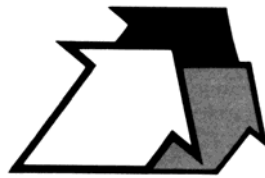


R. D. Parker Collegiate

SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW



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CHAPTER 1

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND REVIEW ACTIVITIES

PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW



This Review was designed to provide all of those interested in the quality of education at R.D. Parker Collegiate with a picture of their school as perceived by various stakeholder groups. The Review provided an opportunity for students, teachers, administrators, support staff, and parents/guardians to become involved in thinking about the school and its future.

Specifically, this school effectiveness review was undertaken:

- 1) To identify those areas in which the school is performing well;
- 2) To suggest areas in which aspects of school life can be improved;
- 3) To suggest ways in which the various stakeholders can work more effectively together;
- 4) To provide a picture of the school as perceived by the various stakeholders;
- 5) To celebrate the successes of the school; and,
- 6) To provide information to be used in planning for the future.

It was intended that stakeholder perceptions of the effectiveness of the school were to provide a data-base to extend collaborative planning for the future of the school. Such planning was to begin early in the 2008-2009 school year. The findings that follow are presented with that objective in mind.

There was no intention to evaluate any individual or individuals associated with the school; rather, the review was designed to look at the total operation of the school with the purpose of highlighting areas of strength and those areas requiring further attention by the school and its community.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

The conceptualization for the School Effectiveness Review is premised on the indicators of school effectiveness and the research related to professional learning communities. During the past two-and-a-half decades, researchers have identified numerous characteristics that depict successful schools. According to this research, effective schools are characterized by a ‘culture’ or ‘ethos’ that permeates the school and results in positive learning outcomes for students.

In an attempt to address the purposes of the review, the School Review Model developed by the Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit (SELU) (Renihan & Sackney, 1992 and revised 2005) guided the study team. This heuristic model has been refined, tested, and used in numerous schools and school systems over the intervening years. The version of the model used in this study was updated in September, 2005.

PROCEDURES

A variety of procedures were used to gather information for the Review. These included site visits, observations, surveys, individual and focus group interviews, and document analysis. These procedures were deemed appropriate methods for collecting data.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Each of the data collection methods is briefly described.



Site Visits. In order to obtain a picture of how the school works, site visits were undertaken. These involved general observations of classrooms, the facility, and several ‘walkabouts’ of the entire school and grounds by the Review Team. The writers made an on-site visit on April 7-9, 2008, in order to provide an orientation for the staff and school administration to the various aspects and processes of the Review. As well, approximately 35 teacher interviews were conducted during the initial site visit. A second

visit by five Review Team members was made on May 5-7, for the purposes of administering the School Effectiveness Survey, viewing the school facilities, interviewing staff, students and parents, and conducting focus groups with a variety of stakeholders. At these times, informal discussions were held with students, teachers and administrators and staff regarding various aspects of school life. It should be noted that the research team was impressed by the warm reception provided by the students and all those who work at the school. It was apparent throughout our interviews that, despite any concerns the professionals in R. D. Parker Collegiate might have had with aspects of their professional lives, they were highly committed to their work and to the welfare of their students.

Surveys. The School Effectiveness Survey was administered to all students, teachers, staff, educational assistants and parents/guardians. All surveys addressed the same school effectiveness variables, but the number of items and wording varied according to maturity level. The Review Team provided paper surveys for parents as well as a link to complete the School Effectiveness Surveys on-line. Student, teacher and educational assistant/support staff were provided links to the survey website and were afforded the opportunity to complete the surveys on-line. The school administration distributed the parent/guardian surveys after the team visit, and the paper forms were either returned to the school or mailed directly to SELU. The number of possible and actual respondents for each group of respondents is provided in **Table 1**. (A copy of each survey is included in Appendix A. Appendices are bound separately from the School Effectiveness Report).



Table 1. Survey Returns for each Respondent Group

Survey	Possible Respondents	Number of Returns	Percent Returns
Grade 9 Students	228	153	67
Grade 10 Students	187	124	66
Grade 11 Students	177	124	70
Grade 12 Students	223	113	51
Parents/ Guardians (families)	720	97	14
Teachers	80	44	55
Educational Assistants/ Support Staff	37	17	46

From the information in **Table 1**, it can be seen that student representation in survey responses was the strongest. There was moderate to poor response numbers from teachers, support staff and parents/guardians. The parent response to the survey (14%) was regarded as low for surveys of this nature. This proportion was further supplemented by focus groups and individual interviews involving about 40 parents.

