SCC members begin with a strength-based approach, they will get to know the families and their gifts, paying particular attention to marginalized families such as those who are Indigenous and newcomers. The concepts of relationship building, welcoming and hospitality, and examining beliefs and assumptions are discussed in detail in the following two Chapters.

Chapter 2-II

Welcoming and Hospitality

In this Chapter, I introduce the concepts of welcoming and hospitality in education. These are important concepts in parent engagement, and particularly so in light of increasingly diverse student and families being served by a non-representative workforce in the provincial K-12 education sector. Fully embracing these concepts requires educators to approach building trust relationships between the school and home, and doing so with humility. Building trust relationships is a necessary precursor to engaging with parents in activities such as directed in the SCC mandate.

Hospitality in Education

Attending to the engagement of Indigenous, vulnerable, or marginalized communities within schools is not a new directive for education in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Education, 1999; Saskatchewan Learning, 2003; Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). Until its abolishment by the provincial Government in Saskatchewan in about 2013, the First Nations and Métis Education Provincial Advisory Committee was the longest standing advisory committee in Government. Its purpose was to advise the Minister of Education on Indigenous education matters. For nearly three decades in Saskatchewan, Indigenous peoples on this committee have been making their voices heard, advising the Minister of Education and education partners regarding challenges in the system, systemic discrimination and ongoing effects of colonization, and identifying possible solutions (First Nations and Métis Education Provincial Advisory Committee, 2013). For decades the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and their special subject

council for Indigenous education, Awâsis⁸, was designed to bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and leaders to identify and address systemic barriers in education in Saskatchewan as they relate to Indigenous students and their families. I also reflect on the legislative directive since 2006 for SCCs to be representative of the diversity of communities, particularly noting the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in schools with partnerships with First Nations (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005). These efforts, however well intentioned, have not produced the engagement of Indigenous and other marginalized communities within schools, in particular SCCs, as identified through this evaluation. Deficit theorizing (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003; Mapp, Carver, & Lander, 2017), racist discourse among educators (Noguera, 2003; Schick & St. Denis, 2003), beliefs and assumptions of educators regarding parents' capabilities to participate in discussions surrounding student improvement (Stelmach & Preston, 2008), and parents being intimidated by the SCC structure (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011) are described in the literature review of this dissertation as possible reasons for the lack of engagement of Indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities within schools or the SCC.

The work of French philosopher Derrida (2000) provides interesting insight into the phenomena of welcoming through his discussion of hospitality and the context of the foreigner. He distinguished between the laws of hospitality and the Law of hospitality. The laws of hospitality are “the conditions, the norms, the rights and the duties that are imposed on hosts and hostesses, on the men and women who give a welcome as well as the men or women who receive it” (p. 77). Gilbert (2006) noted that “the laws of hospitality govern, with liberality and goodwill, our relations with others. These laws invoke political, legislative, and juridical

⁸ Awâsis is the Cree term for “child.”

domains, but they also include the informal and implicit rules and guidelines that equally govern our relations with others” (p. 27). The “laws of hospitality” in the education sector can include such things as school board vision and mission statements, provincial legislation or policy frameworks, and school board policies and/or administrative procedures. In contrast to these “laws of hospitality,” Derrida (2000) describes the “Law of hospitality” as unconditional welcome, using the following explanation to define this concept:

Let us say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before an anticipation, before any identification, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female. (p. 77)

Gilbert made the assertion that these limitations or boundaries that are placed on people through laws of hospitality, no matter how well-intentioned, violate the Law of hospitality, or unconditional welcome as Derrida described. This dichotomy is played out throughout K-12 education in Saskatchewan as Derrida’s concept of the “laws of hospitality,” described in well-intentioned legislative frameworks, provincial policy directives, and school board policies and administrative procedures (what we say), butts up against the “Law of hospitality,” the practices as lived out in the education system throughout the province (what we do). There are school board mission statements and values that honour and welcome engagement with parents and community members (laws of hospitality), while parents are met with ‘all visitors must report to the office’ signs in schools (Law of hospitality). Parents are told they are valuable partners in education (laws of hospitality), as schools ask parents to attend parent-teacher interviews, signing up for a hurried five-minute discussion regarding their child’s learning (Law of

hospitality). Parents and communities are described in educational policy frameworks as holders of knowledge, local history, or Indigenous knowledge, and are to be valued as such (laws of hospitality), while curriculum and pedagogical practices provide limited space for, or exclude, such knowledge within student learning (Law of hospitality). A mandate exists for SCCs in the province to engage parents and community members with school staff to improve student learning (laws of hospitality) while, in some instances, parents are discouraged from questioning student learning outcomes, or being provided the information to meaningfully engage in such student learning-centred discussions (Law of hospitality). In fact, this evaluation has demonstrated that most SCCs are not engaged in co-constructing the school-level plan for student learning, unaware that was their primary mandate, as this message has not been communicated to them within the power structures of schools.

Inhospitality.

Inhospitality in education occurs in relation to parent engagement, and the positioning of parents on the school landscape by educators. This inhospitality can occur with parents in general, but is compounded when coupled with race and class differences. Pushor (2007) documented her own experience as a mother and an educator, entering the school landscape for the first time as a parent bringing her young son to school. In her story, she described feeling as an outsider, discouraged from lingering with her child in a school context that may well have articulated that ‘parents matter,’ but, in practice, lived out a clear separation between home and school, indeed a clear separation of parent and teacher knowledge.

Pushor’s experience of feeling disinvited on the school landscape is not unique. Preston (2012) and Stelmach (2016) surfaced the beliefs of school staff that were not supportive of parent engagement. This SCC evaluation has also surfaced a similar sentiment (see p. 106).

Within a school environment of educator beliefs about the limited role, and value, of parents in students' learning at school, it is little wonder the SCC mandate in Saskatchewan is unrealized. Within a school environment where educators simply cannot imagine the valuable partnership role of parents, indeed seeing them as inferior to the positioning of educators on the school landscape, parents feel disinvited, or as “outsiders” on the school landscape.

Inhospitality in education, as it relates to the role of parents on the school landscape, is compounded for marginalized students and families, and for newcomers and Indigenous students and families. For example, at the time of this writing, the New York Times published a story, *I Feel Invisible*, (Green & Waldman, 2018) regarding the experiences of Native American⁹ students in Wolf Point, Montana, a community in close proximity to Saskatchewan, just across the Canada-United States border. The story again highlighted how the “Law of hospitality” is not lived up to in school systems for Native American students. The article described the significant educational achievement gap for Native American students when compared to non-Native American students. Through interviews with students, it documented the racism that they experienced at school at the hands of staff and fellow students. It also shared the very sad and real suicides occurring in the community among Native American students, at rates significantly higher than the general population, resulting from their feeling invisible and unwelcome in the school.

The school in this story is in Wolf Point School District, a small school district in Montana, USA. In light of this story, I reviewed the school district's mission and vision statement, available online at

[https://www.wolfpointschools.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=278729&type=d,](https://www.wolfpointschools.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=278729&type=d)

⁹ While the term “Indigenous” or “First Nations, Métis, and Inuit” are most commonly used in Saskatchewan and Canada, the term “Native American” is more commonly used in the United States of America.

as I was certain that I would find a commitment to the learning success of all students. Under their banner, “Believe, Achieve, Succeed,” I found the following mission statement:

In partnership with community, Wolf Point Schools will create a positive teaching and learning environment to ensure that every member of the school family reaches academic achievement as set by local, state, and federal standards. We are determined to utilize comprehensive school-wide research based strategies to assure this outcome.

I also reviewed Wolf Point School District’s vision statements, as I was certain that I would find commitments to equity, achievement, and respect. Among their 11 vision statements, these statements are included:

- All children feel safe, welcome, and successful.
- All children appreciate their unique qualities, cultures, and their role as valued members of their school family.
- All children, regardless of race or economic status, have fair and equal treatment.
- All school personnel are respectful, tolerant of differences, consistent, and nurturing.
- All parents, community members, and school personnel will work together to assist children to become productive members of their school and community.

The mission and vision statements of Wolf Point School District are explicitly tied to the “laws of hospitality” for all students, yet the practices, the “Law of hospitality,” is not lived out for Native American students in this school district. While the school district claims that all students will succeed, that all students are valued and respected, that regardless of race students will have fair and equal treatment (laws of hospitality), Native American students are cited in the New

York Times article as “feeling invisible” in this school (Law of hospitality). The superintendent was interviewed in the story for his reaction, and he did not see the value in comparing how the district treats white vs. Native American students, seemingly unconcerned with the data demonstrating an unwelcoming environment for Native American students.

This experience is not an isolated incident. In Saskatchewan, the Ministry of Education commissioned a team of educational researchers through the University of Regina’s Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit, to undertake a study to hear directly from Indigenous students, those engaged, and those not engaged in schools – *Seeking Their Voices: Improving Indigenous Student Learning Outcomes* (2014). Modeled after research undertaken in development of New Zealand’s Te Kotahitanga program, this research captured the voices of students, parents, teachers and school administrators in six Saskatchewan high schools. Among the questions asked of students were: a) What helps you with your learning? b) What kind of things get in the way or hold you back from learning?, and c) Describe to us what it is that good teachers do. Similar to the experiences of Native American students at Wolf Point School District, the data from this Saskatchewan research documented experiences of racism among Indigenous students at the hands of school staff and students.

In some schools racism came up in the conversations so the interviewers asked the question, “Is there racism?” In three schools students affirmed this. One student commented, “Oh, it’s a white school. It’s a racist school.” When interviewing students in School 2, an interviewer asked, “What’s it like to be an Aboriginal student in this school? One student responded, “Not good I guess. You kinda feel different from everybody else cause there is kind of like less of us and more of them.” (p. 78)

The students in this study also described the negative assumptions that school staff held about them as Indigenous students.

They acted like we were slower and we didn't understand things, and they explained it slower. And sometimes they put us in a different class. Automatically we were assigned to talk to the counsellor, and to do work with the counsellor.... They didn't test us. (p. 78)

These recent stories of Indigenous students in jurisdictions neighbouring one another, Saskatchewan and Montana, demonstrate that racism, deficit theorizing, and negative beliefs and assumptions of educators about Indigenous students occur in schools, violating the Law of hospitality.

Ermine (2007) described this undercurrent in the relationship between Western society and Indigenous peoples that continues to privilege Western ways of knowing, while contributing to existing power structures and social inequalities. This undercurrent extends to schools, and to the tension that occurs in a non-representative education system between primarily white educators and Indigenous students and families. Ermine stated, "Among the challenges is to understand and confront the hidden interests, attitudes, and bedrock assumptions that animate Western dealings with Indigenous peoples" (p. 197). Ermine, with this statement, is both reminding us of the inhospitality that may exist in schools for Indigenous students and families, and asking us to confront deficit theorizing, racist discourse, and the negative beliefs and assumptions of educators that exist in schools. In so doing, he is asking us not to blindly accept the negative beliefs and statements we may hear in schools from predominantly white educators regarding Indigenous students and families but, rather, critically reflect on such negative beliefs and statements in view of the relationship that exists between Western society and Indigenous

peoples. Ermine (2007) proposed an ethical space, a space between Western society and its ways of knowing and Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing, where these two solitudes can come together in reconciliation. It is in this ethical space where new dialogue and interactions for engagement can occur. Educators and SCCs can create ethical space through acts of welcoming and through interrupting inhospitable practices.

Interruption.

Pushor & Ruitenberg (2005) contrasted disruption, breaking something apart, with interruption, breaking in on, or putting something in the place of what was there before. This distinction for Pushor and Ruitenberg is important, as disruption is often change imposed upon, while interruption is a deliberate change created from within – interrupting negative beliefs and assumptions that people may hold about families from core neighbourhood communities, for example. To change the *I Feel Invisible* story and to live out the “Law of hospitality” (Derrida, 2000), interruption is required. “One will understand nothing about hospitality if one does not understand what ‘interrupting oneself’ might mean” (Derrida, 1999, p. 52). Interrupting self, starts with personal self-reflection. The responsibility of educators to welcome others can begin with “a struggle with their beliefs and values” (p. 193). This questioning and challenging one’s own beliefs and biases can lead to discarding negative beliefs and assumptions about students and parents, and building new relationships of trust between the home and school. This is particularly important with marginalized groups in communities.

We must trust these others, whether student, parent or Elder in the community, to be active on their own behalf and to give voice to what they desire. We must trust that despite the challenge of marginalization or the disadvantage of some students and their

families and the incapacity this implies, that they are competent concerning the determinations of their lives. (Molnar, 2008, p. 267)

Educators do well to recognize that trust is necessary for partnership with parents and the community. In fact, “The question is not whether or not to become partners, we are partners. We are in this together. The question is, what is the quality of the partnership?” (Dr. Eber Hampton, cited in Saskatchewan Learning, 2003). It is not that educators consciously are pejorative, or setting themselves up to be above parents, but as a systemic result of teacher education, educators are often trained to view themselves as the ‘experts.’ By interrupting self, educators embrace humility, the uncomfortableness, and the vulnerability that places them in.

Humility.

Welcoming and hospitality are rooted in humility. “True hospitality can only be offered by a host who recognizes her or his indebtedness – to others from whom s/he has received hospitality, but even to the guest whom the host is about to offer hospitality” (Ruitenbergh, 2005, p. 24). Derrida underscores this concept when he writes that the person who extends a welcome “is first welcomed by the face of the other whom he [sic] means to welcome” (Derrida, 1999, p. 99). Both Ruitenbergh and Derrida have articulated that hospitality can only be extended to another from a place of humility. Indigenous Elders speak of humility as an important value, a principle to be lived out in our relations with one another (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000). I am conscious of my own family’s teachings about ‘walking a mile in another’s moccasins,’ or putting yourself in their shoes. Such lessons of empathy are rooted first in humility – the willingness to see and value the experiences of others. This is humility, and education as an act of relationship delivered with humility, resonates with Indigenous ways of knowing for which humility is an important value.

