# WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS:

# INVOLVING PARENTS IN THE TRANSITION FROM ELEMENTARY TO

# SECONDARY SCHOOL

by

## CARLY HOLLANDER

B.Ed (Elem.) The University of British Columbia, 2005

B.A. The University of British Columbia, 2003

A GRADUATING PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

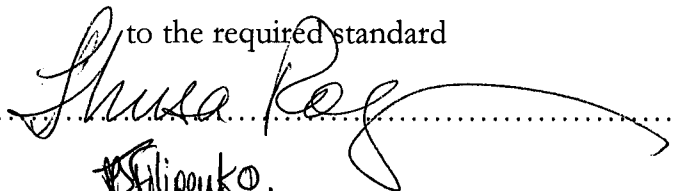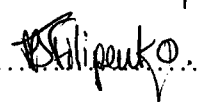THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

## MASTER OF EDUCATION

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**Department of Language and Literacy Education**

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## THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

November 2011

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# ABSTRACT

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF FIGURES

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF FIGURES

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

### Motivation for the project

I began my career in elementary school, teaching both primary and intermediate grades. When I began teaching secondary school, I observed a significant difference in the level of parent involvement from the elementary to the secondary schools. In my elementary classroom, parents regularly came in to volunteer, visit and check in with me regarding their child. I felt as though I knew most members of my students' families and had a greater understanding of who the child was through my understanding of their family. In contrast, at the secondary school where I currently teach, I rarely see parents. Knowing the difference that families can make on their child's education, I am particularly interested in developing ways of increasing parent involvement with grade 8 students. In kindergarten, when children first enter school, parents show high levels of involvement. However, at the grade 8 level, another important transition point for children (i.e. where children are entering a new school with new teachers and new expectations), there is much less parent involvement. I believe that grade 8 is as important a transition as the kindergarten year and I would like to find ways to involve parents in their child's initial grade 8 student experience. It is my hope that if parents become involved at the grade 8 level that such involvement might continue throughout the remainder of the high school years.

### Significance of the project

While much research has been done on family literacy at the elementary level (Anderson & Morrison, 2007; Auerbach, 1989; Morrow & Young, 1995), much less has been done on family literacy at secondary school. Such studies have established that through the application of the principles of family literacy in schools, parents and schools can become collaborative partners working towards the goal of success for children. I am interested in

applying the principles of family literacy commonly applied in elementary school to the secondary school level as a means to engage with parents.

In my own school community, parent participation is low. Through this project, I would like to be able to offer opportunities for grade 8 parents to get involved in their child's learning and then to understand the impact these opportunities have on overall school participation. It is my hope that getting involved at the grade 8 level will motivate parents to continue involvement throughout their child's secondary school experience.

This project will explore the following questions:

- What does the research say about the importance of parent participation and family literacy to the lives of students?

- What are the challenges that students face in the transition from elementary to secondary school?

- How can parents and teachers of grade 8 students work collaboratively to facilitate a successful transition from elementary to secondary school?

## Theoretical Framework

The home and school are not separate spaces; rather, they are connected by a child. In order to honor and value the home and school spaces, we must consider theories that value the learning that takes place in both contexts, and how home and school can work together to support the learning and development of a child. To appreciate the impact of parent involvement in a child's education, we must first recognize the theoretical framework that values the importance of a child's world and how the interconnectivity of his or her various environments contributes to the child's development. This project will focus in on home and school as places that must be connected for the betterment of the child.

*Socio-cultural theory*

Learning begins at the moment a child is born. It occurs by various means, with support from various people. As Vygotsky (1978) says "children's learning begins long before they enter school" (84). Prior to entering school, children learn primarily in the home and in the community. As children begin formal schooling, learning continues to occur in the home, school, and community environments. In endeavoring to understand the impact that family and school connections can have on student learning, we should consider the impact that context has on children's learning and development.

Gee (1989) asserts that discourse is "an identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act and talk so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize" (18). He argues that people's identities and knowledge are socially constructed by the culture and environment to which they are exposed. The environments, values, and discourses to which children are exposed, therefore dictate their understanding of the world (18).

Underpinning this idea of socially constructed knowledge is Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, which asserts that development is a social process. Children develop and learn as a result of the environment in which they live. Vygotsky maintains that learning and development begin from birth and continues throughout life. "That children's learning begins long before they enter school is the starting point of this discussion. Any learning a child encounters in school always has a previous history... Learning and development are interrelated from the child's very first day of life" (1978, 84).

Vygotsky suggests, however, that adult support in student learning is essential to help the child move beyond their actual developmental level into their potential developmental level (1978, 86- 87). He views child development as a "socially mediated process" (1978, 86),

wherein adults support and scaffold ideas with the aim of supporting a child's development. He contends that when children enter the "zone of proximal development", learning occurs. The zone of proximal development is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, 86). He states: "what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone" (1978, 85). Therefore it is in the zone of proximal development where new learning occurs. This theory has major implications for a child's development in both the home and school environment. Vygotsky's ideas recognize the importance of learning from and with adults in various contexts. He values the learning taking place both at home and at school, while taking into account cultural differences between learning that occurs in these two environments.

When considering literacy learning, it is likewise important to recognize the knowledge that children gain from various environments and how this knowledge is constructed through and by these environments.

*Ecological systems theory*

Similar to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory acknowledges that the world around a child impacts their development, including both their immediate surroundings and the larger culture or society. The ecological systems theory describes a series of "systems" that surround a child (Berk, 2007). The child is at the centre of these systems, which, according to Brofenbrenner, greatly influence the development of the child. He presents four different "systems": the micro, meso, exo and macro systems, each system impacting the child's development to varying degrees.

Bronfenbrenner defines the microsystem as "the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person" (1977, 514). The child is at the centre of this system and his or her immediate surroundings may include but are not limited to "home, [and] school" (1977, 514). This system is the closest to children, encompassing the immediate environments that they live in daily, or on a very regular basis. Clearly, these environments have a significant impact on the child, as the environment and the people within it interact directly with the child. The second, or mesosystem, is defined as "the interrelations of major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his or her life" (1977, 515). This system looks at how the interactions of microsystems affect a child's development.
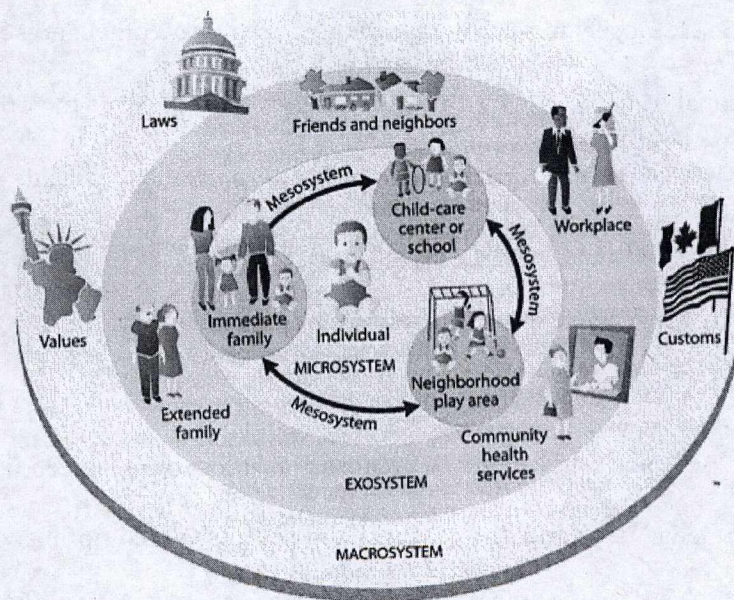


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

When looking at school and family literacy connections for the purposes of this project, both the micro (the home and school environments) and meso (the connection and communication between home and school) systems will be important to examine. Bronfenbrenner (1986) comments that while the connection between home and school is

5

very important, most of the research has focused on the impact that home life has on school, with very little having been done on how school life has impacted home life (727).

The connections between home and school can represent an important reciprocal relationship that merits close examination. Elsa Auerbach (1989) remarks that for many years, family literacy programs at the school level have been "function[ing] under a new version of the 'deficit hypothesis', which assumes that parents lack the essential skills to promote success in their children (165). Consequently, more recent family literacy research has focused on ways of valuing the knowledge that parents bring to the relationship. Trevor H. Cairney (1995) hypothesizes the potential impact of bringing parents and schools together:

> Involving parents more closely in school education at both elementary and secondary levels has the potential to develop new understanding by each party of the other's specific cultural practices. This in turn may enable both teachers and parents to understand the ways each defines, values and uses literacy as part of cultural practices. In this way schooling can be adjusted to meet the needs of the family. (521)

By recognizing the potential that building a reciprocal relationship between home and school can have on students' development, teachers and parents can comprehend the importance of working together for the best interest of the child's learning and development. The theoretical framework for this project is therefore informed by Vygotsky's *sociocultural theory* and Bronfenbrenner's *ecological systems theory*. The next section will explore the relevant literature on parent involvement, family literacy and transition from elementary to secondary school.

## SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature consists of three parts. In part one, I examine the literature that exists in the area of parent involvement. I look at why parent involvement is important, factors that affect parent involvement, and how schools can facilitate positive parent involvement. Part two investigates the topic of family literacy: what it is, why it is important and ways that schools can implement successful family literacy programs. Finally, in part three, I investigate the research regarding the needs of grade 8 students as they transition from elementary to secondary school, the challenges they face, and how schools and parents can support this transition.

### Part One: Parent Involvement

Parent involvement in education has been the subject of much recent educational research. The purposes of this research has been varied but it has laid a foundation that acknowledges the importance for parents to get involved in their child's education, whether directly at the school or through support at home. It is acknowledged that parents' involvement in their child's school and school experience can have a positive impact on the student's achievement, attitudes towards school, behavior and school attendance (Hong & Ho, 2005; Epstein, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Horkildsen & Stein, 1998, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Desimone, 1999). With the understanding that parent participation is important to a child's education, schools have made various efforts to meaningfully engage with parents and the community.

For the purposes of this project, it is important to understand how parents can get involved in their child's education, how schools and teachers can help facilitate positive participation from parents and how parents are motivated to get involved in their child's education. These three aspects of parent involvement were important to understand when

trying to get parents involved in my own school community that has experienced low levels of parent participation in the past.

Parent participation in early primary school is typically quite high. This is a transitional time in both a child's and a parent's life, as the child moves from home to school. However, as students get older, parent involvement lessens. Based on parent participation levels as children enter school, it could be hypothesized that as students move from elementary to secondary school (another point of transition for children), parent involvement in school would be high. This is not the case. Parent involvement is often high at the early primary level, but tends to lessen as students enter the intermediate grades and lessens further when students enter secondary school. Joyce Epstein and her colleagues (1991) suggest "elementary school programs of parent involvement presently are stronger, more positive, and more comprehensive than those in the middle grades" (299).

Reasons for the change in levels of participation is complex and varied, but can be attributed to a number of factors, involving parents, schools, children and communities. Parents may not participate in schools for a number of reasons, which can stem from both home and school (Eccles & Harold, 1993). Families struggle with issues such as "time, energy, economic resources; lack of knowledge; feelings of incompetence; failure to understand the role the family can play; or a long history of negative interactions with the schools" (Eccles & Harold, 1993, 569). Approaches of teachers and schools towards parents can also contribute to a parent's level of involvement by demonstrating such behaviors as: "poor reporting practices, [or] hostility towards parents" (Eccles & Harold, 1993, 569). Parent participation in schools typically lessens because as children get older, they want independence, and therefore, do not want their parents involved at the school. In addition,

8

as children get older, curricular demands become more rigorous and parents may feel less effective in supporting their child academically (Eccles &, Harold, 1993, 570).

However, not all parent participation involves a parent's physical presence at a school - it can take many different forms. Joyce Epstein and Susan Dauber, in a synthesis of research on parent involvement, observed six forms of parent-school interactions. First, a parent has an obligation to their child to meet the child's basic needs to that they may attend school. This first type also includes "building positive home conditions" (Epstein& Dauber, 1991, 577) to support learning at home and school. The second type is a basic obligation of schools to communicate with home about the child's progress and any important school information or programs. Third, parents can become involved in the school directly, including helping out in classrooms, supporting performances or sporting events at the school. Fourth, parents can get involved in learning activities at home, which could be practicing particular strategies at home upon request of the teacher or school, or assisting with homework or learning activities at home. The fifth type places the parents at a level of participation in school culture or decision making, which could be in the form of advisory roles at different levels (school, district, or provincial). The final type of involvement is collaboration with community organizations, whereby school programs help provide families with community support (291). Epstein and Dauber (1991) note that:

> Schools with programs including the five types of involvement help parents build home conditions for learning, understand communications from the schools, become productive volunteers at school, share responsibilities in their children's education in learning activities related to the curriculum at home and include parents voices. (291)

Including all types of participation creates a community of people who are working together for the success of the children. Sehee Hong and Hsiu-Zu Ho (2005) examine parent participation in terms of four distinct types: communication (with the school and/or teachers), educational aspiration (parent's aspiration for the child's educational future), participation in school activities, and parental supervision of school activities at home (34). Like Epstein& Dauber, Hong & Ho expand the definition of parent involvement to include many activities that do not require direct interaction with the school or school personnel.