Interviews. Individual interviews were held with the principal, vice principal, all teachers, EA's, secretaries, caretakers, and parents randomly selected by SELU. Three focus group interviews were also held with samples of Grades 7-12 students. In total, more than 140 individuals participated in individual interviews, telephone discussions and focus groups. The interviews were structured in such a way that the interview questions were common to all members of the sub-groups. Opportunity was afforded for individuals to elaborate as they wished concerning their own experiences and views about the school. Examples of interview guides are provided in Appendix B.

Document Review. Data pertaining to classroom and school populations, parents and staff, school programs, procedures and policies, attendance, minutes of meetings, and sample communications were derived from documents and information supplied by the

administration and staff. These materials were valuable in supplementing and clarifying the picture of aspects of school life captured in the interviews and surveys.



DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Survey data were collated and analyzed by computer and the results were presented in the form of frequencies and percentages for each statement and category. For interested individuals, the full set of data (means, standard deviations, modes and item rankings) is included as Appendix C. A four-point scale ranging from ‘1’ for ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘4’ for ‘strongly agree’ was used for Grade 7 - 12 Students, Parents/Guardians, Teachers, and Educational Assistants/Support Staff. The ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ rankings were aggregated for each statement as were the ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’ categories. The Educational Assistants/Support Staff category included the front office staff, educational assistants, and custodial staff.

As a general guide to interpreting responses to each of the statements in the survey, when more than 70% of respondents indicated ‘agree/strongly agree,’ it was assumed that there was strong agreement with that statement. A percentage of less than 50% indicated a lack of agreement with that statement. When 25% or more of the respondents used the ‘Don’t Know’ option, the percentages are shown in parentheses next to the aggregated agreement/disagreement percentages.

Information from the interviews, focus groups, and written comments in the surveys was collated thematically, content analyzed, and, together with the observation data, combined to provide a review of the school according to each aspect of school effectiveness. Other documents were subjected to content analysis. A number of actual verbatim comments from the respondents are included in this report. These comments, selected from the verbatim and interview data, were used to illustrate the perceptions of respondents and to provide additional perspectives on the survey data. Throughout this report, the term ‘teacher’ indicates data from members of the teaching staff. The term ‘staff’ refers to the total group of teachers and educational assistants/support staff.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This chapter has provided the background and terms of reference for the review and has outlined the research methods that the Review Team utilized to gather and report the data. Chapter 2 presents the perceptions of a variety of groups and individuals as to the work of R.D. Parker Comprehensive School on each of the school effectiveness correlates in turn. A summary of major themes is provided in Chapter 3.

Following the one-day appreciative inquiry examination of the results of the study by the staff and administration of the school, on September 25, 2008, a description of possibilities and planning priorities for future action emerging from this session are included in Chapter 3.



CHAPTER 2

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FRAMEWORK AND THE SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS ATTRIBUTES

This chapter describes the School Effectiveness Attributes within an Effective Practices Framework. For over two decades, research on school effectiveness has emphasized that in effective schools a number of specific characteristics are evidenced consistently and purposefully. The Effective Practices Framework uses current research on the attributes of school effectiveness and expands it to include new dimensions pertinent to effective schools. . The new dimensions used in the framework are Authentic Partnerships which includes the traditional attributes of parent/student involvement and Comprehensive Prevention and Intervention. The framework and its relationship to the school effectiveness characteristics are described below.