A person acting with humility acknowledges that the community members and school families have a history within the school community, far surpassing any of the short corporate history of the staff occupying the school and community landscape (Pushor, 2007). This concept was captured in the stories of two non-SCC parents in this evaluation – one with a child attending Kindergarten through grade 8 at the school, another with two adult children, one school-aged child, and three grandchildren all attending the schools – a long history with the school and community indeed. Insightful educators do well to recognize that when they “enter a community, they are entering a place with relationships, culture, and a history that began long before they arrived and that will continue long after they leave” (p. 8). For an educator to simply show up on the school landscape believing oneself to know the community, and know what is best for the students and families, without honouring the people, knowledge, and history that came before, reflects colonial thinking. Colonization occurred because settlers believed they knew better, and were superior to the Indigenous peoples they encountered. If the school community is diverse, including Indigenous and newcomers, and the educator is not representative of that community, then the experience is further exacerbated for the students and families of that community. The path to reconciliation begins with rejecting such colonial thinking.

Acting with humility and extending hospitality, educators enter into relationship with students and families. “If education is a relation of hospitality, then we will affect and be affected by our encounters with others” (Gilbert, 2006, p. 33). Gilbert expressed that as a teacher, she gets to know more about a student’s gifts and passions from encounters with the student’s family, and is able to affect her teaching to draw out these gifts and passions in the classroom. Gilbert went on to say that in order for education to be delivered as an act of

hospitality, then we “must tolerate our own sense of strangeness, and we might temper our drive to educate with the willingness to endure the humiliations of surprise” (p. 33). Many educators in the province of Saskatchewan are not representative of the Indigenous and newcomer population, and they very often will not have experienced poverty or a situation where they are a minority. Instead of approaching students and families who are different from oneself with fear of ‘walking on eggshells,’ Gilbert suggests embracing our strangeness and the inevitable humiliations of surprise, perhaps with humour. As a Métis, I was not raised with certain First Nation protocols and practices. In my younger years, I recall bringing a gift of cloth to a female Elder, cloth being a required offering for protocol. The cloth I had selected was apparently a bit ‘loud’ and untraditional. The female Elder spoke in Cree to her husband, they both shared a chuckle, and the male Elder said to me, “You picked a pretty funky cloth for Kokum.¹⁰” I laughed in my moment of “humiliation of surprise,” and it provided a learning opportunity for me. Molnar (2008) described the uncomfortableness that educators can encounter in this process of welcoming and hospitality:

What welcoming shows us is that we will remain tasked with the infinite demand placed upon us even in our imperfect response, in our inability and in the inadequacy of our preparation for the roles we play, the rules we follow and regulations we rely upon. Recognizing our un-preparedness and our inadequacy though unsettling, signals our attentiveness to the difference we encounter and while uncomfortable gives us some assurance we are listening to the call of the Other. In other words, we are being responsible. (p. 272)

¹⁰ Kokum is the Cree term for “grandmother”.

Our experiences as educators, and who we are, may be quite different than the students and families in the school community – the Others. The differences may leave educators feeling unprepared or inadequate in their ability to build relationships with Indigenous or newcomer populations for example. Educators can embrace the uncomfortableness and the vulnerability that may be associated with engaging with parents and communities different from their own, approaching this with a sense of humility, and yes, humour. To deliver education in this manner, puts educators simultaneously in role of guests and hosts (Molnar, 2008; Pushor, 2007), which is described next.

Guest hosts.

How can one simultaneously be a guest and a host in the context of the school landscape? “Being guests means learning about the community which educators are entering, spending time and energy to know the context, the history, the culture(s), and particularly the people who reside there” (Pushor, 2007, p. 10). In so doing, educators enter the community with humility, honouring the Indigenous concepts of land, languages, and relationships, and seeking first to understand and uncover the knowledge, the gifts, and the aspirations from those in the community. Simultaneously, educators are also hosts. “Being hosts means extending invitations multiple times and in multiple ways. It means moving beyond typical means of extending written impersonal invitations to extending personal invitations” (p. 10). The importance of extending personal invitations, particularly to Indigenous and newcomers, has already been borne out through the data collected in this dissertation, with one non-SCC parent commenting that she appreciated and took note that school staff extended personal invitations to her to join the SCC.

There are a variety of ways that schools can develop relationships with families by paying attention to the notions of being a guest-host. Kerr (2015) documented her efforts to build relationships with families by writing a letter to the families at the beginning of the school year. In her letter, she acknowledged her role in creating an environment where the children will feel “they belong and that they are cared for, accepted and supported” (p. 82). She went on to invite each parent to write a letter to her so the family could tell her a little about their child, their interests, and anything they thought important for the teacher to know. This small gesture spoke volumes to the parents and families. She described the personal communication she received from parents following this, indicating how it made them feel welcomed and valued, and that she demonstrated she truly cared for their child. Through this initial step, as well as her ongoing communication with families, she was able to engage parents in her classroom.

Another useful starting place for a school staff may be to have a reflective conversation about what messages are being conveyed, both verbal and non-verbal, to parents and community members. Undertaking a “hospitable assessment” is how Ruitenberg (2005) describes this act (p. 195). What welcoming signs and cues greet families as they enter? Is the entry-way dark and dingy or open, bright and welcoming? Who greets parents, students and community members and what words are they greeted with? What are the messages being delivered from school staff to the home? If, for instance, the primary and consistent messages going from the school to the home are negative in nature, such as informing parents of negative student behaviour, or suspension of a student, at some point parents will not respond and the relationship between the school and home will be built on distrust or be broken completely. Henderson et al. (2007) have created a useful tool to “Map Your School’s Parent-Teacher Contacts” (p. 61). The self-evaluation tool leads educators to reflect on what school-family communications tend to focus

when parents and teachers have face-to-face contact, and how student work is shared with families, as examples. Through self-evaluation and critical reflection, a school staff or SCC can use the evidence provided in the results of this tool to unpack their attempts to build relationships and create a welcoming environment and to determine if changes or enhancements are required to create a more welcoming school environment.

Delivering education as both a guest and host may bring together the “laws of hospitality” with the “Law of hospitality” noted by Derrida (2000). An example may be aligning the school board mission statements and the values that explicitly honour and welcome engagement with parents and community members (laws of hospitality), in a welcoming school environment in which educators conduct their craft with humility, welcoming, and hospitality (Law of hospitality.) Such alignment may result in a welcoming environment for the engagement of youth, parents, and community members, including Indigenous, newcomers, and/or other marginalized people in communities.

Trust and Relationships

I have described welcoming and hospitality in acknowledgement of the role these attributes play in creating a relationship between school and home, between educators, SCC members, and students and families. Trust is critical, however, for relationships to work. While SCCs can be legislated, relationships cannot. There is an assumption in the various legislative and regulatory frameworks for school councils in Canada, including SCCs in Saskatchewan, that school staff and parents/community members will work together in new ways. For example, asking educators and parents to co-construct the school level plan assumes that educators and parents will know how to do this. Also, when asking SCCs to provide advice to the school staff and board of education, there is the assumption, similarly, that a relationship is developed

between educators and parents and that processes are in place to enable this to occur. There is evidence, however, that specifically attending to building and developing these relationships may not be consistent (Carlson, 2013; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011). Without a strategy that intentionally attends to building trusting relationships between school staff and parents as a starting place, it is unlikely that SCCs will foster the trust and relationships needed to have open and critical dialogue on their mandate for improved student learning, and the engagement of parents in this endeavour.

Bryk (2010) described how foundational it is to school improvement that educational leaders build trust and relationships, including with parents and community members. In consideration of the need to build relationships between schools and parents, it is recognized that the trust levels of some minority and at-risk families with schools can be low, based on past schooling experiences. Bryan (2005) suggested utilizing staff professional development opportunities for school staff to “examine their beliefs and stereotypes about culturally diverse and urban communities and awaken awareness of the negative effects of viewing students from a deficit perspective” (p. 223). Pushor and Amendt (2018) similarly described the critical role that school leaders play in examining beliefs and assumptions. One way to do this could be to engage the SCC or other parents and community members in conducting a professional development opportunity for school staff, perhaps as part of an orientation to the school and community for educators (new and existing) at the start of the school year. Such opportunities signal to staff, SCC, parents, and community members that a relationship is valued between the school and home, and there is a belief in the role of parents and community members in student learning.

Building meaningful partnerships with parents is an important role for schools and SCCs. Knowing that this practice is important to building trust relationships between the school and the community, how might the SCC be re-imagined to take on this role? What taken-for-grantedness (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005) may exist in schools and SCCs that may need to be questioned or changed to support this role? Some opportunities are presented next as possibility for school staff and SCCs.

Re-imagining SCC Functions

The SCC mandate is to engage parents and community members with school staff to support student achievement. Among the tasks they are assigned is to co-construct the school level plan. Without strong trust relationships between school staff and the community, and in particular between school staff and Indigenous and newcomer families, there is little chance for this mandate to be achieved. One does not simply throw open the school doors and announce to marginalized parents and communities, ‘Hey we’re developing the school level plan tonight, come on in,’ and expect such engagement. Similarly, placing a notice in the school newsletter inviting parents to attend a SCC meeting to co-construct the school level plan is also likely not to result in marginalized parents showing up. Such tactics lack a genuine commitment to building trust relationships, and foster a culture where educators may give up, feeling like they have tried but the parents did not show up. A similar sentiment was expressed in this evaluation, “I haven’t found that the SCC can make that goal on their own – it is driven by the school administration.” The solution to this dilemma lies with understanding the concepts of involvement vs. engagement, as described earlier in this dissertation. Building trust relationships between schools, SCCs, and parents/community members is essential, and activities led by the school and/or SCC can foster this as I describe next.

Attending to relationships with Indigenous and newcomer families.

SCCs have a role to facilitate the broader engagement of the community, and leading activities focused on building trust relationships, particularly with Indigenous and newcomer families, can facilitate engagement. This culturally responsive evaluation surfaced ideas and advice from four women not currently SCC members, representing Indigenous, visible minority, and newcomer voices.

Rahima expressed that the school staff came to her home two times and she found that valuable. “I like that, it’s good for me.” She concluded the interview by saying that the school is very friendly. Kira described the SCC as very friendly and welcoming. Her advice to the SCC was to get more parents involved, as she noted “not too many are involved now.” Anna described how newcomers appreciate larger community events with food, noting the cultural importance of this. In that environment, newcomers will show up to those events at the school. She also identified the language barrier for newcomers as a very real fear which will keep newcomers away if schools or SCCs do not attend to this fear. Her advice is to reframe the SCC as a safe environment for newcomers to practice their English skills, and advised a more relaxed SCC structure to create the environment for this. Sophie described how the school staff got to know families by coming to their homes, and then they invited parents to the school and to the SCC. She noted that through this personal touch, the invitation was genuine and was extended when school staff first came to visit us in our homes.

The primary advice from these women is for schools and educators to commit to building trust relationships between the school and parents. It draws on their experience with successful strategies deployed at Howard Coad School, such as home visits, extending personal invitations,

hosting community gatherings, and attending to language and cultural diversity. These strategies are discussed next to offer ideas to schools and SCCs wanting to build trust relationships.

Personal invitation to community events.

Anna advised schools and SCCs to host community gatherings that provide a more relaxed and safer environment for parents, particularly where language is a barrier. Extending personal invitations (Pushor, 2007) to such an event has also been identified as important.

Pushor (2018) documented what these four women experienced through her work at Howard Coad School.

With each forum, we invite families in multiple ways: sending information home, going door-to-door to ensure the information was received and understood and to explain the purposes of the forum further, and/or to extend personal invitations through phone calls.”
(p. 23)

Pushor went on to describe how featuring “food choices reflective of the cultural make-up” (p. 23) of the community, served in an inviting and relaxed environment with families, is important to attend to. This environment sets the stage for facilitated “conversations with staff and parents through interactive table-group activities and end[s] the evening with whole-group sharing” (p. 23). Having translators present where possible is an inviting step to demonstrating the valuing of all voices. Others have similarly described such examples of hosting community events and leveraging these opportunities to build relationships between staff and parents, and to gather community input (Amendt, 2008; Amendt & Bousquet, 2006; Henderson et al., 2007).
Educators and SCC members conducting home visits to meet parents and extend personal

invitations to visit the school or to join the SCC is also identified as an effective practice, as discussed earlier in this dissertation.

Building social cohesion.

SCCs can facilitate strategies to build social cohesion where relationship building is the priority. “Relationship building, efficacy, and advocacy utilize non-traditional strategies to empower parents to develop personal social networks and engage in reciprocal relationships with schools” (Bower & Griffin, 2011, p. 84). Strategies to build relationships between schools and parents, and to create social networks amongst parents, include ideas such as hosting cultural workshops, community conversations, or learning walks, with the use of translators, so that parents and school staff can learn and understand the diversity within the community. Such activities build social cohesion and connection to the broader community. “As parents experience success not only with their tasks but also with working with additional families, they may feel as though their efforts are rewarded. Furthermore, social networks [cohesion] could allow for the leveraging of resources to assist families and students in meeting their individual and group goals” (Bower & Griffin, 2011, p. 85). As parents attend such events, and build trust through relationship, they can be encouraged by school staff or the SCC to provide further leadership, perhaps within the SCC itself, by organizing similar events. Pushor (2018) experienced this leadership at Howard Coad School following a community forum, where a parent saw the opportunity to connect across cultures. To act on the parent’s idea, the school experimented with an activity to build social cohesion called Cooking for Cohesion.

In Cooking for Cohesion, parents cook a meal for others, sharing information about foods and spices they typically use, special cooking techniques, and pertinent concepts such as *halal* products, as an example. Once the meal is ready, everyone sits together to enjoy it,

and the host family tells stories of their home country, their family, what brought them to Canada, what their journey was like, what the joys and challenges of living in Canada have been for them. (p. 25)

This activity offers relationship building with school and home, but also between parents and community members, building connection to community and the school. Hosting a feast and round dance¹¹, an Iftar¹² dinner, or other cultural events are similar examples to build social cohesion.

Community walk.

Relationship building between school and home requires time and intentional strategies. “Time and contact between teachers and parents build a sense of trust and relationship” (Pushor & Amendt, 2018, p. 10). As educators may see the role of parents on the school landscape in a limited fashion, intentional relationship-building to interrupt this belief is valuable. Further, in low socio-economic communities where educators are not representative of the school community, and where educators may hold bias against the community based on media reports, rather than personal experience, such relationship-building is particularly important. A community walk can be an effective strategy to shift educator bias from deficit theorizing about parents and the community, to a strengths approach, viewing parents and the community as assets, as educators come to appreciate the community and see it in new ways. A school principal and SCCs can provide a leadership role in a community walk, undertaking the organization of this and facilitating it as a part of professional development for school staff.