Hong and Ho's study found that formalized parent programs at the school did not necessarily have the most impact on student achievement. Instead, their results illustrated that a parent's aspirations for their child and communication about school with the child had the greatest impact. "The more often parents and children communicate about school studies, activities and high school program plans and/or the greater the parents' hopes and expectations for their children's education, the greater the educational aspiration of the student, and consequently, the higher the student's academic achievement" (2005, 40). These results were consistent with Xitao Fan's (2001) findings, which stated:

> Parents' educational aspiration for their children stands out for its most obvious positive effect on student's academic growth. The effect was over and above that of SES and was consistent across academic subject areas, across data sources (student vs. parent data), and across ethnic group samples. (57)

A parent's level of involvement is often influenced by many different factors such as employment, childcare, the school's approach to parents and their child's attitude towards their involvement (Eccles& Harold, 1991). For parents to become involved in schools, they need social and psychological resources to be available to them, such as time to become or stay involved (Eccles& Harold, 1991). They also need to believe in their own abilities in

helping their child with their schoolwork, which can become more difficult as children get older and curriculum becomes more rigorous. Parents need to feel as though their support will positively impact their child's education. As well, parents' perception of how their child views their involvement is important. This includes a child's receptiveness to their parents' involvement in both school and at home. The parents' attitudes towards the school and their history of involvement also greatly affects their likelihood of getting involved (Eccles& Harold, 573). All of these factors can be taken into account when schools design parent programs.

Parent involvement is influenced by many factors. Teachers' behavior can be a catalyst for parent participation (Lewis, et al., 2011). It has been suggested that teachers who successfully integrate parents into the school environment all do four key things to meaningfully engage with parents (Lewis, et al., 2011, page). First, these teachers reach out to parents through various means of communication, extending beyondd formal reporting practices to make personal communication efforts, like sending home personal notes, or classroom newsletters, making telephone calls, or even visiting a child's home. These teachers attempted to develop authentic relationships by valuing the parent's knowledge, providing demonstrations for the parents who asked, and emphasizing the parent's importance to their child's development. As well, the teachers who were most successful in involving parents provided opportunities for the parents to get involved in different ways (Lewis et. al., 2011).

Parents have to feel motivated to become and stay involved and their circumstances must allow for involvement. Hoover- Dempsey and Sandler (1997) suggest that there are three psychological factors that affect parent's motivation to get involved in their child's school: role construction (the parent sees it as part of their job as a parent to be involved in

their child's education), efficacy (the parent's view that they are able to assist and support their child in school and that this support is impacting them in a positive way), and invitations from the school (31).

Parents who get involved do not fit a particular mold or demographic. In fact, Vellymalay's (2010) research into the connection between parent's education level and their involvement into their child's education shows no correlation between the two factors. Instead, schools "play an important role in molding the attitude and behavior of the parents' by supplying them the knowledge and skill for higher parental involvement" (447). This means that schools have the potential to encourage involvement from all parents in their school community.

However, getting involved can be difficult for some parents, particularly those who have language difficulties, work multiple jobs or who attended school in a different place or not at all. In one study of refugee mothers from Vietnam, Somalia, and Iran, many of the women expressed the hardships and discrimination that they faced as their children entered school. However, many expressed their gratitude for the liaison services between home and school, which provided support in these forms: translation, food, clothing, and educational opportunities for the mothers as their children entered school (McBrien, 2011). This study indicates the necessity for liaison services to connect home and school in cases where there are barriers to involvement. This was also the case in a study at Boston Arts Academy, a school with typically low parent participation and a highly diverse cultural and socioeconomic population. Authors suggested that the success of the study was partly due to the community outreach worker, who liaised between home and school (Ouimette et. al., 2006). It is clear from these studies that parents who have barriers to participation benefit greatly from the support of a liaison, who acts as an intermediary between home and school.

However, a liaison cannot be a substitute for efforts by the school to communicate with and build positive relationships with families.

The research on parent participation in schools suggests a number of ideas that will continue to guide my own work with the families in this project. The first is that parent participation in schools helps students grow in the areas of academics, behavior and work habits. Second, parent participation is complex and can take multiple forms. Third, teachers and schools play an integral part in encouraging or discouraging parent participation. Fourth, there are ways to engage all parents, even those who may have barriers to involvement.

## Part Two: Family Literacy

The research on parent participation clearly illustrates the importance of parent involvement in a child's education. As discussed in the previous section, parent involvement not only impacts a child's academic achievement, but also can affect their attitude, behavior, and attendance. One way that schools can meaningfully engage with parents is through family literacy. This section will explore what family literacy means, how it can be implemented in a school setting, how it can impact a child's literacy development and how it can influence parent participation.

Literacy is a complex term. UNESCO defines literacy as:

The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society. (2011)

However, this idea of literacy has been expanded in recent years to include literacies of many forms.

Gee (1989) interchanges the word literacy for the word "discourse" and explains how people learn these discourses is essential to connecting literacy and family. He acknowledges two ways that children come to understand particular discourses: acquisition and learning. Acquisition occurs when children understand "something subconsciously by exposure to models and a process of trial and error, without a process of formal teaching. It happens in natural settings" (1989, 20). In contrast, learning "involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching…[it] involves explanation and analysis" (1989, 20). These two ideas are essential as they put into perspective how students come to understand literacy and language. Acquisition and learning help develop a child's discourse in both home and school environments. Discourse "can be viewed as resources for helping students develop stronger understandings of the natural world, both in content area classrooms and in their everyday lives" (Moje, et. al., 2004, 43). We can use Gee's notion of discourse to understand how a child comes to acquire and learn language at home.

Learning begins in the home. Throughout a child's life, the home continues to be a place where children learn and gain experience. Purcell- Gates (1996) suggests that "literacy knowledge construction takes place both at home and school" (409). The challenge for schools and educators then becomes understanding how to tap into the knowledge that students have developed at home and how schools and families can work together to broaden a child's understanding of literacy and literacy practices. Moll, Amanti, et al. (2005) suggest that the home provides a rich learning environment for children by providing a child with a "fund of knowledge" based on their experiences and learning in this setting. The term *fund of knowledge* is explained as "the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll, Amanti, et al., 2005, 70). They explain that "by capitalizing on household and other

14

community resources, we can organize classroom instruction that far exceeds in quality the rote-like instruction these children commonly encounter in schools" (2005, 71). These researchers argue that there are some significant differences between learning at home and at school. At home, children are "active participants", not "passive bystanders" as they are in classrooms; children are also treated more as a whole person in a home environment, not as a student of whatever they are being taught during that specific time period in the classroom (Moll, Amanti, et al., 2005, 74). As well, at home, children learn authentic, real skills, whereas many of the skills that are taught in school are viewed as isolated and disconnected from real-life activities and skills (Moll, Amanti, et al., 2005, 74). Of course, teachers need to have an understanding of the knowledge a child has so that they can tap into the knowledge acquired at home. Teachers and schools should explore and understand children's knowledge through increased collaboration with parents and caregivers through family literacy programs.

Family literacy has been defined in many ways. Anderson et al. (2010) remark:

Family literacy connotes different things for different people; for some, it means intervention programs usually aimed at low-literate or marginalized families while for others, it encapsulates the myriad ways that literacy is practiced and promoted within the context of the family. (33)

It is through the family that schools can begin to understand the funds of knowledge of a child. Family literacy can be looked at in two ways. *Family literacy* as a broad term examines how families engage in literacy activities everyday in the home and community (e.x. by making grocery lists, reading the newspaper, reading signs, etc.), but *family literacy programs* are programs designed by members of the community (library, schools), often in conjunction with families as a means to access literacy resources (Thomas and Skage, 1998). For the

purposes of this paper, we will be examining family literacy programs as a means to engage with families in the context of a school. These programs are a way to invite parents to work with schools in the area of literacy, and can be a way to honor and access the knowledge and experiences families have provided to their children.

Elsa Auerbach (1989) is critical of definitions of family literacy that limit it to the idea of families doing school-like activities in the home. She argues, "if it [family literacy] is defined narrowly to mean performing school-like literacy activities within the family setting, the socio-cultural demands on family life become obstacles that must be overcome so that learning can take place" (1989, 166). She is critical of schools for limiting definitions of literacy to what is learned at school. By doing this, she argues, "life demands are seen as taking away from literacy development and as conflicting with the demands of schooling" (1989, 166). Instead, she suggests that when family literacy is defined in a way that views the home as a place of learning, the home "becomes a rich resource that can inform rather than impede learning" (1989, 166). From this research, it is important to understand that a "unidirectional" model, or "transmission of school practices model" of family literacy, wherein schools provide "training" to parents in the area of literacy does not value the diverse understandings that parents provide to their children. Instead, family literacy should be seen as a collaborative process, where both families (including the child) and schools have a voice and work together to improve child's literacy skills.

It is clear from the research that different home experiences of children, coming from various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, have an impact on a child's literacy learning. Shirley Brice Heath (1982) suggests, "children learn certain customs, beliefs, and skills in early enculturation with written materials" (51). She argues that certain families and adults "give their children, through modeling and specific instruction, ways of taking from

books which seem natural in school and in numerous institutional settings" (1982, 50). Brice Heath labels these "mainstream" literacy interactions. She explains that "the general view has been that whatever it is that mainstream school-oriented homes gave, these other [non-mainstream] homes do not have it; thus these children are not from the literate tradition and are not likely to succeed in school" (1982, 50). She then counters the dichotomy of mainstream and non-mainstream, arguing instead that "each community's ways of taking from the printed word and using this knowledge are interdependent with the ways children learn to talk in their social interactions with caregivers" (1982, 50).

To understand what makes family literacy programs successful and determine the components and characteristics necessary to create such a program, it is useful to review examples of programs already implemented in the field. In a program conducted in BC called PALS (parents as literacy supporters), parents from five different "economically depressed, inner-city areas" were "part of an inter-agency, community development initiative" (Anderson & Morrison, 2007, 69). The aims of the sessions were guided by the needs and wants of the parents, thus, making parents and schools truly collaborative partners in the study.

Of the many features that appeared to make this program successful, the first was regularly scheduled evenings. The group met every two weeks for two- hour sessions from October to May. Second, each evening followed the same structure. It began with every person sharing a meal together, which allowed for families to connect with each other as well as to touch base with facilitators and teachers. Then time was allotted to work on strategies with a particular focus and work with the child one on one. Parents, educators, and administrators all collaborated in order to shape the program each week. A significant element of the program, which may have contributed to its success, was the time spent

honoring and acknowledging parents' own knowledge and experiences in connection to their child's learning.

No effort was made to teach parents in particular or prescribed ways. In addition, we attempt to highlight and draw from the funds of knowledge that families bring to the program. Parents were given time to discuss the literacy practices in their homes and communities and share their own literacy experiences in and out of school. We also take care to encourage, promote, and value the literacy activities and practices that families engage in at home and in the school. (70)

It should be noted that "parent" in this context was defined broadly to include "grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles, and other caregivers" (2007, 70).

A similar program was developed in Australia called TTALL (Talk to a literacy learner) (Cairney & Munsie, 1995). Like the PALS program, regular meetings were held with discussion, demonstration, and reflection of the parent's own experiences in school as well as their own experiences with their children. Additionally, a group of parents from the initial group were selected to be "community tutors", or "in-school helpers". The community tutors were sent to work in the community, bringing ideas that they had learned back to other parents in the community. The in-school helpers were trained to support students in the school. Cairney and Munsie reported many successes of the program. They found that the parents learned a great deal about appropriate materials for their children, and strategies to engage their children in literacy activities, and that these parents were willing to share their learning with other parents in the community. The parents gained confidence and changed the way that they talked about literacy with their children. Even more impressive were findings that the program impacted the children's performance, attitudes and interest in school.

From these two examples, it is clear that a successful program recognizes and honors the knowledge that families bring to their child's educational experiences, involves families in planning the direction of the program, is flexible to fit the needs of the particular group and allows time for families to spend together, which can be difficult in today's busy life. These programs both allowed time for parents to connect with one another and have time built into the evening to share their own personal experiences. What was not stated directly but is needed for a successful literacy program to occur is funding. If family literacy is going to be a priority then schools and school districts should recognize the importance and provide support accordingly.

Much of the research that has been done in the area of family literacy has focused on early childhood education. Some, but much less, has been done in the area of secondary family literacy. There are many reasons that little work has been done in this area.