¹¹ A feast and round dance is an Indigenous community gathering of ceremony, a meal, and dance.

¹² An Iftar dinner is an evening meal, eaten after sunset, which ends each day’s fast during the Holy month of Ramadan in the Islamic calendar.

Pushor & Amendt (2018) described a community walk professional development activity of about an hour or two, where school staff walk through the neighbourhood surrounding the school, tasked with the purpose of identifying two or three assets in the community. The SCC can marshal a few community members in advance to lead such a guided walk, and make contact with a few local community resources to prepare them for a visit by school staff. Community Elders, a health care provider, and/or a business owner may be approached to be visible during such a community walk. These community resources could provide school staff with some history of the community, or speak to their role in the community, the services they provide, as well as provide a perspective of the community from their vantage point.

A community walk is intended to cause interruption and perhaps discomfort for educators (Derrida, 1999; Gilbert, 2006; Molnar, 2008; Pushor, 2007) as they experience the shift in power imbalance (Pushor & Amendt, 2018). It is through such experiences that educators can be challenged to surface their own biases and challenge their beliefs and assumptions, and become open-minded to seeing parents and the community as assets. “Getting to know the community is a first step in marshaling valuable community resources” (Bryan, 2005, p. 224) and, to do so, the school staff must first see the gifts of parents and community members, including minority and at-risk community members.

The preceding examples provide practical ideas for schools and SCCs to build relationships with parents and community members, particularly with Indigenous and newcomer families. Through the development of trust relationships with such activities can result in engagement of parents and community members, including engagement in the primary mandate of the SCC. It is only in engagement activities connected to learning (Goodall, 2017) where improved student achievement can be realized. I return to this point later in this dissertation.

Summarizing Welcoming and Hospitality

In this Chapter, I have surfaced the concept of welcoming and hospitality in education, while at the same time, identifying the inhospitality that may exist in school structures. Interrupting these structures may result in some discomfort for educators as they confront their own biases, and challenge their beliefs and assumptions. If they approach the school community with humility, they will see their role in welcoming and hospitality as both guest and host. Such an approach honours the strengths and the gifts that reside in the community, as well as the knowledge and history that precede educators coming into the school and will remain after they leave. Building trust relationships between schools and homes, particularly with Indigenous and newcomers is integral to engagement, including engagement in supporting student achievement as identified as the primary mandate of the SCC. If “education is a relation of hospitality” (Gilbert, 2006, p. 33) then schools and SCCs will do well to consider their role and function as they serve in building these trust relationships in the school community.

Chapter 3-II

Beliefs and Assumptions Affect Parent Engagement

In this Chapter, I describe the process of surfacing and examining beliefs and assumptions by holders of power in the school system, as it relates to parent engagement and the positioning of parents, by educators, on the school landscape. It is also particularly important for educators to examine their beliefs and assumptions about parents regarding those different from them, including Indigenous and newcomer parents. By discarding those beliefs and assumptions that are harmful to parent engagement, and rejecting deficit theorizing, schools and SCCs can utilize strength-based strategies to facilitate meaningful engagement. Through such efforts, the roles and responsibilities of SCCs can be re-imagined to support these tactics, and possibility can be created for the SCC to engage in their core mandate – to support student achievement.

Beliefs and Assumptions

In the previous chapter on welcoming and hospitality, the notion of beliefs and assumptions surfaced as it is difficult to separate out these strands and discuss one without the other. “Our first assumptions as educators build the foundation of what will destroy or create an essential family/teacher relationship, a relationship that is crucial to the successful education of all children” (Basaraba, 2013, p. 94). This powerful quote captures what lies at the heart of parent and community engagement, ultimately our beliefs and assumptions. Our assumptions and beliefs as an individual form the basis of who we are, and how we relate to others. These assumptions and beliefs, when taken collectively, become the culture of a place (Constantino, 2003), and a school is no different in this regard. School culture is the environment created by the observable practices of the people in the school (e.g. educators and SCC members) which are

reflective of their shared assumptions and beliefs. As a result, careful reflection on our assumptions and beliefs is integral to getting to practices of possibilities around engagement.

The starting place for schools is to examine their beliefs and assumptions about the children, parents, and community to whom they are connected.

Before we can create strong and effective partnerships with families, we have to believe not only that it's important but also that it can be done – and that we can do it. That means it's necessary for school staff to hold a set of positive beliefs about family engagement. (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 27)

An examination of the beliefs and assumptions of school staff can help identify if these are helpful or harmful in developing relationships with youth, families and the community (Pushor & Amendt, 2018).

Welcoming parents onto a school landscape ideally begins with a conversation among all staff in a school. “What do we believe about the place and voice of parents in our school? How can we see our beliefs being lived out? Is there a match between what we say we believe and the practices we have in place? What unconscious or implicit assumptions may be in play in our practices? (Pushor, 2007, p. 8)

Making these assumptions and beliefs explicit is task number one for any school, SCC, or community embarking on parent and community engagement. Later in this Chapter, I describe a process I was part of at Princess Alexandra Community School to develop shared beliefs. Before that, however, I describe challenges that may impede the establishment of a positive set of beliefs and assumptions educators may have regarding the students and families in the community in which they work.

Deficit theorizing.

Deficit theorizing is one of the obstacles that can interfere with relationship-building between the school and home. Bishop et al. (2003) uncovered the harmful effects of deficit theorizing by educators in New Zealand as it related to Māori students. Researchers have found that some educators blame the family, community, or the culture for challenges faced by students, and develop a belief that families do not have the skills and capacities required to help their children (Mapp, Carver, & Lander, 2017). In the minds of educators who deficit theorize, cultural differences, limited English language skills by parents, or effects of poverty, become impossible barriers to overcome. This phenomenon particularly plays out for Indigenous and other marginalized communities in school systems predominantly staffed by non-Indigenous educators who may have inherent bias as it relates to students and families different from themselves (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016; Goodall, 2017; Green & Waldman, 2018; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Stelmach, 2016; Warren et al., 2009). In some instances, this deficit-based thinking leads teachers to a ‘saviour’ mentality, seeing themselves as needing to rescue students from “awful circumstances, neighborhoods, and families” (Mapp et al., 2017, p. 25). In a deficit-based belief system like this, it is impossible for a school or SCC to create or maintain effective home-school partnerships.

Beliefs and assumptions and the SCC mandate.

Kirby and DiPaola (2011) suggested that “practitioners may need to examine their beliefs and attitudes” (p. 555) when it comes to engaging families and communities. In an environment where school staff do not believe parents can effectively contribute to student learning, it stands to reason that the SCC will be ineffective in achieving their mandate in this regard. Comments were uncovered in this research study in reference to parents, particularly Indigenous and

newcomer parents, and the perceptions by educators of their being incapable of engaging in the school level plan. “I think it is asking a lot of new immigrants to weigh in on [the] strategic plan – they are not ready for it – it is too much for my newcomers.” Situated in a context where these beliefs are manifested, it can marginalize SCC members and leave them feeling intimidated to share their voice and knowledge in improving student learning (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011).

Strategies

While the engagement of families and communities in schools has long been recognized as an effective approach to improve student achievement, there remain challenges to effectively engaging families and communities in schools (Goodall, 2017). This gap is particularly noticed within the construct of SCCs and the challenges that remain with their ability to fully implement their mandate. Critical elements emerge in the literature that are important for schools to attend to in order to effectively engage families and communities in schools.

Anti-racist education.

Deficit theorizing, as well as inherent bias of some educators towards minorities or marginalized groups different from themselves, has already been discussed in this Chapter. Racism exists in our society and in our schools. Anti-racist education “acknowledges that school discourses are not neutral but are embedded in and reproduced through social and institutional settings that normalize white racism and other forms of marginalization” (Schick, 2010, p. 48). Left unchecked, these racist discourses are continually reproduced leaving educators blaming those oppressed for their situation (Noguera, 2003; Schick & St. Denis, 2003), rather than addressing their own racist thinking, or engaging in a discussion about power and privilege.

Surfacing harmful and/or racist beliefs and assumptions about parents and community members is imperative, as an integral piece of engaging in relationship building with parents and community. During my time at Princess Alexandra Community School, the staff undertook a process to surface and examine assumptions and beliefs. Some guiding questions we used to do this were:

- What do I believe about my community?
- What role do I believe community should play in the school?
- What opportunities have I given community members to be meaningfully involved in the school?
- What benefits would I receive from working more closely with community? (Amendt & Bousquet, 2006, p. 23)

Questions such as these are helpful in surfacing beliefs and assumptions that school staff may hold about the community. Making these beliefs explicit opens up the dialogue required for school staff to critically reflect on whether these beliefs are helpful, or harmful, in engaging youth, family, and community within the school.

Establishing a helpful set of core beliefs.

After surfacing beliefs and assumptions about parents and community, and identifying and discarding those that are harmful, a school or SCC requires a new set of core beliefs about parents and community that are helpful to engagement. Henderson, et al. (2007) outline four essential core beliefs that support engagement: 1. All families have dreams for their children and want the best for them. 2. All families have the capacity to support their children's learning. 3.

Families and school staff are equal partners. 4. The responsibility for cultivating and sustaining partnerships among school, home, and community rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders. A set of affirming beliefs, such as these, will help schools and SCCs develop effective partnerships with parents.

Developing school beliefs is an engaging activity that can lead a school community to live out new shared beliefs. Amendt & Bousquet (2006) described a process used at Princess Alexandra Community School to develop beliefs.

In March, 2001, staff members, students and parents were invited to a half-day meeting to discuss the development of school beliefs. The morning began by reviewing the concepts of the new discipline program, i.e. Restitution and Self-Discipline. Beliefs around community education and Aboriginal philosophy were shared as a foundation for the ensuing discussion. Groups were then formed to talk about “what we believe about this place.” Each group spent 1.5 hours in a circle, discussing what they personally believed and what they ideally believed about the school. These statements were then shared with the whole meeting when the groups came together. The process took the entire morning and the community felt strengthened by discussing a common goal.

The group work was picked up about two weeks later with parents, staff and students pulling common themes from the beliefs developed at the P.D. day. Four themes emerged: Safety, Respect, Self-Esteem, and Connectedness. Consensus was reached at a later date on these themes, expressing the four beliefs of our school.

After the beliefs had been decided, it was now time to come to a shared understanding of what these beliefs meant to “us.” Through processes with staff, parents, students, and

community members, a shared understanding of these beliefs was created and statements summarizing each belief were developed. These beliefs were posted throughout the school and the shared understanding was taught to students in each classroom.

This process of community engagement took much time to develop, yet we believed it fostered a true sense of community and modeled much of the philosophy of community education. (Amendt & Bousquet, 2006, pp. 9-10)

Pushor (2010) encouraged schools to make visible their beliefs and put new beliefs into practice. These include beliefs in parent knowledge, valuing the presence of children and families in schools, and a belief in parent engagement. Making such belief statements explicit and living out these beliefs will be helpful for schools to develop relationships with families. They will also be helpful for schools in terms of evaluating their existing practices against these beliefs to ensure there is alignment.

Asset-mapping.

When schools reject deficit thinking about students, parents, and families in the school community, they begin a process of strength-based thinking (Mapp et al., 2017) that then underpins building relationships and considerations of parent engagement. Educators who see strengths in the parents and community members, view these strengths as assets. These assets, or funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Mapp et al., 2017; Pushor & the Parent Engagement Collaborative II, 2015), are extremely valuable resources to the school community. Educators do well to reject thinking that these resources from parents are limited solely to financial assets, perhaps derived through fundraising efforts to support the school, and rather are encouraged to consider all assets parents may have. These assets may include such

things as their knowledge and skills gained through work, life, or volunteer experience; their vision for the school, community, and student learning; or their cultural knowledge and community connections.

Asset mapping is a process built upon a belief in the strengths of parents and communities, and a commitment to identifying and engaging these assets (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). School staff do well to get to know the community and identify its assets (Constantino, 2003; Henderson et al., 2007). A “family-support approach focuses on helping families identify and develop their strengths, rather than passively receiving services designed and delivered by professionals” (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002, p. 30). A simple task that a school staff or SCC can undertake is to personally visit each family at the beginning of the school year, or as part of a community engagement evening. It would be important for staff members to introduce themselves and demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment to working in partnership with each family. During such an opportunity, staff members could ask the parents or family members what strengths they might like to share as a contribution to the classroom learning this year. If done in a respectful manner, this approach can elicit many gifts and ideas, such as:

1. A parent who is a seamstress offer[ing] to bring a sewing machine in to teach students.
2. A parent suggest[ing] books be sent home with children so that parents could support learning at home.
3. Parents who were very concerned about child safety and negative influences in the community and [saying] they [would be] willing to advocate more publicly about these issues to generate community support and solution.

4. A parent who is a mechanic offer[ing] to bring a vehicle to the school staff parking lot and show students some basics about a motor vehicle engine's operations.
5. A parent suggest[ing] that, instead of hearing of student work at only three scheduled reporting periods, every second Friday during the last half-hour of the day could be a time where parents could come in to discuss student progress with school staff and see their child's portfolio. (Amendt, 2008, p. 54)

Based on a foundation of helpful beliefs and assumptions, these strategies can position a school staff well to develop the necessary relationships towards engagement.

Possibility

During the course of this evaluation, I was invited by a chair of a board of education in the province to attend and observe their School Community Council Assembly meeting. This particular school division employs a division-wide structure that brings two representatives from each of their SCCs together three times per year to their SCC Assembly. The SCC Assembly is co-chaired by the chair of the board of education as well as an elected chair from the SCCs. The board chair advised me that the agenda is co-constructed and approved by the board chair as well as the elected SCC chair, although the agenda is primarily created based upon the interests expressed by SCCs. The SCC Assembly is attended by school board members as well as senior school division staff officials.

The SCC Assembly took place at a school in the division over a two-hour evening period. Childcare was provided at the school for those SCC members who required it. The agenda included a welcome from the co-chairs, followed by three breakout sessions that SCC members could attend. The breakout sessions covered the following topics: a) an overview of data

measures collected through a system-wide survey, and how the results were being used; b) an overview of arts education instruction in the division; and, c) an overview of technology in the classroom. All three breakout sessions were led by school division central office staff with responsibilities for these areas. Participants could select two breakout sessions to attend, 30-minutes each.

I attended two breakout sessions as an observer. During the session regarding the data measures collected through a system-wide survey, participants were provided with an overview of the survey tool, an explanation of how the school division and schools received the results, and how they used the data. The presentation provided an overview from a division-wide perspective of the data, and what the division was learning. A handout was provided to participants regarding the information presented. The handout concluded with a section, “What can SCCs do to help?” This section encouraged SCCs to dialogue with their school principal and to reflect on learning environments in school and outside of school.

The presenter was thoughtful in the presentation style – sharing information without educational jargon and in meaningful ways for parents to understand and with which to engage. Visual displays of the data were provided, and SCC members were walked through ways they could read the data to inform conversations and questions at their schools. I had a sense from the participants in the room that SCC members were pleased to know that such data existed to inform their work with the school-level plan. There was also some discussion in the room that led to SCC members expressing noted inconsistency in practice across the school division – some commenting that their principal would not share this type of information, while others affirming that their school principal did share this level of data at the school with SCCs.

The second breakout session I attended was regarding technology. The presenter had prepared a presentation outlining the school division's use of technology to inform learning. Soon into the presentation, however, a SCC member interjected with a question regarding cell phone use at school, enquiring about the division's policy on such. This was certainly a 'hot-button' timely issue, as that question led to much engagement from SCC members in the session expressing the practice at their school, as well as weighing in on their opinion as to whether the practice of cellular phone use by students in schools/classrooms should be allowed or not. The presenter facilitated the conversation, answering questions, and inviting comments from SCC members. While the discussion surfaced inconsistency in practice across the schools in the division, it created an understanding that this was a timely topic requiring further discussion, and it was flagged for the agenda of the next SCC Assembly.

Following the time allotted on the agenda for the breakout sessions, the SCC Assembly reconvened in a large group. The final agenda item was an update from the chair of the board of education. The update from the chair provided important highlights from the board of education regarding priorities for the school division and encouraged SCC awareness and engagement in these initiatives. The SCC Assembly concluded with the provision to participants of a six-question evaluation of the SCC Assembly that would be used to provide feedback to the co-chairs, as well as to identify priority topics for future SCC Assemblies.

As I unpacked my experience at this SCC Assembly, I was struck by many important things. First, included in the mandate of SCCs is a directive to provide advice to the board of education. In order for the SCC to be able to deliver on this mandate, a relationship with the board of education has to be in place, and opportunities have to be created for the board of education to interact with SCC members. The SCC Assembly at this school division achieved

this interaction by bringing together SCC members from across the division with school board members and senior school division officials. Beyond getting folks together in a room, I was informed that school board members also attend SCC meetings at the schools they represent.

The second thing that struck me was the atmosphere of trust created in this relationship. This trust relationship was built upon respect for the roles/mandate of both elected board members, as well as SCC members. It was evidenced through co-chairing the SCC Assembly, shared by the board chair and an elected SCC chair. It was also evidenced through the co-construction of the agenda for the SCC Assembly. It was further evidenced in the breakout sessions at this event, whereby senior school officials demonstrated a relationship of trust with SCC members as they engaged in dialogue with them and shared tools, strategies, and tips for engagement, while entertaining challenging questions posed by SCC members. As I shared some of my observations with the board chair that evening, the board chair told me that the secret to their success was simply situated in trusting the parents, noting that it had not always been that way in the division.

The final important observation from my reflection related to beliefs and assumptions lived out by the holders of power in this example. The school board members and senior school division officials had evidently created a culture of beliefs and assumptions about SCC members (parents) as partners in education. The entire SCC Assembly was focused on the mandate of SCCs – teaching and learning. The senior school division staff who presented at the breakout sessions evidently valued the role of SCC members as partners in education, encouraging learning-centred discussions at the SCC back at their schools. The school board members, in similar fashion, evidently believed that SCC members (parents) are valued partners, who can be trusted in relationship to co-construct this event. They also believed in the SCC mandate to

engage in teaching and learning, and to provide advice to the board of education. They lived this out by engaging with SCCs in this forum, and inviting SCC members into important, yet sometimes challenging, conversations regarding teaching and learning and student achievement. Contrast these beliefs and assumptions with the beliefs and assumptions held by an educator expressed earlier in this section, “I really don’t think they [the SCC] should affect my classroom. That’s my classroom...I would think that would be a real detriment, and a real negative event if the School Community Council started to interfere with how we teach” (Preston, 2012, p. 70). The board of education sets the tone from the top. Their beliefs and assumptions matter, and the board of education’s commitment to the SCC mandate, and expectation for the engagement of SCC members and parents in teaching and learning, is an important factor in having SCCs successfully achieve their mandate.

The key role of the principal has already been raised in the findings of this SCC evaluation. The preceding example raises the important role for leaders to surface beliefs and assumptions. This includes coming to terms with those practices that are neither welcoming, nor based on a strengths model regarding parents and community. The parent engagement guidebook created by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (2012), cited earlier in this dissertation, is an example of an effective resource for SCCs, as it focuses on the mandate of SCCs – parent engagement. It contains practical tips and examples of ways to engage parents, as well as strategies to support ongoing parent engagement such as through an annual planning calendar, forming welcoming committees, and providing childminding and transportation to parents to attend school council meetings. All of these strategies were evident in the SCC Assembly example. This guidebook created by the educational leaders in Ontario sends a strong statement that these educational leaders believe in and value the role of parents in the education

system, and understand the impact that partnerships with parents can have on improved student achievement. In a similar fashion, the SCC Assembly example sends the message about the beliefs and assumptions of the board of education and senior school officials in the division as they relate to the role of SCC members and parents as educational partners.

The preceding SCC Assembly example is real. It is not fictitious or theoretical. It is an example of what can occur in Saskatchewan schools and SCCs when beliefs and assumptions by those with power – the board of education, senior school officials, principals and teachers – are helpful to the meaningful engagement of parents. Such an example exists because those with power are negating assumptions that parents cannot engage with educators in meaningful conversations about teaching and learning, or that parent involvement should be restricted to fundraising. It exists in a setting in which the norm has become a belief that parents and educators can work in partnership to support student achievement. Indeed, it is the reason for Recommendation One in this evaluation - that every school in Saskatchewan adopt community education philosophy and practices, to create an environment in which SCCs can thrive, and communities can be engaged. Just as similarly recommended nearly 20 years ago for the provincial education system (Tymchak, 2001), it is imperative that this environment be created by educational leaders. Leithwood (2019) tasked educational leaders to “build trusting relationships with and among staff, students, and parents,” “build productive relationships with families and communities,” and “connect the school to its wider environment” (p. 32), all elements that were lived out in the example I have just described. With this foundation in place, SCCs can achieve their mandate.

Contrasting examples of “engagement.”

The concepts of engaging parents and community, building trust relationships, making underlying beliefs and assumptions explicit, and employing Indigenous methodologies and ways of knowing, have been described herein. Two scenarios are unpacked next to shed light on these concepts in action, and to illustrate how well-intentioned strategies of “engagement” for marginalized communities are at times misdirected. What follows is an example of “engagement,” and a contrasting real-world example of how parent and community engagement occurred and was documented at Princess Alexandra Community School.

One example of engagement may be a well-intentioned Government policy directive, or a school or community organization idea, of a family resource centre. The idea for family resource centres has been contemplated by governments in Saskatchewan over the past two decades at minimum. At the time of this writing, the Government of Saskatchewan announced the formation of Family Resource Centres in certain areas of the province. The example that follows is based more broadly on the concept of family resource centres, and not specifically on the recently announced Family Resource Centres in Saskatchewan, as I am unaware of the specifics that led to their formation. A family resource centre reflects a concept of a centre created in a school or community with predominantly Indigenous or newcomer families living with low socio-economic status. Creating a centre within the community would reduce barriers for families such as transportation, as Indigenous and newcomer parents could potentially access the centre in their community. The centre would offer parenting resources such as brochures, books, as well as local parenting programs that parents could access. The centre would facilitate networking amongst parents, and perhaps engage the health authority where appropriate for programming. There may be nothing inherently wrong or dangerous about such a concept,

however, let's unpack the example to determine its alignment or lack of alignment with the concepts of engagement, building relationships, anti-racist education, and decolonizing concepts such as Indigenous ways of knowing.

Who developed the idea? The idea for the family resource centre is created most likely by non-Indigenous staff from a Government department, or a school or community organization. Who is the targeted audience for the centre? The targeted audience is Indigenous and newcomer parents, most likely living in vulnerable conditions such as poverty. Were the targeted audience involved in determining the need for the centre or co-constructing its mandate? Perhaps not. The centre is a policy response to a problem. What is the problem it is trying to solve? The problem it is trying to solve is to develop capacity and better parenting skills for Indigenous and newcomer parents. What is the belief and therefore assumption behind this solution? The assumption is that Indigenous and newcomer parents do not have capacity or adequate parenting skills when compared with mainstream, predominantly white parents. There is the rub. While well-intentioned, the policy intervention, a family resource centre, may at its core be developed through systemic racism and may result in a further colonizing effect for Indigenous communities – that being to let them know they are inferior, in this case as it relates to their parenting skills, in comparison to their dominant white neighbours. Should the experiment run, well-intentioned and perhaps even practical as it may be, the centre may be under-utilized and fail, with the blame for the failure placed on the marginalized families who chose not to access the centre for their own betterment. Based on McKnight & Kretzman's (1993) understanding, this family centre approach is conducted with a view to identify the needs, deficiencies, and problems in a community in order to address them, as opposed to a clear commitment and purpose to discover the community's capacities and assets. Building trust relationships (Pushor,

2007) has failed in this scenario. Decolonization (Smith, 1999; Kovach, 2009) does not occur, and, in fact, further colonizing effects are experienced. An anti-racist approach (Noguera, 2003; Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Schick, 2010) has not formed the basis for this strategy. There is no reciprocity to the experiment, as it is unidirectional and implemented without strategies of engagement. It perpetuates the status quo and taken-for-grantedness (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005) of current thinking and practices. To use Derrida's (2000) distinction to scrutinize this practice, it is consistent with the "laws of hospitality" as it invokes a structured concept of welcome based upon negative beliefs about parents and the community. Let's compare this with the second scenario.

The second scenario took place at Princess Alexandra Community School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan nearly two decades ago. The story of engagement, the transformational change that took place with the staff and community, and the resulting outcomes have been well documented (Amendt & Bousquet, 2006; Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005; Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, 2004), therefore I will not recite the entirety of that experience here. The scenario I describe is how an adult basic education program was developed utilizing the strategies of engagement, building trust relationships, and decolonizing methodologies.

Relationships between the staff and community at Princess Alexandra Community School had begun to change and become more positive, as a result of staff rejecting deficit theorizing and the school community developing shared beliefs. Through these strong relationships already developed by the staff and community, the conversations between parents and staff changed. Parents and community members approached the school staff with interest in pursuing or completing their K-12 education through adult education offerings. Their request

was whether such an adult education program could be offered at the school. Parents were becoming comfortable in the school, and they felt that childcare and transportation barriers would be reduced if programming could be offered in the school. The school staff pursued the idea with partner organizations and provincial Government departments to determine possibilities. Through these conversations, the concept grew from a single school idea to a network of adult basic education offerings throughout Saskatoon's core neighbourhood schools (public and Catholic). The program offerings were diverse, to match the needs of the parents. It was not assumed that all parents were looking for a GED®, or needing preliminary essential literacy and numeracy skills. The range of programs covered levels from very low literacy to Adult 12. The program eventually went on to offer the first three months of post-secondary courses in educational assistant training, which eventually led to Indigenous and low socio-economic status parents in the community becoming employed and working out of core neighbourhood schools (Deer, 2006). Let's unpack this scenario.

Who developed the idea? The idea for the adult education programs was developed and requested by Indigenous parents in the community. With the concept in hand, school staff then approached appropriate Government departments and other partners to develop it further. Who is the targeted audience for the centre? The targeted audience is Indigenous and low socio-economic parents and community members, most likely living in vulnerable conditions such as poverty. Was the targeted audience involved in determining the need for the program? Yes. What was the problem it was trying to solve? The problem it was trying to solve was to provide adult education programs for parents in core neighbourhoods who determined that the school setting for this program was preferential to attending a post-secondary institution in which they were not comfortable. What was the belief and therefore assumption behind this solution? The

parents in the community know and understand their needs best. The success of the program underscored the importance of attending to the important concepts outlined herein. Building trust relationships occurred (Pushor, 2007) between the staff and community that facilitated space for the discussion about this idea. Decolonization occurred (Smith, 1999; Kovach, 2009) as the concept emerged from parents and community members and was co-developed with the support of school staff. Anti-racist ideology occurred (Noguera, 2003; Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Schick, 2010) as the concept did not develop from deficit-theorizing by the school staff as holders of power. There was also reciprocity in the relationships as parents developed the idea, and ultimately gave back to the school community through employment. It was also implemented with a clear commitment and purpose to discover the community's capacities and assets (McKnight & Kretzman, 1993). This engagement aligns with Derrida's (2000) "Law of hospitality" as it was developed in a true partnership between parents and school staff to address community needs. For those who argue that authentic parent engagement of this nature does not result in improved student achievement, or distracts teachers from focusing on student achievement, the story concludes with evidence of significant improved student achievement as a result of the ongoing engagement of parents in the school (Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, 2004). For those who argue that authentic parent engagement intensifies teachers' workloads and places further pressure on their time, the story concludes with the notation that in the same year that student achievement increased significantly due to parent and community engagement, the use of sick time by teachers at the school decreased to amongst the lowest in the school division, and the turnover rate of teachers significantly decreased (Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, 2004). Pushor (2018) documented a

similar approach to building parent engagement strategies at Howard Coad School. Schools and SCCs do well to be mindful of these concepts in developing strategies of engagement.

Summarizing Beliefs and Assumptions

Surfacing and examining beliefs and assumptions is a critical aspect of parent engagement. Deploying strategies such as anti-racist education, rejecting deficit theorizing, and utilizing asset-mapping can be useful. Rather than being boxed into existing historical roles for the SCC, re-imagining the role of the SCC in view of these strategies is also a worthy endeavour. Such efforts can lead to possibility, and meaningful engagement of the SCC in their core mandate, that being to support student achievement. That possibility, however, can only thrive in an environment where the belief about parents and the SCC as important partners is created.