Parent participation in secondary education often declines because parents believe that children want increased independence, or because there are fewer opportunities for formal and informal parent interactions at the secondary level. Notwithstanding, certain qualities have been recognized as having an impact in a middle or secondary school family literacy program. "A successful program requires a great deal of organization; a skillful, experienced, enthusiastic staff; and a never-flagging attitude of care and respect... These families, so accustomed to disappointment, found in the workshops, an unexpected vision of the possible: school authorities that acknowledged and listened to them, peers whose lives and problems were just like their own, and genuinely helpful ideas" (Goodman, Sutton & Harkavy, 1995, 695). Perhaps, simply offering the opportunity to involve parents in the discussion about literacy will have a positive effect on their participation in the school community or in their child's literacy education.

In her study of parent-child reading relationships at middle school, Kelly Chandler (1999) suggests a number of ways schools might involve parents in a secondary English classroom. For example, teachers could invite parents to participate in book talks, or in literature circles. She also recommends that teachers should attempt to make the secondary curriculum more approachable to parents by acknowledging that many parents would not choose or enjoy reading many of the texts assigned in the secondary English classroom. The lack of interest parents may show in the texts their child brings home may have a negative impact on the quality and number of conversations the parent will have with their child about books.

An attempt in 1995 to bring the TTALL program to secondary school resulted in the creation of the EPISLL (Effective Partners in Secondary Literacy Learning) program. The structure of the program was similar to its elementary counterpart and its findings were similar in that the program contributed to parents' increased communication with their children, as well as increased confidence and knowledge about literacy learning and strategies to support their child's literacy needs (Cairney, 1995). The results of the study also suggested that the partnership between families and school lead to students learning new skills, improved communication between parents and children about school, and students demonstrating increased confidence and self-esteem (Cairney, 1995).

It is clear that the principles guiding family literacy programs in early childhood programs can be used to support family literacy programs at the secondary level. Although the specific focus of evenings may be different, the guiding principles can be transferred from one context to the other.

Based on the research about family literacy, some important trends should be kept in mind when designing a family literacy program. Family literacy can be a way to engage

parents in the secondary school context, particularly at grade 8 where students transition from elementary to secondary school. Adolescents face a number of challenges as they move from one context to the other and family literacy programs offered at the secondary school level should attempt to address these challenges. In the next section of the literature review, I will examine the challenges that adolescents face as they move from elementary to secondary school. I will also look at ways in which parents and schools can work collaboratively to facilitate a successful transition and support students through this difficult time.

## Part Three: Elementary to Secondary Transition

A child's educational career is marked by many important transitions. A child transitions from home or preschool to kindergarten, then they move from elementary school to secondary school (in some districts, a student may go through middle school before entering secondary) and finally, they transition from secondary school to post-secondary school or work. With each of these various transitions, students face new challenges, which come in different forms and can affect the student in many different ways. Robert Felner, Judith Primavera, and Ana Cauce (1981) refer to Bronfenbrenner's notion of "ecological transitions" to frame their work on the psychological impact that transitions can have on students. They explain that ecological transitions occur when an "individual experiences a change in role and/or in environmental setting and… that such transitions may have a profound impact on the individual's development" (1981, 450). In the case of the elementary to secondary transition, children move from one environment to another and this change can certainly impact the development of a child.

21

During this transition, students are confronted with a new environment, new people and new curricular demands. They are forced to navigate their way through all of these different aspects of their education. For many, this transition can be very difficult.

**What are the challenges students face as they transition from Elementary to Secondary school?**

Students face many unique challenges as they move from elementary to secondary school. The challenges noted in the research can be divided into three distinct categories: environmental, academic and social/emotional.

*Environmental challenges*

At a basic level, the change from elementary to secondary school involves a physical move from one (typically small) building to another (much larger) building. Most secondary schools house hundreds, and sometimes over a thousand students. Secondary school students are required to move from classroom to classroom. Navigating their way around this new, larger environment can be scary for many students. In Richard Ward's (2000) study of New Zealand middle school students' transfer to high school, students communicated anxieties as a result of being in a larger environment. The students expressed their "fears about getting lost and finding their way between classes" (368). However, these fears are typically short-lived once the students familiarize themselves with their new environment (Ward, 2000, 368). Physical environment, both in terms of the bigger building and the multiple classrooms, is a significant challenge that tends to create some anxiety in many students as they transitions from elementary to secondary school.

There are also notable differences between the physical classroom spaces in an elementary versus that in a secondary school. Kay Hawk and Jan Hill enumerate the differences that are often seen: "secondary classrooms are planned for students to sit in row

facing the 'blackboard' at the front. Primary rooms and furniture allow for more flexibility" (2000, 3).

The organization of each individual classroom in a secondary school is also different. Students must familiarize themselves with the location of each of their classes as well as the layout of the classes themselves. In a secondary classroom, students may be assigned a seat but it is not their own. They do not keep their materials in the room, which can be challenging for students. They must get used to this change because in an elementary classroom, students are assigned to a particular space, to a particular desk and sometimes even a particular coat space. They have a home for their belongings. However, as students enter secondary school, they have "no place to call home where their work is displayed and possessions can be left" (Hawk & Hill, 2000, 5). Students are simply assigned a locker and expected to carry books and materials around with them at all times. While this may seem easy, for many, coming to class with all necessary materials becomes a difficult feat. All of these differences between the physical classroom spaces represents yet another change that students must contend with.

Likewise, a student's typical day in an elementary versus a secondary school is marked by differences. Hawk and Hill (2000) note that elementary school classrooms operate on a fairly flexible schedule, where the teacher has freedom to integrate curriculum in order to best meet the student's learning needs (3). However, at the secondary level, there is a rigid timetable where the day is broken into a certain number of periods, marked by bells. The classrooms are highly specialized and integration across content areas must be organized at a systemic level or teachers must work collaboratively with other teachers in order to integrate between curricular areas.

Differences in environment are clear when thinking about how elementary and secondary schools function and are organized differently. In elementary school, students have one teacher for all curricular areas and have a home classroom, whereas in secondary school, student move from class to class, where teachers are subject specialists in content areas. Peter Ferguson and Barry Fraser (1999) note that the move from elementary to secondary school marks a change "from a generalist environment, in terms of both the physical classroom environment and teacher background, into on with a more subject specialist approach" (370). Likewise, Ward (2000) suggests:

> [Elementary schools] tend to be based on a child-centered learning environment characterized by a home-room-based organization in which subject integration is an obvious feature. In contrast… secondary schools tend to be organization-driven and offer a learning environment that is largely subject-oriented and taught by subject specialists. (365)

Students move from their elementary school environment, where teachers understand their strengths and needs in all subject areas to a new environment where teachers understand only one aspect of their academic abilities.

Another challenge students must face in their new secondary school environment is learning the expectations of their new environment. Students must understand the expectations of the school as a whole and also of each of their teachers. With each teacher comes different routines, expectations and teaching styles that students must become accustomed to. In contrast to the elementary school, where the routines and expectations of one teacher are reinforced everyday, it often takes time for students to adjust to these new people and new routines. L.W. Anderson et al. (2000) explains this difference: "In elementary school, children usually have one teacher and one set of classmates; in the larger

junior high, the adolescents teachers, classmates, and even rooms are constantly being changed" (327).

In the transition from elementary to secondary school, students face many challenges in their new environment. They must learn their way around a new larger building, with many classes, many new routines, teachers and expectations. Environmental changes between contexts can lead to academic challenges.

### Academic challenges

As students move through school, curricular demands change, as do the skills that students require so they can cope with the new demands. L.W. Anderson explains that there is a change in the "academic standards (particularly increased rigor in grading), teacher expectations and student autonomy"(2000, 326).

Students who move from elementary to secondary school have to cope with new, specialized courses. In elementary school, all subjects are taught in one classroom, and curriculum is often integrated. However, in secondary school, courses are separated and taught by content area specialists. As a result, the curriculum becomes divided and the connections between the curricular areas become less apparent. This fragmentation of courses can result in student difficulties with new curricular demands, organization and homework completion.

There are a number of differences between the skills students require to be successful in elementary and secondary school. Students in secondary school are required to take final course and government exams that contribute to their overall classroom grade. Elementary students in British Columbia take the provincial Foundation Skills Assessments, the score is used to collect provincial data and does not contribute to their classroom progress. Writing exams can be a source of stress for many secondary students. Preparing

for and writing exams is a skill that students in secondary school require but may not have developed because of the differing curricular demands between elementary and secondary schools.

Some evidence also shows that students in secondary school may require different literacy skills than in elementary school. One notable example is the inclusion of the area of note- making on the Grade 8 Reading for Information curriculum document, which is not included on the Grade 7 curriculum document (BC IRPs, 2008). The inclusion of this area on the Grade 8 curriculum document suggests its importance for success of Grade 8 students.

In addition to increased demands on students and the changes in curricular demands, students must learn to balance the requirements of their various classes. They must learn strategies to keep up with their assignments, study for final exams (which many students have not taken before), all while "apply[ing] previously learned skills and understanding" (Perkins & Gulfer, 1995, 171). Understandably, these changes pose challenges for many students.

### Social - Emotional Challenges

Students in their transition year also face social and emotional difficulties because of the change in setting. "A student's social networks can change dramatically as he or she moves through a school transition" (Rice, 2001, 377). They enter a larger school where students come from other schools, and they know fewer peers and adults. "High schools tend to be larger than middle schools, making them less neighbourhood-oriented and more diverse with regard to demographic composition" (Rice, 2001, 378). As a result, adolescents may feel the effect of a weaker support system in this new environment: "students feel more isolated and have more difficulty making friends after they transition to higher levels of

education" (Rice, 2001, 377). Social connections are important predictors not only for an adolescents' emotional well- being but also for their academic success: "the existence, quality, and stability of social structures can be an important predictor of a student's ability to succeed academically" (Rice, 2001, 377). In most cases, the social environment is composed of "several elementary schools [that] "feed" each high school, a radically changed set of peers" (Felner et. al., 1981, 449).

However, students who had social connections with students from other feeder schools may experience less social anxieties than those who do not (Ward, 2000, 373). Connections from out of school activities, such as sports, or having older siblings appeared to have a great impact on the social success of a student in the transition year (Ward, 2000, 373). Therefore, it is essential that schools, in planning for students in their transition year, put in place both social and academic supports.

**Who struggles with transition?**

There are certain groups of students who may be at increased risk for unsuccessful transition than others:

> Gender, classroom behavior, achievement, and SES/race combine to make successful transitions extremely unlikely. The net result is that students privileged by race/ethnicity, social class and gender more readily negotiate the demands of schooling (including those associated with systemic transitions), whereas students lacking these privileges are silenced, marginalized, and not served well by schools.
> (Anderson et al, 2000, 328)

The four risk factors identified in this research (gender, prior problem behavior, low academic achievement and socioeconomic status) should be kept in mind when educators are planning for transition (Anderson et. al., 2000, 328).

In addition to these risk factors, Anderson suggests that the level of parent participation in a student's transition also plays a huge role in how successful a student's transition will be. Parental interest, exposure to other educational activities outside of school, and discussion about school are key factors for students to make successful transitions (Anderson, et. al., 2000).

Some external factors can help ease the transition for many students (Ward, 2000). Students who have the following prior to entering secondary school tended to have an easier time during this adjustment period: older siblings, understanding of the school's layout, clear ideas of how to get from classroom to classroom, and connections with other students from other contexts (i.e. sports teams) (Ward, 2000). Success in transition is critical to overall completion of school. The fear for many educators is that these students who do not make a successful transition will become "disengaged" with the school system and as a result, may drop out entirely (Anderson, 2000; Roderick, 1993).

**How can parents support transition?**

Parent participation in elementary to secondary transition is important. As previously established in this literature review, parent participation in a child's education impacts a child's success in school in many different ways, such as achievement, behavior, and attendance. There appears to be three main reasons for parents to become engaged in the transition process (Anderson, 2000). First, parents who become involved during transition typically remain involved after the child's transition year (335). Second, "parents become role models for their children" by attempting to motivate their child throughout transition (335). Finally, communication between families and schools are improved when parents take an active role during the transition (335). This can lead to early intervention for challenges that students encounter early on in their secondary school experience.