Chapter 4-II

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Indigenous methodologies have been utilized in this evaluation study, and a thread of Indigenous ways of knowing has been intentionally woven throughout this dissertation. As described earlier, this has been a way to situate myself as a Métis researcher in this work. It has also been done intentionally as I believe possibility lies within gaining a deepened understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and how they resonate with concepts of parent and community engagement. If schools and SCCs, primarily not representative of Indigenous peoples, are intentional about gaining this deepened understanding, they may experience success in engaging First Nations and Métis parents and community members within the SCC and the school landscape. While it is not my place to provide detailed cultural information or make attempts here to capture and document Indigenous ways of knowing, I will share limited information based upon knowledge I have gained over many years from Indigenous Elders, traditional knowledge keepers, and academics, both locally and internationally.

Parent and Community Engagement, and Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Indigenous ways of knowing are based upon Indigenous knowledge that is passed down through the generations primarily through oral teachings, often through stories and ceremony. There is no pan-Indigenous way of knowing. Each Indigenous nation is unique, each with their own languages, histories, stories, and connections to their lands. While there is no one Indigenous way of knowing, there is a set of common themes that emerge when Indigenous peoples share their knowledge – land, languages, and relationships. These themes are built upon principles and values that are important to Indigenous peoples.

Cardinal & Hildebrandt (2000) interviewed treaty Elders in Saskatchewan from across the nations and language groups in the province. They demonstrated that while each nation is unique, there are shared “spiritual philosophies, teachings, laws and traditions that are remarkably similar to one another” (p. 9). A sacred connection to the land is noted in the stories from the Elders. Principles of good relations and getting along with others also emerges as a theme. “In each of their languages, the Elders described the collectivity of their citizenry” (p. 39), underlining the value of relationships and kinship. Kovach (2009) noted similar themes that consistently emerge in Indigenous epistemologies: they are holistic in nature, pragmatic, and focus “on language and place, and on values and relationships” (p. 57). The stories ground the people in place and knowledge from place, and bring a sense of belonging and interconnectedness to each other in relation to the land or place. Indigenous epistemologies reflect “a holistic, value-based knowledge system that consistently returns to the responsibilities of maintaining good relations” (p. 63). Brayboy (2006) recognizes the uniqueness of Indigenous communities resulting from place, language, and histories, but also identifies commonalities in Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. Land, languages, and relationships are present in tribal knowledge.

Land, languages, and relationships are foundational elements of First Nations and Métis ways of knowing as expressed in Saskatchewan’s First Nations and Métis education policy framework (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2018). The writers expressed that First Nations and Métis ways of knowing are lived out in Indigenous languages and passed on through Elders and knowledge keepers. One of the principles in the policy framework is a commitment to a provincial education system that values relationships and the authentic engagement of children, youth, families, and communities in creating culturally responsive learning programs.

Further, the writers articulated a respect for the natural world, and for embracing this value by including this knowledge within learning programs for students. Battiste, (2013) cited examples of successful school programs that support Aboriginal learning by, among other things, legitimizing the voice of Aboriginal people through place and culture; embracing both Indigenous and mainstream knowledges; and, supporting learning within the community by encouraging the [engagement] of parents, elders, and community (p. 176). These practices demonstrate respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and are examples of ways educators can reflect Indigenous knowledge in their classrooms and schools, in order to support student achievement.

Parent and community engagement, historically, has been equated in Saskatchewan with community education, a way of delivering education that is based upon community education principles (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). When educators live out these principles in their teaching and schooling practices, it can result in increased engagement of youth, parents, and community members, and improved student achievement. Just as Indigenous knowledge is valid in its own right, similarly, community education has its own history lived out in Canada and elsewhere. My attempts to draw parallels here are not to situate one over the other, nor to assume, for instance, that community education is based upon Indigenous ways of knowing. Unpacking the principles of Indigenous ways of knowing, as well as the principles of community education, can support educators to develop practices that respect and include Indigenous ways of knowing within the learning program, and facilitate the engagement of Indigenous parents and communities within the school landscape. The goals of such efforts are both to support Indigenous students' achievement, and help all students gain insights into Indigenous ways of knowing.

Land.

Indigenous ways of knowing value the knowledge derived from place (land). Knowledge connected to place has enhanced credibility and validity because of where it resides. “Stories connected to place are both about collectivist tribal orientation, and they are located within our personal knowing and conceptual framework of the world” (Kovach, 2009, p. 62). Maori protocols of introduction name “the mountain, the river, the tribal ancestor, the tribe and the family” (Smith, 1999, p. 126). That context situates the person, acknowledges their kinship, and provides credibility as it locates their knowledge as situated in a specific place or context.

Foregrounding the importance of community, Freire (1970, 1973) challenged the traditional models of education and facilitated the engagement of communities in new ways. Based upon principles of community development, he worked to create a new philosophy of education. Situated in community, this philosophy is very much connected to place. A reciprocal relationship of respect is created where schools respond to place-specific community-identified needs and work with communities in non-judgmental ways. Freire’s philosophy underpins the community school model that was implemented in Saskatchewan, including the concepts of school as community, and school as hub of the community (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). Similarly, school as hub of the community, is an element of the community school model in other jurisdictions (Constantino, 2003).

Languages.

Indigenous knowledge lives in Indigenous languages and is passed on through the generations often through stories (from place) and through ceremonies. This concept of language in a community education context may be thought of literally in terms of respecting,

honouring, and including the languages and cultures within the school community. Pushor (2018) described the importance of utilizing translators during family and community events at Howard Coad School. The non-SCC parents interviewed in this evaluation also shed light on the importance of honouring and attending to languages and cultures as a strategy to engage families. They described the SCC as a place that parents for whom English is a second language could come in order to practice English skills in a safe and supportive environment. Taken further, schools and SCCs wanting to reflect and honour Indigenous ways of knowing will find ways to engage Elders and traditional knowledge keepers in the school. At Princess Alexandra Community School, for example, the school adopted a local female Elder as school Kokum. The school Kokum welcomed students, staff, and families to the school each day. She also visited with parents who were seeking advice. She sat with staff and students who were experiencing distress or needing comfort. She visited classrooms, teaching students a few Cree words, and sharing Indigenous knowledge she had come to learn over her lifetime of experiences. At Howard Coad School, Elders and other community resources were invited to the school for family library times where teaching Cree and teaching about certain cultural protocols took place. A resource person from the Office of the Treaty Commissioner was also invited to the school to speak to staff and parents about working with students in culturally responsive ways. These are examples of what school staff and/or the SCC could do to support “language” and the honouring of Indigenous ways of knowing.

Language is shared in and among community. In Indigenous communities, as with other cultural groups/communities with a shared language, the language is spoken in community, taught to the young, as a vital part of a thriving cultural community. The concept of languages in a community education context can also be thought of as shared understandings within a

community of learners – students, staff, parents, and community. Amendt and Bousquet (2006) documented a community education practice of developing shared beliefs at Princess Alexandra Community School, described earlier in this dissertation. This practice resulted in four shared beliefs - Safety, Respect, Self-Esteem, and Connectedness. Through processes with staff, parents, students, and community members, a shared understanding of these beliefs was created and statements summarizing each belief were developed. These beliefs were posted throughout the school and the shared understanding was taught to students in each classroom, as well as discussed during parent and community meetings at the school council structure in the school at that time. A shared language and understanding was thereby created at Princess Alexandra Community School for a community of learners.

Relationships.

Indigenous ways of knowing value relationships – relationships with land, kinship, and with each other. Community education principles and practices, at their core, value the engagement of youth, families, and community. They are based on a belief that students and the community succeed when there is shared responsibility and leadership, shared decision making, and reciprocity in the relationship between school and community. At the heart of this belief is relationship. Educators and SCC members build positive relationships with families and community members with a belief that the families and community members have important strengths and gifts to be included in the school in order to help students succeed. The tenets of welcoming and hospitality, described in detail in this dissertation, are all about relationships. SCCs that embrace welcoming and hospitality seek ways to build relationships with families and community members, and understand that such practices are a core aspect of their function, and lead to engagement.

Summary

In a study of two Saskatchewan schools adopting community education practices, Amendt (2008) described themes that educators and SCC members/parents can pay attention to as they begin to adopt community education practices. Establishing two-way communication between the school and home, developing relationships of trust with families, and engaging family and community in the learning program are all important aspects, and can become an agenda for school staff and for SCC members. In the one school in the study with a high First Nations and Métis population, it was noted that being culturally responsive was an important aspect. Noting this, the school staff and SCC members engaged Elders and traditional knowledge keepers in the school learning program, and paid attention to Indigenous protocols during school and SCC/community events. Such actions were identified by school staff, parents, and SCC members as important to building relationships between the school and community. Amendt and Bousquet (2006) described the process undertaken at Princess Alexandra Community School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan to create a culturally affirming learning community. Developing meaningful relationships with families was an important element in the process. The study described the actions taken by the school staff, parents, and the community and school association (the forerunner to the SCC) to engage First Nations and Métis families within the school, and how adopting community education practices facilitated a community of learners. Caron (2006) described the ways teachers and schools can create opportunities for First Nations and Métis parents' involvement in schools. She determined that educators do well to build meaningful relationships first with First Nations and Métis families before expecting their engagement.

I unpack the principles of Indigenous ways of knowing and the principles of community education here to draw parallels between the two. I also do so to invite educators and SCC members to adopt community education principles and practices that respectfully engage First Nations and Métis parents and community members in the SCC and on the broader school landscape. At Princess Alexandra Community School, I witnessed an Indigenous parent take on the role of Chair of the parent and community association, and go on to lead talking circles (starting with the cultural protocol of smudging) for school staff and community members. I further witnessed this Indigenous parent lead professional development for school staff that was focused on sharing his Indigenous knowledge. Educators and SCC members can similarly develop practices that respect and include Indigenous ways of knowing within the learning program, with the goals of supporting Indigenous students' achievement and helping all students gain insights into Indigenous ways of knowing.

There is acknowledgement in this evaluation that Indigenous parents are not being engaged in the SCC, during a time when there are public messages confirming the need for schools to embrace reconciliation. Among the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the following subsections under #10 are included:

- ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.
- v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.
- vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012, p. 2)

Call to Action #10 articulates a desire for parent and community engagement for reconciliation. I am reminded of the words of Hon. Justice Senator Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “Education is what got us here, and education is what will get us out” (Sinclair, 2014). School Community Councils may in fact be a vehicle for dismantling colonization (Martell, 2008), thereby enacting reconciliation. Education is key to reconciliation, and by adopting community education principles and practices, SCCs can build the necessary trust relationships with Indigenous communities by creating a welcoming and inclusive structure that fosters one path to reconciliation.

Chapter 5-II

Resistance

Resistance

With five decades of research to support parent engagement and its impact on student achievement (Mapp, 2013), it would seem that authentic and meaningful parent engagement should be readily evident everywhere, embedded in the practices in schools, and prevalent in the discourse around board of education tables, and in Ministry of Education strategies and policy frameworks. As demonstrated in the historical scan of Saskatchewan's education scene in this dissertation, there are times when this indeed is the case. Over my working experience of nearly 25 years in Saskatchewan's education sector, I have found that the concept of parent engagement is met with a spectrum of responses that range from excitement and enthusiasm, to cynicism and resistance. I have also heard similar responses as I have presented this SCC research in the province. Educators, researchers, and educational leaders advocating for parent engagement can expect resistance as they attempt to build momentum towards these ends. I believe the arguments of resisters are caught up in limitations of their own experiences, complacency, a lack of awareness of the difference between parent involvement and parent engagement, a limiting conception of what constitutes professional boundaries, and fear. Leadership requires moving forward with evidence-based research to inform educational policies and practice and so, while I would caution spending too much time focusing on resisters, it is worth a word here to acknowledge these voices of resistance.

Limitations of personal experiences.

As described by some research participants in this study, their experiences have led them to believe that parents do not want to become engaged in co-constructing school-level plans. Some individuals describe trying shared planning when the mandate for SCCs first emerged, but achieving limited success, or even being told by parents that they (principal or teacher) should just handle that. I have heard others describe these ideas as theoretical, either seemingly unaware or offensively dismissive of the meaningful leadership of folks in all corners of Saskatchewan's education sector who are well on their journey with parent engagement, including as it relates to the mandate of SCCs. I would suggest the most honest comment I hear when discussing the results of this study, or when generally discussing parent engagement in student learning is, "I don't even know what that would look like." Educational leaders – those who hold power – need to be able to envision authentic and meaningful parent engagement in their schools and SCCs. Without a clear vision of what this may be, it is unrealistic to expect parent engagement practices to emerge, be fostered, and thrive. As already discussed in the recommendations of this study, there is work to be done to support educators and education partners to be able to share this vision, and lead practices in support of it.

In this research, and in my previous Master's research, I have also heard from those individuals whose experiences with parent engagement (or involvement) have not gone well. They claim to have a SCC with dominant personalities of parents and community members who attempt to place unrealistic demands on the school staff, are not reflective of the school community, and are hyper-critical of the school and staff. While in no way condoning 'bad behaviour' of any individual, parent, or school staff member, my first reaction to school staff who present these arguments is that these folks are already in your school and community, you

are already in a relationship. A partnership approach with parents, and building trust relationships, is required for parent engagement (Bryan, 2005; Bryan & Henry, 2012; Henderson et al., 2007; Warren et al., 2009). The limitations of previous experiences, or even fear from past negative experiences, are not valid reasons for dismissing parent engagement. Leadership is required to confront these challenging circumstances (Leithwood, 2019), or perhaps to use them as leverage into broader parent and community engagement activities to change the relationship.

Complacency.

Fundraising has already been discussed in this study, along with a recommendation to allow space for it, where parents desire it, through a Friends of School Name body. This second formation of parents will enable SCCs to remain focused on their mandate, a mandate that does not include fundraising. I also noted in the findings that the interpretation panel did not come to consensus with respect to addressing this matter. As I have conducted this research, and shared the findings and recommendations of this study with SCC members, board members, teachers, principals, and other education partners in Saskatchewan, this item draws the most conversation.