Parent participation can take multiple forms. Toni Falbo et al. (2001) identify the three types of parent involvement with the most significant impact during the transition process:

> Three kinds of parental interventions assisted the teen in making the transition to high school successfully: (a) active involvement in school work, (b) nesting the teen in a desirable peer network and (c) direct participation in the school. For a student to be successful, parents had to engage in at least two out of the three kinds of interventions. (517)

Parental involvement in schoolwork is defined as helping with homework, helping the child find appropriate resources, or simply providing encouragement to complete homework (Falbo et. al., 2001, 517). "Nesting the teen in a desirable peer network" (Falbo et. al, 2001, 517) means that the parent encourages participation in various activities prior to or during the transition year so that the child connects with other children who may be at their new school. Direct participation means the parent gets directly involved in various capacities in the school, like participating in the PAC, attending parent evenings or communicating regularly with the student's teachers. Parent participation is essential, particularly as students' transition from elementary to secondary, because during this time, there are many challenges and students are expected to take on more responsibility (Falbo et al., 512). However, during the transition, the temptation of parents is to "give high school students greater autonomy" (Falbo et al., 512), but it is important for parents to recognize the essential role they play in their child's education, no matter what the context.

**What can schools do to support transition?**

There are a number of programs and interventions that can be implemented at the school level in order to help students cope with the multiple changes and challenges they

29

face as they move from elementary to secondary school. Researchers suggest a number of supports that schools can put into place, but all programs should be designed according to context, and to the greatest extent possible, adapted to the individual student.

Nancy Mizelle and Judith Irvin (2000) suggest "the best transition programs... include a variety of activities- in particular, counselling, school visits and special summer courses to help students understand their new school" (58). They recommend that in order to be effective, transition programs should provide information to students and parents about the new school, offer social and academic support for students, and bring together educators from both schools to learn about each other's programs and curriculum (2000). Family literacy programs and parent information evenings can serve to inform and welcome families to their new school in order to help them feel a part of the community.

Teachers from both schools should also be brought together to develop transition plans for their students (Anderson, 2000, 334). Such transition plans provide information to secondary school teachers and help guide them to make instructional and course planning decisions that best support students. As well, students should have as many opportunities as possible to visit the secondary school to help familiarize them with the new environment (Hawk & Hill, 2001, 5). This can be accomplished in various ways. For instance, elementary students can be brought in as audience to view a presentation, or join in on lessons. Secondary students or teachers can also become visible in the elementary context by working with the younger students in their classroom, or coaching an elementary team (Hawk & Hill, 2001, 8). The goal of each of these strategies is to familiarize the students with their new environment and to help them build connections within this new environment.

## SECTION 3: CONNECTIONS TO PRACTICE

In the literature review, I examined three main areas connected to the questions asked at the beginning of this paper. Research in the areas of parent involvement and family literacy was examined to determine how best to engage families in the transition of children from elementary to secondary school. From this research, it is clear that parental involvement in secondary school is important for student success. An authentic and meaningful way to engage parents is through family literacy, where parents operate as learning partners to children and schools, and who bring a level of understanding about their child and home literacy practices that schools do not have. In order to foster these relationships, schools must involve parents as collaborative partners, where the needs of families dictate the topics of the events.

With the results of this research in mind, I describe in this section three family sessions, each designed to address the needs of my particular school community. The first session was intended to introduce the parents to our school community, as well as to emphasize the importance of parent participation in a child's education. This took the format of a traditional information session. The second parent session, which focused on family literacy, was designed to provide parents and students with strategies to support them in organization, homework completion, test taking and content area reading. The third session also had a family literacy focus and provided support to parents and children in preparing them for final exams. The latter two events were interactive and attempted to provide hands-on opportunities so parents could develop their own understanding of strategies to support their child during their transition year.

## Description of school community

My school community is situated in a suburb of a major city in Western Canada. This secondary school has a highly diverse cultural makeup. Most students come from South Asian descent (typically second or third generation Canadians), while the rest come from around the world, namely China, Europe, South America, and the Middle East. There is a small population of First Nations students. However, despite the diverse cultural makeup, our ESL program is relatively small because the majority of the students at the school are second or third generation Canadians.

In addition to a diverse cultural makeup, there are also diverse academic and social needs. There are high numbers of students with significant academic challenges as well as a high number of students showing high academic achievement. There are very few students who fall into the "middle". The role of the classroom teacher is therefore difficult, as it is necessary to differentiate instruction in order to meet the needs of such varied students. With parents working hard, some at multiple jobs, many of our students have additional household responsibilities, like caring for younger siblings, cooking, or cleaning the house. For these reasons, school is often not the first priority for many of our students and families.

The socioeconomic status of the community is as diverse as its population. To the south and east is farmland that many of our students bus in from on a daily basis. To the north is government subsidized low-income housing and to the west are very expensive homes. No matter what part of the community the students live in, the majority of their parents work full time, with many working more than one job.

I have worked as a teacher at this school for five years and know many parents and families of the students who attend the school. I have worked at the school in various roles, beginning as a Resource teacher, working with students with special needs and learning

32

difficulties and am now an English teacher and the school's Literacy Leader. In these various

roles, I have worked with families to help foster academic success for their children in

transition as well as in the higher grades. I have supported a number of students and families

in navigating their way around the school system and helping them plan for the future after

secondary school.

### Potential barriers to parent participation

Parent evenings at the school are sparsely attended for a variety of reasons. For

instance, at my last parent teacher conferences, I had only ten parents attend appointments

out of the nearly two hundred students that I teach.

There are several potential barriers I had to keep in mind when attempting to plan a

successful parent evening. The first potential barrier was language. While the majority of the

students are second or third generation Canadian and may be fluent in written and spoken

English, many of their families struggle with the English language. This can pose challenges

when sharing information or demonstrating strategies on particular topics. For parents to

feel motivated to attend any formalized school- parent evening, they need to feel that their

presence will have an impact on their child. If a family member does not have the ability to

understand and participate fully in an event, it is difficult to establish and develop a

collaborative relationship.

Another potential barrier is timing. Because many of the parents work shift work or

have more than one job, it is important to pay attention to the scheduling of the events.

In order to address these potential barriers, a number of supports have to be in place

for each of the planned parent events. First, translators must be available and a number of

visuals or hands-on materials available to make the evening practical and meaningful for the

parents. Second, families must be given the opportunity to provide input and feedback in a

safe environment. Finally, the scheduling of any event needs to take into account that parents work shift work and may require childcare for younger children.

## Goals and Objectives

Each of the three sessions had different goals and objectives. The overall goal of all three sessions is to increase parent participation as a means to facilitate successful transitions for our grade 8 students. Getting parents to the sessions may be difficult, but it is hoped that once present, parents will see the impact their involvement can have on their child's learning.

Having a broad section of parents (in terms of culture, gender, ability and socioeconomic status) present is important in that it will provide important information on how to best support the needs of families from the diverse groups that make up our school community. The greater the number of parents who attend these events, the better understanding I will have about the ways in which our school can become a more collaborative, relevant and welcoming place.

To reiterate, the aim of these sessions is to converse with parents about how we can best work together to support their children, discuss and practice specific skills that students need as they enter secondary school, and hopefully as a result, uncover ways that we can increase parent involvement. Figure 2 below indicates the goals and topics of the three parent evenings. The specific goals of the sessions were identified as needs of our grade 8 population both by parents and teachers of grade 8 students in the form of feedback surveys. The skills targeted at each of the two parent evenings are cross- curricular skills that are not always explicitly taught to students but are necessary for success in secondary school.

| Evening topic | Goals for the evening | Topics covered |
|---|---|---|
| **Grade 8 Family Information Event** | Parents will be able to understand:<br>• The impact that parents can have on their child's education<br>• Challenges students face in their transition to secondary school<br>• Ways they can support their children in their transition<br>• Ways that parents can get involved at our school or in their child's education<br>• Ways that students can get involved at school<br>• Ways that teachers and staff are supporting Grade 8 learners in their transition | • Parent participation and the impact on students<br>• Challenges students face in transition<br>• Ways to support your child in ssecondary school<br>• Ways for parents and students to get involved at school<br>• Ways that our school is supporting Grade 8 students |
| **Grade 8 Family Literacy event #1: Strategies for success** | Families (parents and students) will be able to understand and practice:<br>• Specific strategies to get and stay organized<br>• Specific strategies to identify the main idea of a text<br>• Specific strategies to preview a textbook<br>• Specific ways to take notes | Content area reading:<br>• Main ideas<br>• Previewing a textbook using THIEVES<br>• Note-making<br>Organization<br>• Day 1/Day 2 binders<br>• Master binder<br>• Homework completion<br>• Time management<br>• Agenda use |
| **Grade 8 Family Literacy event #2: Final exam preparation** | Families (parents and students) will be able to understand:<br>• How to develop a study schedule<br>• Specific strategies to use when writing an exam<br>• Specific strategies to study for exams across content areas | Study schedule<br>• Weekly and daily schedules<br>Test-taking strategies<br>• Multiple choice test<br>• Short answer/written test<br>• True/false test<br>Study strategies<br>• Index cards<br>• What's in/ what's out<br>• Creating your own exam<br>• Using your textbook |

Figure 2. Goals and topics of family sessions

## Advertising

As stated above, these parent sessions have already occurred. Initially, I worked with the parent advisory committee (PAC) to give them the opportunity to provide input and feedback for the planning of these events. These parents are already highly involved in their child's education, so I was able to learn from this group about what motivates their participation in the school.

Parents received notification of the sessions in multiple ways, in their own language. Notifications were provided through invitations, letters, and phone calls. Parents were invited to the family literacy sessions at the Grade 8 parent information evening, where they received the dates of the events and had the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the topics that would be explored during the evenings (Appendix A). Six options were given for possible session topics: study skills, technology, what to expect from the high school curriculum, reading a textbook, test taking, and adolescent development. Feedback forms were distributed at the information session and also at *Meet the Teacher* night.

In order to advertise the first family literacy session, a letter was sent home to all grade 8 parents reminding them about the upcoming family literacy event (Appendix B). On this letter, parents were asked to RSVP to the school office to get a sense of how many people would attend. They were also asked to indicate whether they required childcare or a translator (and if so, for what language). A notice was put into the school newsletter (which was sent home) and a notice was published on the school website. Finally, one week and the day before, an automated telephone message called all grade 8 parents to remind them about the evening.

For the second family literacy session, the advertising was much more targeted. Like the first session, the event was advertised in the school newsletter and on the school website

and all grade 8 parents were called using our automated calling system. However, this time, instead of sending home the letters without a systematic collection process, we sent home letters (Appendix C) with each one of the grade 8 students in their English classes. These letters were to be signed and returned to the English teacher so that we knew how many people to expect and what the needs of the group were. On top of these measures, I asked for teachers to provide feedback as to which students would benefit from this session. From this feedback, I called these parents directly to invite them to attend the session. As a result of these additional measures, the second session was much better attended than the first.

### Grade 8 Parent Information Session

*Structure of the evening*

Parents were invited to the school prior to *Meet the Teacher* night and met in the library. Snacks and beverages were provided. There were a number of staff representatives at this event, who presented on various topics (see Figure 2). Parents were provided with a brochure that outlined each of the topics that would be covered that evening (Appendix D). This brochure was later made available to parents who were not able to attend the evening.

I began the evening by introducing myself and the other staff representatives. I then gave a short presentation on the importance of parent participation on student's success in school and how parents can get involved in our school community or in their child's education (since one is not necessarily synonymous with the other). I also discussed the challenges that our students face as they move from elementary to secondary school, how the school is providing support to overcome these challenges and how families can support their child through this transition at home. All of this information was presented in a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix E). After I spoke, staff members made formal presentations about various aspects of our school community. Following the presentation,

37

parents were asked to provide feedback about the evening and suggest topics they would like to explore in our upcoming family literacy sessions. This input was the used to plan the family literacy sessions.

*Reflection on the evening*

This evening was well attended, both by parents and staff. Parents found the information helpful and suggested that we focus our family literacy events around the topics of study skills and content area reading. Attendance may have been strong because of the time of year (September) as students are just entering our school. Staff who attended found it helpful to see what information that was being shared with grade 8 parents. Most people who attended the evening completed a feedback form, which helped to guide the planning for our subsequent family literacy evenings.

## Family literacy session #1: Strategies for success

*Structure of the evening*

The first family literacy evening focused on organizational skills and content area reading. Parents selected these two topics as important on the feedback forms from the parent information evening. Staff involved in this evening then selected the particular strategies that are used in classrooms across content areas. The staff involved were many of the grade 8 teachers, who frequently collaborate with one another and attempt to use similar strategies to support students.

It was held at 7:00 pm in the school's meeting room. It was scheduled on the same evening as a PAC meeting so that the PAC could try and recruit some new members to their committee. Round tables were set up throughout the room, with four to five chairs around each table. At each table, one or two staff members were asked to present on and lead a

discussion on particular topic. There were snacks, coffee, tea, and juice available for parents and staff.

Before the formal presentation started, people mingled with one another and parents with young children brought their children to the adjacent room for childcare, provided by grade 12 students. Once the formal program began, parents and staff were invited to sit together in the center of the room. The evening began with individual introductions, the staff indicating their role at the school and parents explaining what they hoped to get from the evening.