Research participants have described that they believed their mandate as prescribed by historical practice was fundraising. My most memorable comment from a research participant in this evaluation, “You just bake things like back in the 50s.” In fact, SCC members, teachers, and principals were often surprised to learn that the SCC mandate is significantly different than that. As they came to this realization, some expressed a sigh of relief, commenting that they did not like this aspect of the role. Other individuals commented that, in fact, separating the fundraising from SCC work may in fact engage new parents who will have interest in the actual mandate, while giving parents who have an interest in fundraising, a space for that work. Some parents heard the findings and recommendation related to fundraising and reacted with a sense of loss of

identity. Other stakeholders claimed that fundraising is the SCCs' support of student learning, and, in fact, how they are achieving their mandate. In this regard, there were education leaders who provided examples whereby the SCC raised in excess of \$100,000 to purchase playground structures, for example. Many individuals found the recommendation to separate fundraising from SCCs unrealistic, out of touch, and even laughable. Finally, other individuals went as far as to suggest that the problem is the SCC mandate, not that SCCs are focused on fundraising, a comment reflective of the conclusions of Preston (2012) in her study of SCCs.

In regard to this criticism of the mandate of SCCs, it is important to acknowledge two critical factors: first, the research evidence is clear that it is the *engagement* of parents in students' teaching and learning activities that positively impacts student outcomes; and, second, the legislation consciously differentiates between the mandate of a SCC and a parent fundraising body. While a SCC is designed intentionally to promote parent engagement, a parent fundraising body enables parent supporters of the school to continue to be involved in other ways in schools.

A culture of fundraising exists in Saskatchewan schools, and perhaps across Canada. An entire cottage industry exists that caters to SCCs and school council type structures to support their many fundraising endeavours, such as companies creating fundraising coupon books, or offering cookie dough sales. A parent recently told me that her child came home with five coupon books, with the child explaining that she was to sell these books to support the SCC. Beyond the role explained through the child, there was no communication between the SCC and parent regarding this expectation. It is little wonder why, then, that when asked what their primary role is, SCC members describe fundraising. While the debate around fundraising in schools lingers, it is undeniable that it exists and it is effective (substantially so) in some communities. It is also undeniable that it perpetuates inequities in our schools between 'have'

communities and ‘have not’ communities, and runs contrary to the lofty claims made by educational partners who believe all students in the province should have the resources they need to succeed regardless of where they live or their personal circumstances. In fact, it may be the reason that some parents, including those from marginalized or vulnerable communities, stay away from an SCC whose primary purpose is to fundraise. All that aside, I do not intend to claim that fundraising in schools or by SCCs is somehow wrong. I am just stating another undeniable fact – it is not the mandate of SCCs. As SCCs were created, significant attention was paid by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education to clarify and direct the mandate of SCCs to focus on student learning, rather than fundraising and similar activities which have little impact on student achievement (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005). It is why you do not find “fundraising” as the mandate in the legislative, regulatory, or policy frameworks for SCCs.

While claims are made that indeed the fundraising activities of SCCs support student achievement, there is no evidence provided to back up these claims. In this research study, SCC parents who successfully fundraised described a ‘Dragon’s Den’ style model where teachers pitch their ideas to the SCC, and the SCC decides where to bestow their fundraised earnings. Using that analogy, one would anticipate seeing a return on investment in the form of data evidencing improved student achievement. The argument that fundraising supports student learning falls short in this regard. The literature strongly suggests differently, that it is parent actions such as setting high standards, facilitating learning opportunities in out of schools times and places, and promoting the value of schooling that positively impacts student learning (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kirby & DiPaola, 2011; See & Gorard, 2015; Warren et al., 2009). While some parents and educators may claim that the SCC mandate is the problem, the literature would suggest otherwise. The

reality of complacency with what exists – claims that what we have is working, that it works well enough, that this is always how we have done this – is a hurdle that advocates for parent engagement must find ways to counter.

Parent involvement vs. parent engagement.

In previous research (Amendt, 2008) and earlier in this dissertation, I differentiated between definitions of parent involvement and parent engagement. Others have similarly noted this important conceptual difference (Goodall, 2017; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Pushor, 2010; Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005; Warren et al., 2009). While this distinction is noted by researchers, it is often not apparent to all practitioners, and resistance comes from those who do not understand the contrasting root underpinnings of parent involvement and parent engagement.

SCCs were created with a focus on parent engagement, and the language used for their structure reflected such a conceptualization (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005). This design was intentional on the part of the Ministry of Education, based on research literature and on their previous attempts to support parent engagement prior to the creation of SCCs. Resisters who claim that fundraising supports student learning, do not understand the distinction between involvement and engagement. Fundraising, by nature, is a parent involvement activity.

Parent involvement activities can be important in schools as they are sometimes the starting places to build relationships that can lead to parent engagement. Bryk (2010) described these activities as ‘small wins’ that “gradually build a school community’s capacity for the greater challenges (and higher-risk social exchanges) that may lie ahead” (p. 28). The challenge here is that education leaders can become complacent with parent involvement, either unable to move the relationship between teachers and parents to a deeper place of parent engagement or

unaware that, in their current place, they have not arrived at engagement. They perhaps unknowingly, given the historical positioning of parents on school landscapes, restrict SCCs to involvement activities, such as fundraising, rather than building upon the relationships with parents and leading them to engagement in conversations and activities that can result in improved student outcomes, as directed in the mandate for SCCs.

A limiting conception of what constitutes professional boundaries.

A discussion regarding the SCC mandate, in regard to engaging parents in discussions with educators about improving student achievement, may lead to resistance by educators who fear the erosion of, or the value placed on, their specialized professional knowledge earned through the attainment of their university degree and teacher license. Within teacher education programs, time and attention given to the development of subject area and content expertise may contribute to shaping a narrow and limiting conception by teachers of what it means to be a professional. Grumet (2009) stated, “There is the failure of professionalization, which idealized the authority of knowledge, the so-called knowledge base, imposing university practices . . . and reinforcing the separation of teachers from children and families (p. 28). Perhaps this same failure of professionalization exists in professional teacher bodies. Within the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation (n.d.) Standards of Practice, the strong focus on teachers’ commitments to the profession and to high standards of teaching and learning may in fact reify this same narrow understanding of membership in a profession. In light of a view of professionalism by teachers as being holders of specialized teacher knowledge, some teachers may perceive SCC parents who want to engage with educators in strategic planning for enhanced student achievement as an attempt to infringe on the professional work that they feel is clearly in their purview. As Sarason (1995) wrote:

However you define a professional, that person's training makes clear that there are boundaries of responsibility into which "outsiders" should not be permitted to intrude. Those *boundaries* are intended to define and protect the power, authority, and decision making derived from formal training and experience. (p. 23)

Reflecting this same understanding of what it means to be a professional, Preston (2012) cited two comments regarding the protection of professional boundaries in her conversations with teachers regarding parent engagement in the learning improvement plan. I also heard from one school division official during the course of this research who described parents as "demanding" the principal that they be engaged in curriculum, or hiring staff, as examples. Schools are governed and operated within prescriptive legislative and regulatory frameworks, and within comprehensive board policies and administrative procedures. While the 'parents taking over' claim may be made, it is difficult to imagine any scenario where this claim reflects reality within the highly regulated environment for provincial schools. From stories I have heard from SCC members, parents, and educators, the scenario is more likely to be played out as follows:

- A parent or SCC learns the mandate of the SCC and asks questions of the school principal about teaching and learning in the school. The school principal responds saying that those questions are curriculum questions within the domain of educators, and not the purview of the SCC.
- A parent or SCC understands it is their responsibility to monitor the school level plan. The parent or SCC requests school level data to monitor the progress on the plan. The school principal responds by saying that privacy laws prevent the school from sharing school level data with the SCC.

- A parent or SCC understands it is their role to advise the school staff and board of education on educational and community matters. The SCC requests that the school principal create a process to solicit feedback from the parents and community members. The school principal responds that the SCC is overstepping their boundaries with such a request.

The questions and conversations presented in these examples are ‘learning’ conversations. They go straight to the heart of the mandate of the SCC, but they can quickly be interpreted by educators and school administrators as parents overstepping their boundaries. The responses that SCC members receive are power and control responses resulting from the fear of educators to enter into such conversations with parents. As Lave and Wenger (1991) stated:

Shared participation is the stage on which the old and the new, the known and the unknown, the established and the hopeful, act out their differences and discover their commonalities, manifest their fear of one another, and come to terms with their need for one another. Each threatens the fulfillment of the other’s destiny, just as it is essential to it. (p. 116)

I would argue that such educators’ comments, reflecting both fear and difference, do so because of the limitations of their lack of personal experience with meaningful and authentic parent engagement. As shared by one educator in this research, who has not yet experienced a sense of the mutually fulfilled destiny inherent in parent engagement, “I don’t even know what that would look like.”

Pushor (2001) cited Brouillard’s *Three Cats* when reacting to similar comments. The wordless book depicts three cats perched on a branch in a tree, staring down at fish in a pond. As

you flip the pages, you see that eventually the cats end up in the pond, and the fish escape to the branches in the tree. Pushor suggested that this is not what parent engagement is about – trying to have parents take over the role of teachers, or trying to have teachers take over the role of parents (pp. 228-232). While a protection of professional boundaries may present as resistance, it is perhaps teachers’ misconstrued idea of what constitutes real professionalism that presents the challenge.

Rather than competing with each over roles, building collaborative relationships between parents and educators is vital (Warren et al., 2009). These relationships require a change from the typical school-led model of parent involvement, where the school sets the agenda for the relationship. As noted by Warren and colleagues:

Increasing parent power through collaboration does not require that teachers lose their authority as experts in education. But it does require that teachers enter authentic processes of relationship building and engagement with parents and community leaders. Rather than approaching parents with the agenda of teaching them how to be better parents or to simply support the school’s agenda, the relational approach engages parents around their own interests and values and respects their contributions. In this process, both educators and parents grow and change, potentially forming a learning community together. (pp. 2243-2244)

Pushor (2010) described this relational approach as “walking alongside.” When teachers and parents walk alongside one another, they learn with and from one another, and they foster an environment for meaningful parent engagement where neither parent knowledge nor teacher knowledge is privileged over the other, but where these ways of knowing come together to support student learning. In a respectful relationship of this nature, I argue that there are few

conversations that educators cannot engage parents within, up to and including conversations about curriculum (Amendt, 2008), or processes of recruitment for key school personnel. While the SCC legislative framework in Saskatchewan does place some restrictions on the spectrum of authority of SCCs, as compared to other jurisdictions in Canada, authentic parent engagement practices in an environment of trust can, and do, occur in Saskatchewan. I note that my first job in Saskatchewan's education system had me hired by a large urban board of education through a selection panel that included central office staff, school staff, and parents from the school community – an 'innovative practice' from nearly 25 years ago.

Fear.

Perhaps connected with the issue of professional boundaries for educators, fear is another obstacle to authentic and meaningful parent engagement. Fear most often manifests itself through power and control. In the one example I provided above, I described a SCC parent requesting data to monitor the school plan and was told by the school principal that the data could not be shared as a result of privacy concerns. While I was not privy to the specific privacy concerns raised by the principal, I am reminded of the SCC Assembly I attended during the course of this research where the presenter shared data regarding measures collected through a system-wide survey. SCC members were provided with an overview of the survey tool, an explanation of how the school division and schools received the results, and how they used the data. The presenter encouraged SCC dialogue, providing a handout to participants with a section, "What can SCCs do to help?" This section encouraged SCCs to dialogue with their school principal and to reflect on learning environments in school and outside of school. Rather than choosing fear, this school division official welcomed and encouraged dialogue about data between educators and parents at the SCC.

Fear can also be experienced by parents who describe the SCC as “too intimidating” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011). Non-SCC parents interviewed in this research described this fear particularly for Indigenous and newcomer parents, for whom the formality of the structure, and language barriers, prevent their engagement. Non-SCC parents advised that personal invitations to parents by school staff and SCC members are valued and a way to break down this fear. Another non-SCC parent advised marketing the SCC as a safe environment where parents of whom English is a second language could come to practice their English skills.

Vulnerability and Sharing Power

As there is most often a power imbalance between parents and school staff, it is important for school staff to create an invitation for SCCs to enter an environment that is safe, constructive, and collaborative. School principals play an invaluable role in creating this environment of trust relationships (Bryk, 2010). As already confirmed in this evaluation, SCC members applauded the principal for the times the SCC was functioning, focused on its mandate, and operating as a collaborative relationship between school and parents. SCC members also cited the principal as the reason for the times when this was not the case. Mapp (2013) articulated how important it is for school staff to be committed to working as partners with families, believing in the value parents bring to improving student learning. School staff, as members of the SCC, and also within their broader role beyond the SCC, can lead the way by recognizing the power they hold, and finding ways to share power and work collaboratively with the SCC. As an early career teacher in a research conversation with Pushor (2011) about his work with parents, Ryan Digneau expressed, “Sometimes we see ourselves as we have to live up to something. In parents’ minds too. But that almost creates the gap – we’re trying to live up to the professional but what we really need to live up to is the person to person” (p. 233). Molnar (2008)

encouraged all educators to take up this same belief in ‘living up to the person to person’ by embracing the uncomfortableness and the vulnerability that may be associated with engaging with parents. Within a belief system where parents are valuable partners who can support student achievement, educators define and embrace an expanded view of professionalism that includes humility, trust, and hospitality as described in Part II of this dissertation, and place their teacher knowledge alongside parent knowledge to create a dynamic partnership to support student learning.

Chapter 6-II

Closing Comments

I embarked on this collaborative research with the SSBA at the direction of boards of education in Saskatchewan, with the primary view to determine the current state of SCCs in relation to their mandate. As I learned, the purpose of evaluation may be sociopolitical, neither wholly formative nor summative, but, rather, the purpose may be to increase awareness of specific activities (Nevo, 2009). This study was conducted in a collaborative manner that respected the relationship and roles of education partners in Saskatchewan, and honoured the voices of SCC members. Through the research conversations, I do believe that awareness of SCCs, and where they are in relation to their mandate, has been surfaced. I selected a “learning-oriented evaluation approach” (Dahler-Larsen, 2009, p. 312) for which the characteristics include a belief that learning is the most important purpose of evaluation; that the evaluation should be relevant; that there should be ownership or deep involvement of practitioners in the evaluation process; and there should be a degree of trust in relationships through the evaluation process (Dahler-Larsen, 2009). This collaborative and culturally-responsive research engaged approximately 120 school board members, SCC members, teachers, principals, Directors of Education, and school division central office staff with responsibilities for SCCs. This evaluation has also enlisted educational partners in Saskatchewan – the Ministry of Education, LEADS, SASBO, STF, and the SSBA throughout the evaluation, including the analysis and interpretation of the data. Through this extensive engagement, the research has provided Saskatchewan’s K-12 educational leaders with a glimpse into the current state of SCCs in Saskatchewan.