After the introductions, I presented a PowerPoint (Appendix F) that explained: the learning intentions for the session, the topics that would be covered at each table group, the format of the session, and how our topics/strategies were selected. Once the PowerPoint concluded, parents moved to a table of their choice.

At each of the tables, a staff member presented and modeled a particular strategy. There were four tables in total set up for the session: two for content area reading, and two for organization. At table #1, parents would learn a strategy for finding the main idea of a text and the different note-making formats that are taught in grade 8 at our school. At table # 2, teachers would model the THIEVES strategy for the parents and discussed the rationale behind using it. Table # 3 was devoted to strategies for test-taking and at table #4, participants would discuss study strategies. We began each of the table groups with an informal discussion. Parents discussed their own school experiences, any memories they wanted to share about reading or studying and their own attitudes, or thoughts towards school. We also discussed their impressions of their child's school experience at secondary school thus far. This informal discussion was to help the make the parents comfortable with the people at their table, to emphasize the important role the parents have in their child's

education and to help presenters tailor the presentation as much as possible to the needs of the parents.

Staff presenters then distributed handouts (Appendix G) so parents could refer to this as the presenter spoke. In their presentations, staff explained the rationale behind using these strategies and demonstrated to parents how the strategy could be employed. We discussed that these skills were identified as important based on a performance based assessment administered to all the grade 8s at the beginning of the year and also through discussion with staff about what skills help students be successful in secondary grades. Student samples were made available where possible to provide the parents with visuals as to how students may use the strategy. Staff presenters had organized small activities so that parents could have hands-on experience with each of the strategies discussed. The following table illustrates the strategies that were covered at each of the table groups.

| Topic | Strategy |
| --- | --- |
| **Reading strategies** | • Previewing a textbook: THIEVES<br>• Main ideas: GAP (Generate, arrange, paraphrase)<br>• Note-making: Web, Linear notes, Cornell notes |
| **Test- taking strategies** | ▪ Multiple choice test<br>▪ Short answer/ written test<br>▪ True/ False test |
| **Organization** | ▪ Day 1/Day 2 binder system<br>▪ Master binder<br>▪ Filling out your agenda |

Figure 3. Strategies covered under each topic at first Family Literacy session.

Parents spent 15 minutes at each table. After the 15 minutes, the parents and students moved to the next table.

Once the table sessions were complete, parents and staff were brought back together and the evening concluded with questions, comments and discussion. Parents were asked to complete an exit slip to inform staff of what parents learned from the evening, what they still

had questions about and if they would be interested in sharing anything at our next literacy session. (Appendix H).

### Reflection on the evening

This family literacy session took place on November 18, 2010. Despite the attempts to advertise in both English and other community languages (Mandarin, Spanish, French, Punjabi, Hindi), there were only ten parents in attendance. Based on the feedback that we received from the letters home, we were expecting 25 parents. The poor turnout could have been because of the unexpected snowfall that evening. We made some changes in order to accommodate the small group. Instead of 4 table groups, we made two table groups: one based on organization and test-taking strategies and the other based on reading. This provided an audience for the presenters and also allowed parents to work together if they had any questions about the activity. We had childcare available to families who might have needed it, but no parents brought their young children to the event.

The schedule of the evening was clearly outlined and provided much opportunity for parent discussion and participation. Parents had been encouraged to bring their child to the evening but only one parent did so. Despite the low turnout, the discussions were meaningful and rich. Parents responded positively, as they were able to get involved in the activities in a hands-on manner.

### Family Literacy session #2: Final Exam Preparation

### Structure of the evening

Our next family literacy session was held on May 10, 2011. This session intended to reflect upon the grade 8 year and also provide strategies to support students in preparation for their final exams. These topics came out of feedback that we received from the previous family literacy evening.

The structure of this event was similar to the other evenings in that there were teacher presenters who presented specific strategies and then provided some hands on support to those who would like it. However, at this session, parents were required to bring their children with them so that strategies could be practiced. Unlike the previous session where small groups were set up, instead, teachers presented their strategies to the whole group and then provided time and resources to practice the strategy taught. Parents and children sat together at a table and were provided with a study skills package, which included the PowerPoint slides (Appendix I), handouts describing the strategies that were presented (Appendix J).

The evening began with a large group presentation, which again emphasized the importance of parent participation in a child's education. Based on the people that were attending this session, we knew that this piece of information would not be redundant as none of these attendees were at the previous family literacy session. We then went over the aims of the evening and helped parents think back to their own experiences with final exams.

Once the introduction was finished, each of the teacher presenters shared one strategy with the group. The teacher presenters who presented were from different content areas, thus providing some insight into how particular strategies may look different when preparing for a different content area.

Each teacher presenter covered a certain topic connected to final exam preparation. The first presentation was about organizing for studying, which covered how to schedule study time into your daily routine and how to determine what needs to be covered and what does not. The second presentation shared a specific strategy for studying: using index cards, wherein students write questions or vocabulary terms on one side of the index card and

write the answer or the definition on the other side. The third presentation was by a member of our Math department, who demonstrated how to use the Math textbook to prepare for their Math final exam. Finally, I presented a strategy to help students make their own final exam, which can be used when studying with friends or on their own. Once presenters shared their strategy, parents and children were given between 10-15 minutes to practice that strategy. We provided textbooks that are used in grade 8 classrooms in order to encourage parents and children to make the experience as authentic and practical as possible.

Once all the strategies were presented and practiced, the group reconnected for questions, comments, and discussion. Parents were asked to provide feedback about the presentation and offered suggestions for future sessions.

*Reflection on the evening*

This session, unlike the other family literacy session, was very well attended. Since attendance was an issue at the last evening, we systematically targeted the grade 8 students. Like the last session, we advertised in the newsletter and on the school website, and also called all the grade 8 parents using our automated calling system. However, this time, we sent home letters with each one of the grade 8 students in their English classes. These letters were to be signed and returned to the English teacher so that we knew how many people to expect. On top of these measures, I elicited teacher feedback as to which particular students may benefit from this session and called these parents directly to invite them to come.

As a result of these actions, the session was very well attended, with 70 people in total, 35 parents and their 35 children. Childcare was once again offered to families and four parents brought their young children. Translation was offered as part of the letter home to parents, but no parent requested this. Feedback from the parents suggested that the evening

was very helpful, as it provided practical strategies while also providing time to practice these strategies with their child.

# SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of the project, I began by asking three questions:

- What does the research say about the importance of parent participation and family literacy to the lives of students?

- What are the challenges that students face in the transition from elementary to secondary school?

- How can parents and teachers of Grade 8 students work collaboratively to facilitate a successful transition from elementary to secondary school?

By examining the research in the areas of parent involvement, family literacy, and elementary to secondary transition, I was able to develop successful parent sessions for my school community that were informed by the research in these areas.

**Question 1: What does the research say about the importance of parent participation and family literacy to the lives of students?**

Based on the research done by Vygotsky, it is clear that children learn from the beginning of their life, from others who model skills and behaviour. The parent's role in early development is essential to a child's development. The importance of family support does not diminish as children grow up. However, parent participation in school activities tends to lessen as children grow up. Research suggests that parent participation declines in secondary school for a number of reasons that stem from both parental and school causes. First, parents may believe that their adolescent child does not want their support. Second, parents may not feel confident in supporting their children in curriculum covered in secondary school. Third, secondary schools may not be as welcoming as elementary schools. Finally, parents may not necessarily understand the role that they can play in their child's education. Schools and teachers can make a significant impact on parent participation in their child's education.

Research indicates that parental support is very important in the academic success of a secondary school child. The level of support provided by a parent can impact a child's achievement in school, attitudes towards school, and their attendance of school.

A parent's participation in their child's education can take different forms. Some parent participation in education includes involvement at the school, while some forms do not require this. Parents can get involved in their child's education in the following ways:

- By providing a safe and comfortable home environment where learning can occur
- By reading report cards and/or communicating with teachers about their child's progress
- By volunteering at or helping out at the school or in the classroom
- By reinforcing school-based strategies at home or participating in learning activities at home
- By joining a parental organization, which helps make decisions about school culture, activities
- By encouraging their child academically, having high aspirations for their educational future
- By facilitating positive peer groups and activities at home that will connect to school life

Through my own exploration of the research in this area, I discovered that parent participation contributes a great deal to the success of students in secondary school. It is evident that parent participation in school can take multiple forms, but whatever the form, it can have a significant impact on a child's achievement, behaviour, work habits, and attendance. Therefore, it is necessary for schools to try to engage with parents in multiple ways.

**Question 2: What are the challenges that students face in the transition from elementary to secondary school?**

As children move from elementary to secondary school, they face many challenges. Research in the area of transition suggests that these challenges can be divided into three distinct categories: environmental challenges, academic challenges and social-emotional challenges.

The organization of the day and the physical space of classrooms and schools are vastly different when comparing an elementary and a secondary school. Researchers in the area of transition note the numerous differences between these two spaces. In an elementary school, students are given a "home" classroom, where they have their own desk and have a place to display their work, whereas in a secondary school, students move from classroom to classroom, without a home base. Students in secondary school must keep their belongings in a locker, a place outside of the classroom environment. Organizing themselves for success can be challenging for students, as they must become responsible for materials for each different subject area.

The size of the school is much different as well. Students move from an elementary school, which is typically smaller in size and in structure to secondary school where the building is bigger and most often, the school population is bigger as well.

Researchers note the difference even in the physical layout of the classrooms in each of the buildings. Classrooms in the secondary school tend to be more teacher centered, with rows of desks facing the front, while the layout of classrooms in elementary schools are flexible and easily changed.

Schedules in elementary school and secondary schools are quite different as well. Like the layout of a classroom, elementary schedules tend to be flexible, where curriculum is integrated and leads into one another. Secondary school schedules are marked by rigid bell schedules, which mark both the beginning and end of class times, where curricular areas are kept separate and specialized. With the changes in instruction comes a difference in grading practices. Student must cope with new behavioural and academic expectations from their new school environment and also with these new expectations from each one of their new teachers.

In addition to coping with new expectations, student must learn new skills to help them deal with new curricular demands. There are new literacy skills that are required by the Ministry of Education, like note- making, and students must also learn new organizational and study skills to cope with the new school environment. Oftentimes, these organizational and study practices are not explicitly taught and students are expected to know or develop these skills on their own.

A child's social connections also change as they move from elementary to secondary school. There are many new peers from different feeder schools, so children are forced to navigate this new social landscape. There is no guarantee for the children that they will have classes with their friends, or know anyone in their classes. This poses a challenge for children, as social success often comes with positive attitudes towards school. Therefore, it is important for parents and teachers to help facilitate social connections for students in the classroom context as well as in the community outside of school. Research suggests that those students who knew other children from other schools prior to transition were more successful in terms of social transition and experienced less social anxiety during transition than those that did not have social relationships with students from different feeder schools. Parents can play a part even in the social lives of their children by encouraging them to get involved in school activities and also helping to facilitate extracurricular activities.

**Question 3: How can parents and teachers of Grade 8 students work collaboratively to facilitate a successful transition from elementary to secondary school?**

Based on the research on parent participation and transition from elementary to secondary school, it is clear that families are an important part of the educational success of adolescents. Family literacy programs are one way that schools can meaningfully engage parents, as the focus of these programs are to value the knowledge that families bring to the

education of their children. Through family literacy programs, families and schools can work collaboratively to help facilitate success for children.

Family literacy programs are a way to tap into the understanding that children have from their home environments. By understanding the knowledge that comes from families, teachers can have a greater understanding of how to build upon their students' understandings of the world. There are many goals of family literacy programs, but at a broad level, these programs aim to involve parents in their child's learning, while also providing a forum for parents and schools to work collaboratively so schools can understand the rich knowledge that families provide for their children. By placing value on parental knowledge and their role in their child's education, families may be more likely to involve themselves in school activities, as they understand the importance of what they bring to the school. These programs can be especially important for understanding the knowledge that diverse groups bring to the educational system.

Successful family literacy programs appear to share some similar characteristics. First, the events are scheduled and regular. The timing of the events should be flexible enough to accommodate participants. Second, the program should allow parents to assist in the planning of events and provide opportunities for parents to share their own knowledge in the topic. In successful examples of family literacy programs, parents have a voice in the planning and structure of the events. Finally, the programs must be practical and useful to the parents. These events should be structured so that there is mutual reciprocity of knowledge for schools and families. Not only should parents be provided with information, but schools should also learning from the parents.

Family literacy programs are a meaningful way to engage with parents and in my own school context, proved to be a successful way to encourage parent involvement. Through

the principles of family literacy, I was able to target the needs of our grade 8 students as they moved from their elementary feeder school into our secondary school while also encouraging parent participation at the school.

Families are fundamental to the learning and development of children. It is clear that family participation in early learning and throughout a child's school career has a significant impact on a child's learning and development. While in adolescence, children may be resistant to parent participation, but this is a crucial time for parents to remain involved. In particular, as children move from the elementary context into the secondary context as the child will face numerous challenges in this year. Through the principles of family literacy programs which is a collaborative framework for schools and families to work together, secondary schools can encourage parent participation with the aim of student success in the transition year and through to graduation.

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**Appendix A: Parent Feedback form (Grade 8 Parent Information Event)**

1. Would you be interested in attending a parent series on various topics related to your child's education?

_____ Yes

_____ No

2. Please check the topics that would be of interest to you and your family:

_____ Study skills

_____ Technology and our adolescent's lives

_____ What to expect from the high school curriculum

_____ Reading across the curriculum

_____ Other (please specify) _____

3. What time of day is best for you to participate in school- related activities (please check):
_____ 3:00-5:00 pm

_____ 5:00- 7:00 pm

_____ 7:00- 9:00 pm

_____ Other (please specify) _____

3. What did you find informative about tonight's presentation?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What would you still like to know about or have any questions about?

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. On the lines below, please provide any additional comments regarding tonight's presentation:

_____

_____

**Appendix B: Letter to Grade 8 Parents for Family Literacy Event #1**

To the parent(s)/ guardian(s) of _____ ,

Re: Family Literacy Evenings

The staff at _____ Secondary would like to invite you to two special we will be holding for Grade 8 students and their parents.

The first event will be a parent/ child study skills evening, which will be held on November 18, 2010 from 6:30- 7:45 in the Library. Topics that will be covered include: helping your child get and stay organized, note-taking, reading their textbook and taking tests. This event is for parents and their children and we would like to encourage all members of the family to come.

The second event will be held in April 2011 (date to be announced) and will focus on literacy skills in Grade 8. A variety of strategies will be presented to address the following reading skills: identifying main ideas, checking for understanding and developing word skills.

If you are interested in attending, please detach the form below so that we can make enough handouts and set the library up appropriately. Should you have any questions, please contact the school at _____ .

Thank you,

_____ Secondary Staff

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Please indicate below if you plan on attending:
_____ Yes, I am planning on attending the Parent/ Child study skills evening on January 27, 2010

_____ No, I do not plan on attending the Parent/Child study skills evening on January 27, 2010

If you plan on attending, please indicate below:

_____ I would like a translator in _____ (please specify language)

_____ I require childcare for my young child.

April 29, 2011

To the parent(s)/ guardian(s) of _____,

**Re: Grade 8 Parent/Child Study Skills Workshop**

   The staff would like to invite you to a special parent/ child study skills evening. **This event will be held on Tuesday, May 10 from 7:00- 8:00 in room A140.** The session will be led by teachers from Cambie and will provide parents and children with specific strategies to help prepare for final exams. This event is for parents and their children. Childcare will be available to families with younger children. Translation will also be available to those who indicate they require this.

   If you are interested in attending, please detach the form below and have your child return to their English teacher before May 6 so that we can make enough handouts and set up appropriately. Should you have any questions, please contact the school.

Thank you and hope to see you there,

_____ Secondary School staff

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Please indicate below if you plan on attending:
  _____ Yes, I am planning on attending the Parent/ Child study skills evening on
   May 10, 2011

  _____ No, I do not plan on attending the Parent/Child study skills evening on
May 10, 2011

If you plan on attending, please indicate below:

  _____ I would like a translator in _____ (please
   specify   language)

  _____ I require childcare for my young child.

**Appendix D: Grade 8 Parent Information Brochure**

# Grade 8 Parent Information Evening

WELCOME TO SECONDARY SCHOOL!

At _____ Secondary, we are proud of our community of learners and of all the ways in which we support our students.

Students, staff and parents of _____ are committed to the intellectual, social, aesthetic and physical development of our students in a challenging, safe and supportive environment.

Our mission is:

* To develop social and personal responsibility.

* To foster cultural and aesthetic awareness.

* To encourage healthy living.

* To develop an attitude which promotes lifelong learning.

We welcome you to the school and look forward to getting to know your family over the next five years.

## GETTING INVOLVED- PARENTS

Parent participation in their child's education is a significant factor for academic success. Parent participation can help their child achieve success in many ways. Your involvement in your child's education can take many forms:

## FAMILY LITERACY EVENTS

This year we will be hosting two family literacy events for parents of Grade 8 students. We will be sending out letters, emails and synervoice messages to confirm the dates. The study skills evening will be held in November 2010 and the other in May 2011.

*Study skills evening (November 2010)*
Please join us for an evening to discuss strategies to support your child in: studying, test-taking, and organization. Translators and child care will be available to families.

*Reading in the content areas (May 2011)*
Please join us for an evening to discuss strategies to support your child in reading in their content area courses. Topics to be covered include: Note-making, finding the main ideas, and checking for understanding.

## PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

Parent-teacher conferences are held three times a year prior to report cards. Attending these events is a great way to stay connected with your child's teachers

and up to date on their academic and social progress

## COMMUNICATIONS WITH TEACHERS

Informal communications with teachers is a great way of staying informed about your child's progress. Teachers can be contacted at the school or via email.

## HOMEWORK

Setting aside a place and time for homework is important, as it sets a routine for your child.

## PAC

The Parent Advisory Council (PAC) is committed to promoting a sense of community and student well being within the school. By listening, supporting, assisting and advising, the PAC acts as a liaison between the students and families on one hand and the teachers and administrators on the other. It is a goal of our PAC to enrich our children's learning experience by having parents and educators working in a team environment. The PAC meets in the school library from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. on the fourth Wednesday of each month. We encourage all parents to join us at these monthly meetings.

## TIME WITH YOUR CHILD

The most important way to get involved in your child's education is to spend time with your child. This will give you a sense of how they are doing both socially and academically.

# SUPPORTING OUR GRADE 8 STUDENTS

The transition from Elementary to Secondary school can be difficult for many students. Our school offers a variety of programs that help facilitate successful transitions that support our grade 8 students throughout the year.

## INTERMEDIATE LEARNER PROJECT

The ILP team is a partnership between students and teachers to facilitate successful transitions from Elementary to Secondary school. The aims are to connect grade 8 students with the school community and assist students in demonstrating academic and social success.

## INTERMEDIATE READING INITIATIVE

The Intermediate Reading Initiative (IRI) is a district-wide initiative, which aims to support the literacy needs of our students throughout their Grade 8 year and foster strong reading habits for these students in all of their content area courses.

## RESOURCE DEPARTMENT

Our Resource department provides academic support to our student population. Should you think your child would benefit from additional academic support, please contact your child's counselor.

---

## Athletics

Athletics are a great way for students to get involved. Each season, a variety of sports are available for students to choose from. Below is a list of teams available by season.

**FALL (September- December)**

Girls (8-12) volleyball

Senior Boys Volleyball

Senior Boys Soccer

Cross country running

**WINTER**

Boys and Girls Basketball

Table Tennis

**SPRING**

Boys Volleyball (8-10)

Girls Soccer

Golf

---

# GETTING INVOLVED-STUDENTS

The best way for students to better their high school experience is to get involved in extra curricular activities. At _____, we offer many clubs and teams that are open to students of all ages and interests. We hope that your child will find something that suits their interests and needs.

## Clubs

There are many clubs available for students here at _____. Clubs target a variety of interests and are open to students from grade 8-12.

AV CLUB

JAZZ CLUB

GLEE CLUB

FIRST RESPONDERS

FRIENDSHIP CLUB

ROBOTICS CLUB

ANIME CLUB

GAMES CLUB

WORLD COMMITTEE

STUDENT COUNCIL

SKI CLUB

BOOK CLUB

Appendix E: Parent Information Event PowerPoint

## Grade 8 Parent Information Evening

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Welcome Parents!

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## Times they are a changin'

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- ❧ The transition from Elementary to Secondary school is a BIG change in a child's life
- ❧ Students experience changes in:
  - ❧ Environment (new teachers, new courses, new school, new peers)
  - ❧ Curriculum
  - ❧ Classroom organization
  - ❧ Social circles

---

## Challenges in Transition: Environment

og

- ❧ Move from small to big school
- ❧ Many classes in many rooms
- ❧ Individual desks to Lockers
- ❧ 4- 75 minute periods per day
- ❧ New and different routines, expectations

---

## Results of Environmental Challenges

og

- ❧ New environment can cause:
  - ❧ Difficulties with organization
  - ❧ Difficulties feeling connected to adults at the school
  - ❧ Difficulties keeping up with homework
  - ❧ Difficulties understanding and demonstrating expectations in all environments

# Result of Academic Challenges

New academic demands can cause difficulties:
- ❧ In homework completion
- ❧ With organization
- ❧ Preparing for tests
- ❧ Demonstrating strong work habits

---

# Possible result in social challenges

❧ Students may have difficulty:
- ❧ Making new friends
- ❧ Maintaining old friendships
- ❧ Building relationships with new adults
- ❧ Finding their "niche" at school
- ❧ Figuring out what to do in "spare" time (recess, lunch)

---

# Challenges in transition: Academic

- ❧ New academic demands:
  - ❧ Final exams
  - ❧ Specialized courses in separate classrooms
  - ❧ Curricular demands
  - ❧ Teacher expectations

---

# Challenges in transition: Social

- ❧ More people in new environment
- ❧ Many unfamiliar faces
- ❧ Many teachers to get to know
- ❧ Students from different feeder schools
- ❧ New clubs, teams
  - ❧ Often have to try out or be "elected", which is different from Elementary school

# But doesn't my child want me to leave them alone?

ଔ

- ଔMaybe…BUT
  - ଔ Research shows that parent's involvement (directly and indirectly) in their child's education has a significant impact on their
    - ଔ Academic success
    - ଔ Attendance
    - ଔ Work habits
    - ଔ Self-esteem
    - ଔ Social well-being

---

# Want to learn specific strategies to support your child in transition?

ଔ

- ଔ Grade 8 Family Literacy Events
  - ଔ Topic #1: Study skills (January 27, 2011)
  - ଔ Topic #2: Reading in the content areas (May 2011)

---

# What can parents do to help?

ଔ

- ଔ Get involved as much as possible
  - ଔ Parent involvement can take multiple forms:
    - ଔ Talking to your child about homework, assignments
    - ଔ Attending parent events at the school
    - ଔ Getting involved in decision-making: PAC (school or district)
    - ଔ Keeping in touch with teachers as soon as issues arise
    - ଔ Spending time with your children to keep informed about their lives
    - ଔ Encouraging your child to get involved in school activities
    - ଔ Understanding who your child's friends are
    - ଔ Encouraging your child to get involved in community activities

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# What the school is doing to support the transition

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- ଔ Intermediate Learner Project
- ଔ Intermediate Reading Initiative
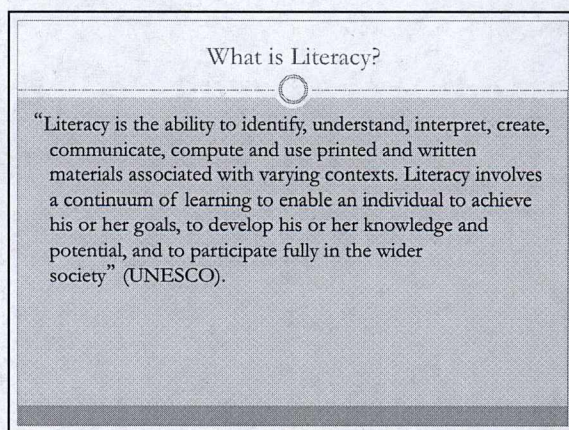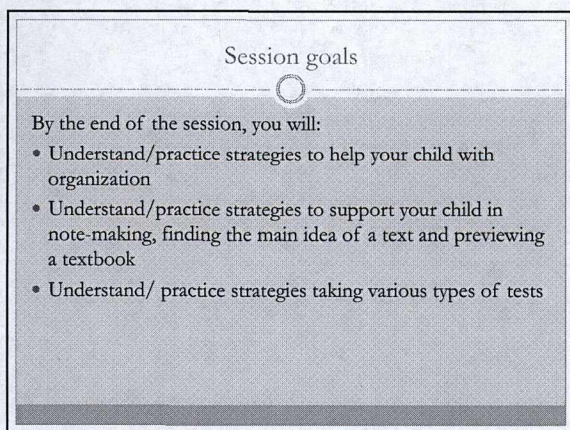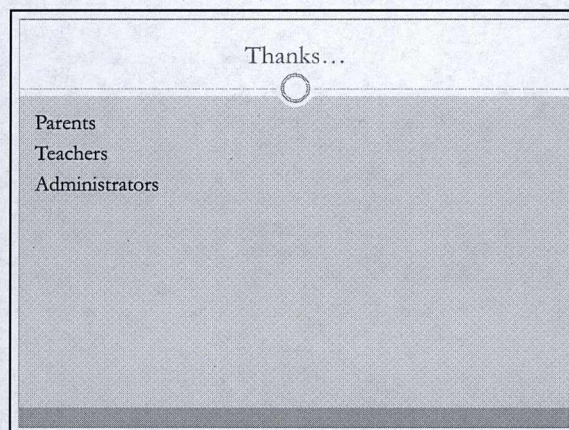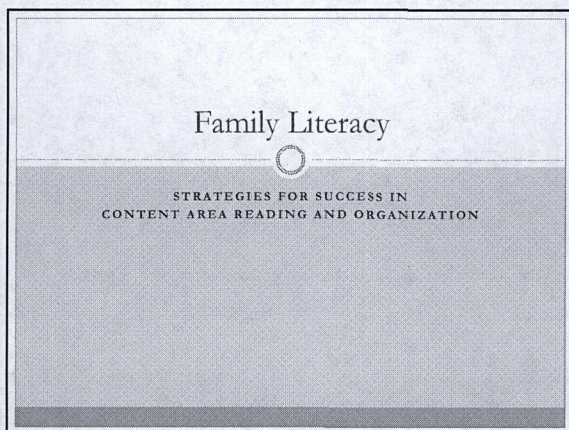- ଔ Intramurals
- ଔ Buddy program
- ଔ Peer workshops

QUESTIONS??????