The evaluation has concluded that, by and large, SCCs are not meeting their mandate. This is due to a variety of factors, identified within this dissertation, including: SCC members' unawareness of the mandate; SCCs' focus on historical, yet non-mandated, activity such as fundraising; as well as the beliefs and assumptions of those with power in the education system who cannot imagine or create space for the engagement of parents and community members within the "real" work of schools as it is understood by educational professionals – that of teaching and learning.

Important Considerations

This study surfaced important considerations for SCCs and education partners in Saskatchewan upon which to reflect, in their work to focus SCCs on their mandate. One important outcome of this dissertation is the development of a logic model for SCCs (see page 59) that helps to clarify their direction and intent. The logic model developed for SCCs is based upon the mandate, describes desired outcomes and activities, and makes visible key assumptions. This logic model may help to clarify and focus the work of SCCs and education partners on the direction and intent of SCCs.

In this dissertation, I also raised important considerations to perhaps re-imagine the roles of SCCs, or at least focus their work on critical themes that continue to emerge in the conversation around parent engagement – welcoming and hospitality, examining beliefs and assumptions, and exploring community education philosophy and practices that resonate with Indigenous ways of knowing. Potential activities for SCCs were described as possibilities that may lead to the engagement of parents and community members through a focus on building relationships. Such a focus is particularly important for Indigenous and newcomer parents, as the provincial Pre-K-12 education system remains non-representative of these communities. The

challenge presented to SCCs is to form strategies and intentional actions to build relationships with Indigenous and newcomer communities that can lead to their engagement. Through hospitality, building relationships of trust, and re-imagining the roles of SCCs, one path to reconciliation is also presented in this dissertation whereby educators embrace community education practices to engage Indigenous parents and communities in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #10.

Implementing Change

To change the future for SCCs and focus them on their mandate, action is required by SCCs, boards of education, and the education partners in Saskatchewan. This SCC evaluation calls for specific actions under four broad recommendations (see p. 106) intended to provide SCCs and education partners in Saskatchewan with the research upon which they can draw to form conclusions about the benefits and successes of SCCs, and serve as a guide towards their renewal. Actions focused on the recommendations are required to implement change. The following chart serves as an implementation guide for required stakeholders in addressing the recommendations.

Recommendations (abbreviated – see p. 106 for the complete list of Recommendations)	Boards of Education	SCCs	Ed Partners
Recommendation 1: That every school in Saskatchewan adopt community education philosophy and practices, to create an environment in which SCCs can thrive, and communities can be engaged.			
1.1 Establish/sustain a school culture that is welcoming and inclusive to parents and community. Annually conduct assessments of such (e.g., parent surveys or staff evaluations).	✓		
1.2 Engage school staff and SCCs in ongoing PD focused on community education philosophy and practices.	✓	✓	
1.3 School division recruitment and selection practices revised to attract candidates who value engagement.	✓		
1.4 SCCs review their member election process and meeting structure. Revise their bylaws and meeting practices as necessary.		✓	
1.5 SCCs implement a strategy to engage Indigenous, visible minority, and newcomer parents in the SCC.		✓	
Recommendation 2: That SCCs focus on their mandate to support improved student achievement.			
2.1 Saskatchewan Ministry of Education and boards of education launch a communication strategy that clarifies the purpose of SCCs.	✓		✓
2.2 Boards of education review, and revise as necessary, their SCC resources and supports.	✓		
2.3 Boards of education provide ongoing professional development opportunities for school staff and SCCs that focus on their mandate.	✓	✓	
2.4 Fundraising not be permitted within SCCs. Where parents express an interest in fundraising, a separate structure is created.	✓	✓	
Recommendation 3: That education partners in Saskatchewan provide adequate supports and create new supports for SCCs.			
3.1 SSBA and LEADS revise the existing SCC resource to provide SCCs and school staff with strategies and supports focused on the SCC mandate.			✓
3.2 Education partners jointly develop and implement a strategy to support principals to carry out their leadership role with SCCs.			✓
3.3 Boards of education and SCCs review the school division existing supports for SCCs, and update these supports as required.	✓	✓	
3.4 Boards of education formalize a division-wide SCC body to facilitate networking between boards of education and SCCs.	✓		

Recommendation 4: That the education sector prioritize youth, parent, and community engagement as a foundation of Saskatchewan’s Pre-K-12 education system and hold itself accountable to this end.			
4.1 SK Ministry of Education prioritize engagement in its vision and strategic plan, and create a Parent Engagement Office.			✓
4.2 SK Ministry of Education and boards of education advocate to SK post-secondary institutions.			✓
4.3 Education partners advocate to the SK Professional Teachers Regulatory Board to revise its requirements for teacher certification.			✓
4.4 SCCs conduct an annual self-evaluation to determine their effectiveness in achieving their mandate.		✓	

Figure 6-II.1 – SCC Evaluation Implementation Schedule

As stated earlier in this dissertation, it is recognized that SCCs do not operate within a vacuum, but rather are situated within broader educational policy in Saskatchewan. The engagement of parents and communities, including First Nations, Métis, and newcomers, is subject to the political interests and context of those who hold power. As a result, the engagement of parents and community members within the school is often met with resistance. Prioritizing relationships requires the time, energy, political will, and desire to change on the part of SCCs and the education partners in Saskatchewan to create the environment for SCCs to thrive and for parents and community members to be engaged with school staff in supporting student achievement.

SCCs are a means to an end – that end being the engagement of parents and community members with educators to improve student achievement. Situated in a mindset of positive beliefs and assumptions about parents and community members, the SCC can become a place where the ‘we’ in the school is truly representative of staff, students, parents, and community members. Moore (2017) nicely captured the outcomes of such a relationship,

DOING THINGS <i>TO</i> PEOPLE	If we direct or control others, or if we have a covert agenda to change people as we see fit then we will get either compliance or resistance, but no building of skills or self-reliance
DOING THINGS <i>FOR</i> PEOPLE	If we do charitable work, with no expectation of parents doing anything or reciprocating then we may provide temporary relief, but no building of skills or self-reliance
DOING THINGS <i>WITH</i> PEOPLE	If we establish partnerships between parents and professionals, with shared power then we will see benefits for parents, building confidence, skills and self-reliance
DOING THINGS <i>THROUGH</i> PEOPLE	If partnership with shared agenda to promote children’s skills and participation	... then we will see benefits for children as well as the family, creating positive environments for all

Figure 6-II.2 – Outcomes of Different Forms of Helping (Moore, 2017)

When asked if SCCs matter, there was a resounding “yes” by all parties asked in this research. It is evident that there remains a desire in Saskatchewan’s Pre-K-12 education system for strong relationships between school and home. This study has shed light on the significance of parent and community engagement in schools, with the hope that it will lead education partners to tackle resistance to parent engagement, and strengthen the position of parents on the school

landscape in a more consistent and systematic fashion, ultimately leading to improved educational and social outcomes for students and families in the province of Saskatchewan.

Further Research/Future Direction

To build upon five decades of research to support parent engagement and its impact on student achievement (Mapp, 2013), further research is recommended to support the practice of parent engagement within education systems. To enhance practice, additional research is recommended:

1. In its Vision 2025, the SSBA identifies courageous leadership as a strategic intent. Situated alongside personal integrity, it is described as taking pride and responsibility for one's work and decisions. What is the role of courageous leadership in affecting systematic change and addressing resistance, as it relates to parent engagement and to SCCs achieving their mandate?
2. What measures can boards of education utilize to achieve consistency of expectations and practice related to parent engagement in schools across a school division/district?
3. As educators and SCCs embrace Indigenous ways of knowing and adopt community education practices, how do marginalized parents and community members (e.g., Indigenous and newcomers) respond and engage within the school landscape? How might the adoption of community education practices be one path to reconciliation?

Closing Comment

We have our work clearly defined for us – and it is no small task. At the same time, we have the commitment of all educational partners/stakeholders in Saskatchewan to School Community Councils. The timing is great as the education partners in Saskatchewan are

currently embarking on the development of a new vision/plan for education to 2030. There is the possibility of this work being embedded within that plan. There are many stakeholders with responsibilities for SCCs – principals, teachers, parents, Ministry of Education officials, senior school division staff, and elected boards of education in Saskatchewan. Given the legislative framework in Saskatchewan, boards of education are ultimately responsible for SCCs, and therefore it is boards of education in Saskatchewan who should be the voice for this work. As we create the vision for education in Saskatchewan to 2030, boards of education will do well to ensure that this evaluation does not sit on a shelf, but rather that the findings are acted upon, and the space is created in the new education vision/plan for the meaningful engagement of SCCs, parents, and community members in supporting improved student achievement.

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Appendix A – Research Groups Questions

Research Sharing-Circles Questions: National Congress on Rural Education and Focus Group of SCC Urban Members

1. Based on the following scenarios (copies provided in writing to participants), please select the one that most closely reflects the practices at your School Community Council (SCC) as it relates to the SCC mandate to “develop and recommend to its Board of Education for approval a school level plan that is in accordance with the school division’s strategic plan.”
 - a. To my knowledge, we do not develop and recommend a school level plan, nor do we receive updates on the progress of the plan, or receive any data to determine the effectiveness of the school level plan on student achievement at my school. The SCC is not aware of their mandate to develop and recommend to the Board of Education for approval, a school level plan that is in accordance with the school division’s strategic plan.
 - b. A school level plan is created by the school principal and staff, and is taken to the SCC for their approval. There is limited discussion with the SCC on the substance of the school level plan, nor is there an opportunity for the SCC to provide input into, or change, the school level plan presented by the principal and/or school staff. An update on the school level plan may be provided to the SCC by the principal and/or school staff, however there is no opportunity to review school level data on student achievement, or an opportunity for the SCC to dialogue and provide feedback and direction regarding the school level plan progress throughout the year. There is a sense by the SCC members that the school level plan is owned by the principal and/or the school staff.
 - c. A school level plan that aligns with the school division’s strategic plan is created by the SCC members with the principal and/or school staff. This is done through a process whereby SCC members, the principal, and school staff contribute to the plan’s development by sharing their ideas. The principal and/or school staff bring regular updates to the SCC with data related to the school level plan. The SCC reviews the data and has an opportunity to discuss the progress of the school level plan, and/or participate in a dialogue to chart any revisions to the plan if results are not being achieved. There is a sense by the SCC, the principal, and school staff that “we all own the school level plan.”
2. If you have selected scenario “c” above, describe the characteristics of your SCC (what your SCC looks like, sounds like, feels like) that creates the opportunity for that level of partnership. If you have selected scenario “a” or “b”, describe the characteristics of your SCC and what may need to change in order to move towards the conditions described in scenario “c.”
3. The primary mandate of a SCC is to facilitate parent and community engagement in the school towards improving student achievement. How does your SCC do this? How might your SCC do this better? What supports do you receive from the school, school division, and/or others that helps you achieve your mandate? What supports do you

- require from the school, school division, and/or others that you are not currently receiving, that you believe would help your SCC achieve its mandate?
4. Please participate in table discussions to share one effective practice that your SCC does that you believe helps you to achieve your mandate of engaging parent and community members in the school.
 5. Why did you join the SCC? Why do you think a SCC is important?
 6. The Board of Education and a SCC have different roles, however they do inter-relate with each other. What is your experience with connecting the work of the SCC with the Board of Education? Is there a role for the SCC to engage with the Board of Education in some way on major education initiatives or projects in the school division – school division planning, or Reconciliation as examples? If so, what might that look like, and how might that work?
 7. Your feedback is important as the SSBA conducts a review of SCCs. Do you have any other comments you wish to make regarding your experience with a SCC that you think are important for including in a review of SCCs?

Research Sharing-Circles Questions: School Board Members and Directors of Education at the Saskatchewan School Boards Association Spring Assembly

1. The following scenarios are being shared with School Community Council (SCC) members as part of the process for the review of SCCs in accordance with the 2016 SSBA adopted resolution. Based on your understanding of SCCs in your school division, which scenario do you think the SCC members in your school division will identify with as it relates to the SCC mandate to “develop a recommend to its Board of Education for approval a school level plan that is in accordance with the school division’s strategic plan”?
 - a. To my knowledge, we do not develop and recommend a school level plan, nor do we receive updates on the progress of the plan, or receive any data to determine the effectiveness of the school level plan on student achievement at my school. The SCC is not aware of their mandate to develop and recommend to the Board of Education for approval, a school level plan that is in accordance with the school division’s strategic plan.
 - b. A school level plan is created by the school principal and staff, and is taken to the SCC for their approval. There is limited discussion with the SCC on the substance of the school level plan, nor is there an opportunity for the SCC to provide input into, or change, the school level plan presented by the principal and/or school staff. An update on the school level plan may be provided to the SCC by the principal and/or school staff, however there is no opportunity to review school level data on student achievement, or an opportunity for the SCC to dialogue and provide feedback and direction regarding the school level plan progress throughout the year. There is a sense by the SCC members that the school level plan is owned by the principal and/or the school staff.
 - c. A school level plan that aligns with the school division’s strategic plan is created by the SCC members with the principal and/or school staff. This is done through

a process whereby SCC members, the principal, and school staff can contribute to the plan's development by sharing their ideas. The principal and/or school staff bring regular updates to the SCC with data related to the school level plan. The SCC reviews the data and has an opportunity to discuss the progress of the school level plan, and/or participate in a dialogue to chart any revisions to the plan if results are not being achieved. There is a sense by the SCC, the principal, and school staff that "we all own the school level plan".