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**Appendix F: Family Literacy Event #1 PowerPoint**

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# Family Literacy

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS IN
CONTENT AREA READING AND ORGANIZATION

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## Thanks...

Parents
Teachers
Administrators

---

## Session goals

By the end of the session, you will:
- Understand/practice strategies to help your child with organization
- Understand/practice strategies to support your child in note-making, finding the main idea of a text and previewing a textbook
- Understand/ practice strategies taking various types of tests

---

## What is Literacy?

"Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in the wider society" (UNESCO).

## Why is literacy essential?

"Literacy is a human right, a means for social and human development and a tool of personal empowerment. Literacy is at the heart of basic education for all, and essential for eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, cubing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy" (UNESCO).

## Literacy skills

- Reading and writing text
- Document use
- Numeracy
- Oral communication
- Computer use
- Critical thinking skills (decision-making, problem solving, locating information)

## Literacy at Cambie Secondary

Four transitional points in child's education in Canada:
- Kindergarten (as children first enter school)
- Grade 4 (focus of curriculum changes)
- Grade 8 (as they enter secondary school)
- Grade 10 (provincial exams and credits)

## How are we supporting Literacy at Cambie?

Reading programs (Focused reading, Reading incentive programs)

Cross-curricular focus on literacy

Intermediate Reading Initiative

School literacy team

Resource support for students in need of additional support

## Working together to support literacy



## Responding to student needs
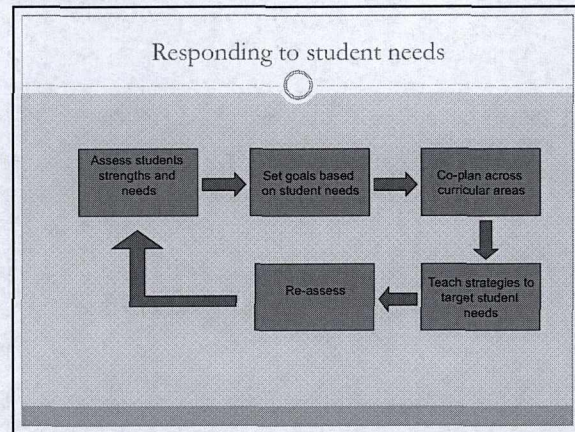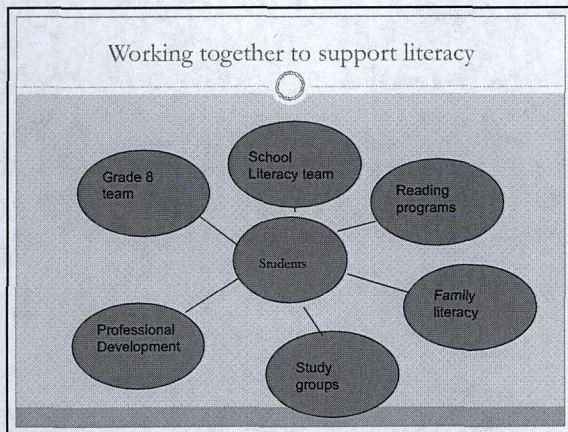


## Strategies to address student needs: Content area reading

**Finding the main idea:**
- GAP (Generate, arrange, paraphrase)

**Pre-reading:**
- THIEVES (Titles, headings, introduction , every first sentence, visuals, end of chapter questions, summary)

**Note-making:**
- At Cambie, we teach three ways to take notes
  - Webbing
  - Linear notes
  - Cornell Notes

## Strategies to address student needs: Organization

- Agenda use
- Binder organization
  - Day 1/ Day 2 binder syster
  - "Master" binder system

## Strategies to address student needs: Test-taking

Different approaches to different types of tests:
- Multiple choice
- True/False
- Written

## Today's session

Four tables are set up around the room with numbers:

#1: Note-making and Main ideas

#2: THIEVES reading strategy

#3: Organization

#4: Test-taking

Each table "workshop" will be 15 minutes long and you will have time to practice the strategies presented. After 15 minutes, you will move to the next table.

** The first table session will be slightly longer to allow for introductions and some discussion.

## Questions?
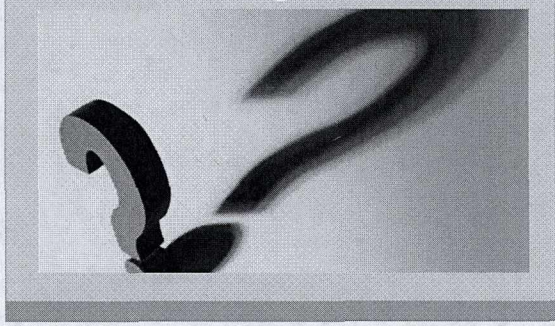
# My Schedule

Name: _____

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **3:00** | | | | | |
| **3:30** | | | | | |
| **4:00** | | | | | |
| **4:30** | | | | | |
| **5:00** | | | | | |
| **5:30** | | | | | |
| **6:00** | | | | | |
| **6:30** | | | | | |
| **7:00** | | | | | |
| **7:30** | | | | | |
| **8:00** | | | | | |
| **8:30** | | | | | |
| **9:00** | | | | | |
| **9:30** | | | | | |
| **10:00** | | | | | |
| **10:30** | | | | | |

Amount of homework time per day: _____

Location for homework time: _____

# Taking Notes

## Why take notes?

Taking notes is a skill that will follow your child throughout their educational career. We teach students to take notes for a number of reasons.

1. Notes help students to put new information into their own words, phrases and pictures, making it easier to understand.
2. Notes help students pull out the main ideas and details from text, videos, lectures, etc. By pulling out the main ideas, it will filter down the amount of information that they need to study.
3. Notes help students to organize new information into a way that makes sense to them.
4. Notes help students to review the material that they have learned in class.

## What is the best way to take notes?

There is no "right" way to take notes, although there are some things that all "good" sets of notes have in common. Below is a suggested list of do's and don'ts when taking notes:

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| • Use your own words<br>• Choose an appropriate format (web, Cornell notes, outline)<br>• Use appropriate headings<br>• Use point form, not full sentences<br>• Use abbreviations<br>• Record the main ideas<br>• Record key words and vocabulary<br>• Distinguish between the main ideas and details<br>• Leave appropriate amount of space<br>• Use text features to figure out information<br>• Review notes once completed<br>• Highlight important words<br>• Add drawings, symbols and connections | • Copy information directly from the text/ source<br>• Make a list of information with no distinguishing features<br>• Write a lot of words<br>• Read only the text |

## What are some formats for notes?

Although there are many formats for notes, there are three most commonly used at Cambie:

- Cornell Notes
- Webbing
- Outlines (linear notes)

## What are the differences between these formats?

The difference between these formats is that some may be more effective in certain situations than others. The other difference is personal preference. One student may only feel comfortable using Cornell Notes, while another may like to interchange between Cornell Notes and webbing.

**1.Outlining (Linear note-taking)**
*Is most effective for*:
- Organizing ideas for writing
- Note-taking from a textbook or other informational text
- Helping students to see the structure or sequencing of a text
- Students do well with a lot of structure
- Recording research information

*It is less effective for*:
- Brainstorming
- During lectures or movies
- Representing connections
- The student is more of a visual learner

**2.Webbing**
*Is most effective for::*
- Note-taking from a textbook or other informational text
- Brainstorming
- Showing relationships/ connections between ideas or concepts
- Taking notes from fiction text
- Recording information from a movie, lecture
- Recording research information

*Is less effective for*:
- Organizing ideas for writing
- Structure is necessary
- Students need to see the structure/ sequence of a text

**3. Cornell Notes**
*Are most effective for*:
- Studying
- Taking notes from films, lectures (without clear text organization)
- Taking notes from a discussion
- Taking notes from a speaker
- Taking notes from a field trip
- Taking notes from informational text or textbook

*Are less effective for*:
- Showing relationships/ connections between ideas or concepts
- Brainstorming
- Organizing for writing

# My Agenda Checklist

**Before School**

- ☐ Make sure that the today tab is on the right week
- ☐ Copy down the block order for the day
- ☐ Write in the names of your classes next to their blocks
- ☐ Make sure you have the supplies and work for each class

**During Every Class**

- ☐ Write down details of all assigned homework
- ☐ If something is due after the next class, write it in on the due date as well
- ☐ If you have no homework for a given class, write "no hw"

**After School**

- ☐ Check your agenda to make sure you are bringing home everything you need to do your homework

**At Home**

- ☐ Check your agenda to see what work you have to do
- ☐ Write a ✓ next to things when you finish them
- ☐ When you are done everything, put it all back in your schoolbag

**Appendix H: Feedback Form Family Literacy Event #1**

*Please fill out the following feedback form to help inform our future presentations.*

1. What is one (or more) strategy that you think you will use to help your child at home?

2. What did you find useful about tonight's presentation?

3. What questions do you still have?

4. Please provide any additional comments that you think may help us for future sessions.

**Appendix I: Family Literacy Event #2 PowerPoint**

# Grade 8 Parent/Child Study Skills Workshop

Preparing for Final Exams

# Welcome Parents!

o THANK YOU for coming
o Meet our staff presenters
o What do you hope to gain from this evening?

# Parent participation in a child's education

o Parent participation comes in many forms:
  o Helping with studying and homework
  o Communication with teachers
  o Attending parent evenings
  o Involvement in PAC
o Studies show that increased parent involvement in education benefits student:
  o Academic achievement
  o Attitudes towards school and learning
  o Attendance
  o Confidence in school

# Session Plan

o Introduction
  o Workshop- style (Present, then you try!)
o Organizing the home for studying (Emily Tan)
  o Scheduling studying (By week, month)
  o Finding a place
o You have a plan, now what? (Bert Wiens)
  o Know/ Need to Know log
o Study strategies
  o Index cards and Two- column notes (Ian Felgar)
  o Studying for Math exams (Bert Wiens)
  o Creating your own exam: Perfect for studying with friends!

## Final exams:
## Oh the memories!
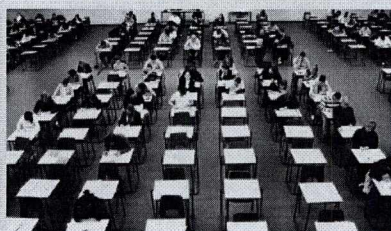


## Unfortunately studying doesn't do itself...
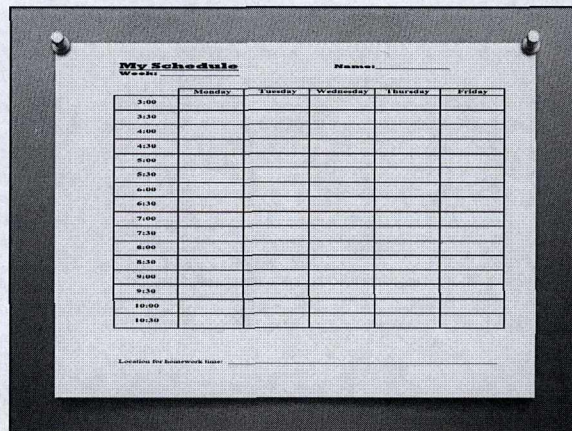


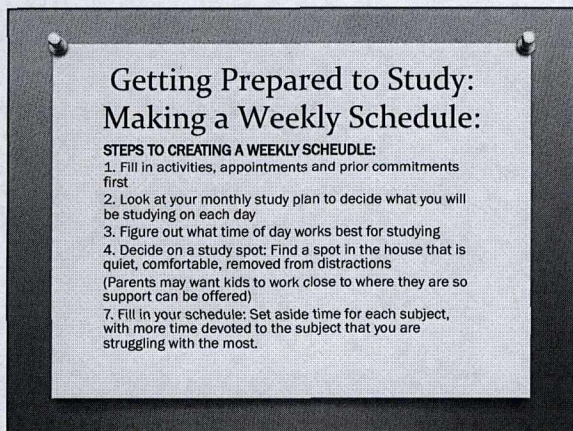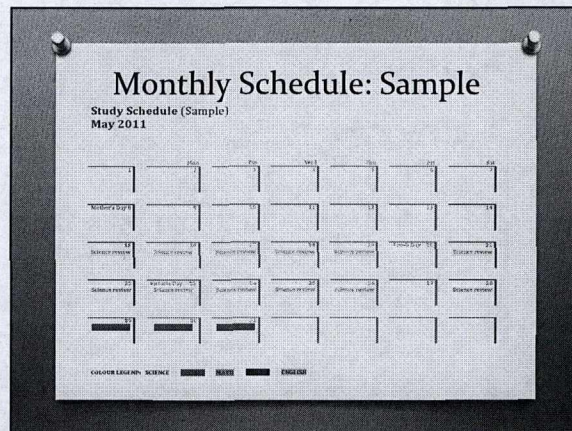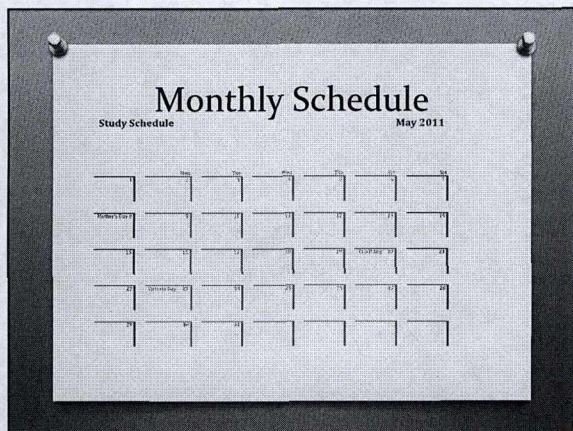## Studying for Finals:
## Dos and Don'ts

| DO | DO NOT |
|---|---|
| • Make a study plan<br>• Rate your knowledge to decide how best to use your time (What you know and what you don't)<br>• Decide what you still need help from the teacher on<br>• Ask your teacher what to focus your studying on<br>• Organize your notes for the year<br>• Find a study strategy that works for you | • Start studying for an exam the night before<br>• Re-read the material you already know<br>• Sit back if you need help- ASK!<br>• Re-read your notes and textbook over and over again (Studying is an active process and requires a student to engage with the material) |

## Getting prepared to study:
## Making a Monthly Schedule

Learning to study takes ORGANIZATION and PRACTICE

**HOW TO ORGANIZE A MONTHLY SCHEDULE:**
○ Study a little every day: This will allow the student to be better prepared and less overwhelmed.
○ Create a workable schedule: Be realistic about what can be accomplished.
○ Choose times that the student is able to concentrate best
○ Fill in appointments, standing commitments first
○ Fill in exam date
○ Figure out how many days between exam and current date
○ Write down the focus for each day: Devote most days to the subjects that may be difficult

## Monthly Schedule

**Study Schedule**          **May 2011**

## Monthly Schedule: Sample

**Study Schedule (Sample)**
**May 2011**

COLOUR LEGEND: SCIENCE    MATH    ENGLISH

## Getting Prepared to Study: Making a Weekly Schedule:

**STEPS TO CREATING A WEEKLY SCHEUDLE:**

1. Fill in activities, appointments and prior commitments first
2. Look at your monthly study plan to decide what you will be studying on each day
3. Figure out what time of day works best for studying
4. Decide on a study spot: Find a spot in the house that is quiet, comfortable, removed from distractions
(Parents may want kids to work close to where they are so support can be offered)
7. Fill in your schedule: Set aside time for each subject, with more time devoted to the subject that you are struggling with the most.

### My Schedule

Week:          Name: _____

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3:00 | | | | | |
| 3:30 | | | | | |
| 4:00 | | | | | |
| 4:30 | | | | | |
| 5:00 | | | | | |
| 5:30 | | | | | |
| 6:00 | | | | | |
| 6:30 | | | | | |
| 7:00 | | | | | |
| 7:30 | | | | | |
| 8:00 | | | | | |
| 8:30 | | | | | |
| 9:00 | | | | | |
| 9:30 | | | | | |
| 10:00 | | | | | |
| 10:30 | | | | | |

Location for homework time: _____

## Slide 1 — My Schedule

**My Schedule**   Name: _____   Week: _____

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3:00 | Snack/Break after school | Snack/Break after school | Snack/Break after school | Snack/Break after school | Snack/Break after school |
| 3:30 | | | | | |
| 4:00 | Homework | Homework | Homework | Homework | Time with friends |
| 4:30 | Science review | | Science review | Science review | |
| 5:00 | | Piano lesson | | | |
| 5:30 | | | | | |
| 6:00 | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner |
| 6:30 | Chores | Chores | Chores | Chores | |
| 7:00 | Soccer practice | Science review | Soccer practice | Soccer practice | Movies with friends |
| 7:30 | | | | | |
| 8:00 | | | | | |
| 8:30 | Shower | Shower | Shower | Shower | |
| 9:00 | Piano practice | Free time | Piano practice | Piano practice | |
| 9:30 | Free time | | Free time | Free time | |
| 10:00 | Bed | Bed | Bed | Bed | |
| 10:30 | | | | | Shower and bed |

Location for homework time: _____

## Slide 2 — I'm ready, Now what?

# I'm ready, Now what?

o Determine what you KNOW and what you NEED TO KNOW
o Studying is an ACTIVE and MULTI-STEP process:
  o Organize your notes and assignments by unit
  o Sort words, information into what you KNOW and what you NEED TO KNOW
    o Allows students to manage time more *effectively*
o NOW YOU TRY!

## Slide 3 — Know/ Need to Know Log

# Know/ Need to Know Log

**WHAT DO I KNOW?**
- When reviewing a topic, take a piece of paper and fold it in half.
- Make sure the topic is not too big (not a whole unit or chapter)
- Think about everything you remember
- Write down notes about everything you know on the left side of the page.

**WHAT DO I NEED TO LEARN?**
- After writing everything you know, begin reviewing notes and/or textbook in the topic
- In the right column, make notes of everything that you missed that is important to remember.
- If it relates to something that you remembered and had on the left, make sure to write that down
- Use these notes to review, focusing on the right hand side

## Slide 4 — You Try! Science 8: Cells

# You Try!
## Science 8: Cells

**What do I know?**
Students: Write down **EVERYTHING** you know about cells

Parents- While students are writing down, please read the Science passage in front of you.

**What do I need to Learn?**
Once the students have finished writing, work together to figure out what else students need to know about the topic.

Study strategies:
Index Cards and Two Column Notes



Math 8 Final Exam Preparation



Math 8 Final Exam:
Knowledge Rating



Study Strategies:
Index Cards and Two Column Notes

## Study Strategies:
## Creating your own Exams
Imagine that you are the teacher



## Creating your own exams
- ❑ Look at your notes, textbook, and old exams you have collected
- ❑ Identify important concepts
- ❑ Create questions
    Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
    ** Use your Know/Need to Learn chart to guide your questioning
- ❑ Quiz yourself and a friend
- ❑ Divide up chapters between you
YOU TRY! Socials 8

Based on the Socials 8 passage given, come up with 3-5 questions that you think a teacher may ask you...
1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

## Final Thoughts
- ✓ Studying is ACTIVE not PASSIVE
- ✓ Re-reading over and over is not an effective method of studying
- ✓ Plan ahead
- ✓ Ask for help
- ✓ Ask for guidance
- ✓ Choose a strategy that works best for you

# TEST PREPARATION

1. **Studying must be ACTIVE rather than PASSIVE.**
   - passive studying is simply reading and rereading the texts and/or notes (this is how most students study)
   - in order for your mind to retain and learn information you need to be ACTIVE by producing something like mind maps, flashcards, practice tests, testing others...
   - you need to create 'work' for yourself

2. **Study what you DON'T know rather than what you already know.**
   - our brain likes to operate with familiar information...but this doesn't help students get ready for a test
   - ACTIVE studying will help isolate what you don't already know
   - must isolate the information that you need to learn/practice

3. **Pick up on teacher clues/hints.**
   - listen carefully...has your teacher told you what will be on the test?
   - listen for key phrases like: "this is REALLY important!" and "it's essential that you understand this part."
   - put a star beside points that are repeated several times

4. **Talk to your teacher(s).**
   - make sure you ask for help as soon as you need it, not five minutes prior to the test
   - ask what type of test you will be writing so that you can study most effectively
   - ask if there is anything specific to focus on
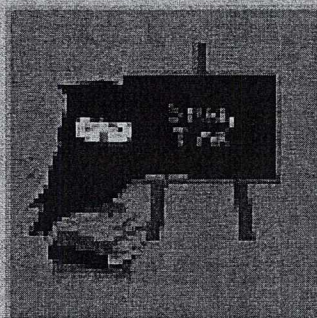
# Studying With
# Flash Cards

Flash cards can be an easy and effective way of studying for a test. They are a great way to learn a large amount of vocabulary or many questions in a short amount of time.

A good flash card has a vocabulary word or question on the front side and the definition or answer on the back side. It may also be helpful to include the page or section number of the textbook where more information can be found.

**Front**

**Density**

**Back**

*The amount of mass per unit of volume*

More dense | Less dense
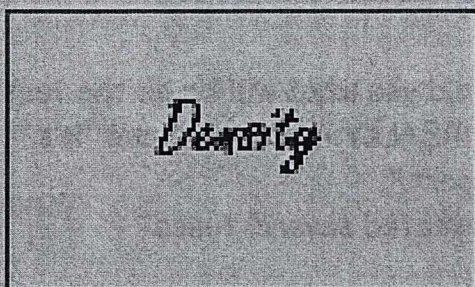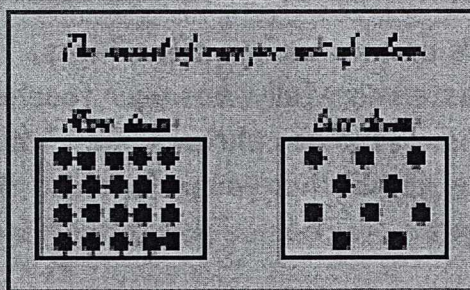
Here is how to use flash cards effectively:

1. Start with all of your cards on one side. If you have a large number, it can be easier to work on one chapter at a time.
2. Look at the first card. Say the definition/answer out loud if you know it.
3. Check your answer.
   - If you are right, set the card off to the side.
   - If you are wrong, put the card on the bottom of the pile.
4. Move on to the next card.
5. When you have no cards left, you are finished studying!

The key to success with flash cards is...
Spend more time with what you need to learn and less time with what you already know.

*Good luck!*

72

# My Schedule Name:_____ Week: _____

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3:00 | Snack/Break after school | Snack/Break after school | Snack/Break after school | Snack/Break after school | Snack/Break after school |
| 3:30 | | | | | |
| 4:00 | Homework | Homework | Homework | Homework | Time with friends |
| 4:30 | Science review | | Science review | Science review | |
| 5:00 | | Piano lesson | | | |
| 5:30 | | | | | |
| 6:00 | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner |
| 6:30 | Chores | Chores | Chores | Chores | |
| 7:00 | Soccer practice | Science review | Soccer practice | Soccer practice | Movies with friends |
| 7:30 | | | | | |
| 8:00 | | | | | |
| 8:30 | Shower | Shower | Shower | Shower | |
| 9:00 | Piano practice | Free time | Piano practice | Piano practice | |
| 9:30 | Free time | | Free time | Free time | |
| 10:00 | Bed | Bed | Bed | Bed | |
| 10:30 | | | | | Shower and bed |

Location for studying: _____

# KNOW/NEED TO KNOW LOG

Subject: _____        Topic: _____

Date: _____

| What Do I Know? | What Do I need to Learn? |
|---|---|
| When reviewing a topic, take a piece of paper and fold it in half.<br><br>Make sure the topic is not too big – do not choose an entire chapter in Science or Social Studies for example, but a sub-chapter or sub-topic.<br><br>Begin by thinking about the topic and all the things you remember.<br><br>Organize your thoughts and write down notes about everything that you know on the topic on the left hand side of the paper. | After writing down everything you know on the left side, begin reviewing notes and/or textbooks on the topic.<br><br>In the right hand column of the paper make a note about everything that you missed that is important to remember.<br><br>If it relates to something that you remembered and had on the left side column, write it down right beside it.<br><br>Use these notes to review regularly, focusing on the right column. |