2. As you see it, describe the characteristics of an SCC (what it looks like, sounds like, feels like) that creates the opportunity for the level of partnership described in scenario "c". What might get in the way of scenario "c" being realized?
3. The primary mandate of a SCC is to facilitate parent and community engagement in the school towards improving student achievement. How does your Board of Education or school division help SCCs accomplish this? What supports (practices, processes, resources) does your Board of Education or school division provide to SCCs that help them achieve their mandate? From your perspective, are these working or adequate, and are there other supports that might be required? Do you have the supports you need as a Board of Education or school division to enable you to provide the necessary supports to SCCs so they can achieve their mandate? From your perspective are these supports adequate and working, or are there other supports that you require?
4. Please participate in table discussions to share one effective practice that your Board of Education or school division does that you believe helps SCCs to achieve their mandate of engaging parent and community members in the school.
5. Based on your understanding of the mandate of SCC as well as your experiences with SCCs, do SCCs work? Why or why not? Do SCCs matter, and are they important? Why or why not?
6. The Board of Education and SCCs have different roles, however they do inter-relate with each other. What is your experience with connecting the work of the Board of Education with SCCs? Is there a role for the Board of Education to engage with SCCs in some way on major education initiatives or projects in the school division – school division planning, advocacy, or Reconciliation as examples? If so, what might that look like, and how might that work?
7. Your feedback is important as the SSBA conducts a review of SCCs. Do you have any other comments you wish to make regarding your experience with a SCC that you think are important for including in a review of SCCs?

Focus Group Questions: SASBO, SSBA, LEADS, STF, and Ministry of Education

1. Based on your experiences with School Community Councils (SCCs), from the following scenarios, please select the one that most closely reflects your experiences with the practices at SCCs as it relates to their mandate to "develop a recommend to its Board of Education for approval a school level plan that is in accordance with the school division's strategic plan".
 - a. To my knowledge, we do not develop and recommend a school level plan, nor do we receive updates on the progress of the plan, or receive any data to determine

the effectiveness of the school level plan on student achievement at my school. The SCC is not aware of their mandate to develop and recommend to the Board of Education for approval, a school level plan that is in accordance with the school division's strategic plan.

- b. A school level plan is created by the school principal and staff, and is taken to the SCC for their approval. There is limited discussion with the SCC on the substance of the school level plan, nor is there an opportunity for the SCC to provide input into, or change, the school level plan presented by the principal and/or school staff. An update on the school level plan may be provided to the SCC by the principal and/or school staff, however there is no opportunity to review school level data on student achievement, or an opportunity for the SCC to dialogue and provide feedback and direction regarding the school level plan progress throughout the year. There is a sense by the SCC members that the school level plan is owned by the principal and/or the school staff.
 - c. A school level plan that aligns with the school division's strategic plan is created by the SCC members with the principal and/or school staff. This is done through a process whereby SCC members, the principal, and school staff can contribute to the plan's development by sharing their ideas. The principal and/or school staff bring regular updates to the SCC with data related to the school level plan. The SCC reviews the data and has an opportunity to discuss the progress of the school level plan, and/or participate in a dialogue to chart any revisions to the plan if results are not being achieved. There is a sense by the SCC, the principal, and school staff that "we all own the school level plan".
2. As you see it, describe the characteristics of an SCC (what it looks like, sounds like, feels like) that creates the opportunity for the level of partnership described in scenario "c". What might get in the way of scenario "c" being realized?
 3. In an evaluation of SCCs done by the Ministry of Education in 2011, there was evidence that some SCC members feel "intimidated" by the SCC and that the processes were to "business-like" for their comfort level. Based on your experiences with SCCs, are those comments still accurate? If they are accurate, why is this, and what can be done to shift SCCs to more of a partnership model of school staff, parents and community working together? If they are no longer accurate, why is this, and what do you believe has contributed to this change?
 4. The primary mandate of a SCC is to facilitate parent and community engagement in the school towards improving student achievement. How do Boards of Education, school divisions, or other education partners help SCCs accomplish this? What supports (practices, processes, resources) are you aware of that Boards of Education, school divisions, or other education partners provide to SCCs that help them achieve their mandate? From your perspective, are these working or adequate, and are there other supports that might be required? Do you have the supports you need in whatever role you interact with SCCs to enable you to provide the necessary supports to SCCs so they can achieve their mandate? From your perspective are these supports adequate and working, or are there other supports that you require?
 5. Please identify one effective practice that you are aware of that is helping SCCs to achieve their mandate of engaging parent and community members in the school.
 6. Based on your understanding of the mandate of SCC as well as your experiences with

SCCs, do SCCs work? Why or why not? Do SCCs matter, and are they important? Why or why not?

7. The Board of Education and SCCs have different roles, however they do inter-relate with each other. Do you have an example of how a Board of Education is effectively connecting or aligning the work of the Board with SCCs? Is there a role for Boards of Education to engage with SCCs in some way on major education initiatives or projects in the school division – school division planning, advocacy, or Reconciliation as examples? If so, what might that look like, and how might that work?
8. Your feedback is important as the SSBA conducts a review of SCCs. Do you have any other comments you wish to make regarding your experience with SCCs that you think are important for including in a review of SCCs?

Appendix B - School Councils in Canada:

Structure, Composition and Summary of Purpose - 2017

Province/Territory	Structure	Composition	Summary of Purpose
British Columbia	Parents' advisory council	Representation is determined by bylaws governing its affairs, developed by the parents' advisory council in consultation with the principal.	May advise the board and the principal and staff of the school respecting any matter relating to the school.
	District parents' advisory council	Each parents' advisory council elects annually one of its members to be its representative on the district parents' advisory council.	May advise the board on any matter relating to education in the school district.
Alberta	School Council	A school council must include the principal, at least one teacher, a senior high school student (for secondary schools) and parents who have been elected. The majority of members must be parents of students enrolled in the school	A school council may advise the principal and the board respecting any matter relating to the school. A board must provide the school council with an opportunity to provide advice on the development of the school's mission, vision and philosophy; policies; annual education plan; annual results report; and budget. A board must also provide the school council with the school's provincial testing program results and other provincial measures and a reasonable interpretation of those results and measures.
Saskatchewan	School Community Council	Five to nine elected members who are parents or guardians of pupils or community members, and members appointed by the board of education: one or two	The School Community Council facilitates parent and community participation in school planning, and provides advice to the board of education and the school's

		secondary students, principal, one teacher, and in consultation with the other members, any other individuals.	staff. In co-operation with the school staff, develops and recommends to its board of education for approval a learning improvement plan that is in accordance with the school division's strategic plan.
Manitoba	Advisory Council	Members are elected (minimum 7 members) of which 2/3 are parents attending the school, and no more than 1/3 who may be community members without children attending the school. The principal and a teacher representative are ex-officio to the advisory council.	<p>An advisory council may advise the principal on a number of school policies, activities and organization (i.e. Locally developed curriculum, culture and extra-curricular, student discipline, community access to facilities, fundraising, school annual budget); and may participate in developing an annual school plan.</p> <p>An advisory council may also advise the school board on a process of hiring and assigning principals, and participate in any school review directed by the board or Minister.</p> <p>The legislation also recognizes the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils and requires the Minister to meet with this association at least once every 12 months.</p>
Ontario	School Council	The composition will include parents elected in accordance with bylaws of the board, principal, one teacher (elected), one other staff member (elected), a student (if a secondary	The purpose of school councils is, through the active participation of parents, to improve pupil achievement and to enhance the accountability of the education system to parents. The school

	<p>Parent Involvement Committee</p>	<p>school), one community representative appointed by the school council members, and a representative appointed by the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations (or the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, or Parent Partenaires en Education if the school council is a member of one of these associations.)</p> <p>The Parent Involvement Committee will have members appointed in accordance with the bylaws of the board and will include the Director of Education, a board member, a principal, a teacher, a staff member, and parents and community members. Parents will be majority members and parent(s) will serve as chair or co-chairs.</p>	<p>council primarily achieves its purpose by making recommendations to the principal of the school and the board. The board shall solicit the views of the school council on policies/guidelines related to pupil achievement; accountability of the education system to parents; development of implementation plans for education initiatives; and report on the results of tests of pupils.</p> <p>The purpose of a parent involvement committee is to support, encourage and enhance parent engagement at the board level in order to improve student achievement and well-being.</p>
Quebec	Governing Board	<p>A governing board shall be established for each school with no more than 20 members that include: at least four parents of students attending the school elected by their peers, at least four members of the school (at least 2 teachers) elected by their peers, secondary students if applicable, a staff member for</p>	<p>The governing board analyzes the needs of the students, and characteristics and expectations of the community; oversees the implementation, and periodically evaluates, the school's educational project; and approves the school's success plan, anti-bullying plan, and rules of conduct as proposed by the principal. Each year the</p>

	<p>Parent participation organization</p>	<p>preschool/childcare if applicable, and two representatives of the community appointed by the governing board.</p> <p>In addition to the governing board, parents may decide to form a parent participation organization and elect its members.</p>	<p>governing board informs the parents and community on the level of quality of education by making public the school’s educational project and success plan. It evaluates the results achieved by the school related to its anti-bullying plan. The governing board approves the approach of the school to programs and activities proposed by the principal; and approves time allocation for compulsory and elective subjects.</p> <p>The purpose of a parent participation organization is to encourage the collaboration of parents in developing, implementing and periodically evaluating the school’s educational project and their participation in fostering their child’s success. A parent participation organization may also advise the parents’ representatives on the governing board regarding any matter of concern to parents.</p>
New Brunswick	Parent School Support Committee	<p>No fewer than six and no more than twelve members elected by parents of pupils enrolled in the school. The majority of members shall be parents of pupils enrolled in the school. Other members include one teacher, a student for a high school,</p>	<p>A Parent School Support Committee shall advise the principal of the school respecting the establishment, implementation and monitoring of the school improvement plan. (i.e. strategies for ensuring the language and culture of the school, school mission; for</p>

		<p>one or two community members appointed by the Committee. The principal of the school attends and participates in the meetings of the Committee. A member of a District Education Council may participate in any meeting of the Parent School Support Committee.</p>	<p>communication between school and families; for establishing partnerships with the community to improve the quality of learning within the school; for developing a school climate and conditions to improve the quality of learning and teaching within the school.) The Parent School Support Committee shall advise the principal of the school respecting the establishment, implementation and monitoring of the positive learning and working environment plan. The Parent School Support Committee shall participate (through the Chair) in the selection of the principal or vice-principal of the school, review the results of the school performance report, advise the principal of the school in the development of school policies, and communicate with the District Education Council.</p>
<p>Prince Edward Island</p>	<p>School Council or Home and School Association</p>	<p>The majority of members shall be parents of students attending the school.</p>	<p>The functions are to provide feedback and information to the principal on various matters related to school operations and administration. They advise, if required by the education authority, with respect to the development of the school effectiveness plan; and advise if requested by the education authority with respect to</p>

	District Advisory Council	The District Advisory Council includes one parent from each school council or home and school association, two students from high schools, and a regional director of the P.E.I. Home and School Federation.	the selection of a principal for the school. The District Advisory Council advises the Minister on education issues, engages school communities in discussions on education issues, and fosters collaboration on education issues in the district that the Council serves.
Nova Scotia	School Advisory Council	A school advisory council shall have at least five and no more than 18 members, with at least one parent of a child attending the school elected by parents of children attending the school; students; at least one teacher and the principal; and at least one community representative, either appointed or elected by the community. Not more than 1/3 of the members shall be in any one clause above (i.e. parents, teachers, students or community members.)	A school advisory council shall, after consultation with the staff of the school, develop and recommend to the school board a school improvement plan; advise on the development of school policies that promote academic excellence and a positive learning environment; advise the principal and staff on curriculum and programs, school practices, discipline and fundraising; participate in the selection of the principal through representation on the school board's selection committee.
Newfoundland and Labrador	School Council	The school council shall consist of no fewer than eight and no more than 15 members, of which no fewer than two and no more than four are teachers elected by teachers, no fewer than three and no more than six shall be parents elected by parents of students in the school,	The purpose of a school council is to develop, encourage and promote policies, practices and activities to enhance the quality of school programs and the levels of student achievement in the school. The school council shall approve for recommendation to the board a plan for improving

		and no fewer than two and no more than four community representatives appointed by the school council members.	teaching and learning in the school, support and promote the plan, approve and monitor fundraising activities, consider information respecting performance standards in the school, assist in the system of monitoring and evaluation standards in the school, monitor the implementation of recommendations in reports on the performance of the school, and communicate concerns regarding board policies and practices to the board.
Yukon	School Council	The Minister shall specify the number of members of a school council. Each Council shall have no fewer than three and no more than seven members. Members are elected and must live in the attendance area or be a parent of a child in the attendance area. The Education Act guarantees representation for Yukon First Nations on School Councils through a negotiated agreement.	A Council shall review, modify if necessary and approve the school objectives, educational priorities and courses of study by grades, as prepared by the school administration, and other matters required for the effective functioning of the school; make recommendations related to the school budget; participate in the selection procedures for persons to be interviewed for principal and select for appointment a principal; and, with the Superintendent, establish a procedure for resolving disputes between schools, parents and teachers. A Council may propose and offer locally developed courses of study; provide advice to the Minister respecting matters such as

			establishment of school year and school day, school closures, teaching and support staff requirements, transportation, school renovations, school programs; direct the superintendent or principal to evaluate a staff member and provide a report; recommend to the superintendent the dismissal, transfer, discipline or demotion of a staff member; and approve extra-curricular activities.
Northwest Territories	Do not have a school council type structure.	N/A	N/A
Nunavut	Do not have a school council type structure.	N/A	N/A

Appendix C – Non-SCC Parent Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself. How long have you lived in this community? How long have you had a child(ren) attending this school?
2. Every school in Saskatchewan has a School Community Council, a council that includes the school Principal, a teacher, and parents. What is your understanding of the School Community Council and what they do? What would you say their primary role is?
3. Do you get information regarding the work of the School Community Council? It is helpful to you in terms of understanding what they do? If not, what could be improved?
4. I understand that you are not a member of the School Community Council. Please tell me why. Please explain any barriers that exist that make it difficult or impossible for you to be part of the School Community Council. How might these barriers be overcome?
5. In an evaluation of School Community Councils done by the Ministry of Education in 2011, there was evidence that some members feel “intimidated” by the Council and that the processes were too “business-like” for their comfort level. As a parent who has not joined the School Community Council, do you agree or disagree that the School Community Council is too business-like and intimidating for you? Why do you think so?
6. If you feel the School Community Council is too intimidating or business-like, what would need to change so that you would feel more open to joining it?
7. Your feedback is important. What other comments or advice do you have to give regarding the School Community Council?