Adaptive Leadership

1. A consistent and clear vision and purpose shared by all stakeholders
2. An empowering and positive leadership style
3. A professional learning community that focuses on teaching and learning

Caring and Respectful School Environment

1. Conscious attention to the maintenance of a warm, caring, and respectful climate that is conducive to learning
2. The maintenance of safe, attractive, and well maintained physical environment

Responsive Curriculum and Instruction

1. A strong, consistent emphasis on academic skills which is maintained in keeping with the school's philosophy of instruction
2. The use of appropriate instructional strategies for student learning

3. The provision of a well-resourced school in support of learning

Assessment for Learning

1. The attention to continuous, consistent, fair, and timely feedback to students and parents/guardians on student academic and social performance with a provision of authentic assessment that uses varied and appropriate assessment strategies

Authentic Partnerships

4. The promotion of active and positive parental/guardian involvement
5. A deliberate provision for the participation of students in the life of the school
6. The provision of supports to learning through school-linked services

Comprehensive Prevention and Early Intervention

7. Early identification of learning problems
8. Provision of prevention programs that are proactive and head off learning difficulties

In this Chapter, the information from various sources of data as they relate to the work of R.D. Parker Comprehensive school is presented for each of the above dimensions in turn.



ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP: VISION AND PURPOSE

Research has demonstrated that an effective school projects a shared philosophy and a sense of vision of what those involved want to achieve. A school's mission and primary goals are widely shared by teachers, administrators, staff, parents/guardians, and students. Those engaged in the day-to-day life of the school seek to build communities of parental/guardian and student support while keeping their common purpose paramount at all times. In essence, an effective school always keeps students' learning as the focus of its work.

While parents/guardians and other key stakeholders have a role to play in the development and clarification of the school's mission, the professional staff play a pivotal role in assessing the school's performance, discussing priorities, and developing collaborative ways of doing things that matter most in the school. Such a focus on mission is reflected in the following characteristics: shared norms and consistency throughout the school; agreed-upon ways of doing things; clearly stated goals known to all; a high degree of acceptance of the importance of goals; joint planning initiatives; and, data-based decision making. Inherent in achieving the mission of the school is the belief that the professional staff has the potential to change the culture of the school.

Parent, staff and student perceptions of the extent to which these characteristics are represented at R.D. Parker Comprehensive School are summarized in **Table 2**.



Table 2. Indicators of Adaptive Leadership: School Vision and Purpose

Item	% Indicating 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'						
	Parents/ Caregiver	Teachers	EA/SS	Students Gr. 9	Students Gr. 10	Students Gr. 11	Students Gr. 12
The staff has a clear idea of what the school should be doing for students.	37/44	43/52	35/47	61/21	63/25	54/35	40/52
Our school has a clearly identified belief and mission statement.		32/66	41/35				
I support our school's vision.		48/18					
Students are aware of the goals and priorities of this school.	35/58	18/75		61/22	56/26	60/29	48/40
Efforts are made to discuss the goals and priorities of this school.	27/52	39/61	24/41				
Improved student learning is the basis for school decision-making.	37/33	36/55	41/47				
Staff believe they can make a difference in the lives of students.		77/16	47/35				
The principal and staff are consistent in the way they do things.	24/56	18/80	24/59	70/18	62/19	59/31	41/49

As indicated in **Table 2**, assessments provided by parents, staff and students regarding aspects of school vision and purpose were not very positive. Specifically, there were low levels of agreement among parents, teachers and support staff with the statements: 'the staff has a clear idea of what the school should be doing for students,' 'people are aware of the goals and priorities of the school,' 'efforts are made to discuss the goals and priorities of the school,' 'improved student learning is the basis for school decision making,' and 'the principal and staff are consistent in the way they do things.' On the other hand, the greater proportion of the responding professional staff (77%) agreed with the item, 'staff believe they can make a difference in the lives of students.'

Students, particularly the Grade 9, 10 and 11 students, were much more positive than were the other groups that the principal and staff are consistent in the way they do

things, that the staff has a clear idea of what the school should be doing for students, and that students are aware of the goals and priorities of the school.

In the interviews, focus groups and surveys, people were asked in what ways this school exhibits a sense of vision and purpose. The following comments reflect the sense of vision and purpose among the staff at R.D. Parker Comprehensive School:

- *“This school has to be more than a drop-in centre. We need to convince the students that they do need to have an education.” (Support staff)*
- *“This school has amazing potential. It has so much to offer. But the students have to get there.” (teacher)*
- *“One goal is to get kids to come to school and stay!” (Support staff)*
- *“It is very grey. Some people think we have a clear vision. But we don’t get together and talk about this.” (teacher)*
- *“I’m not really aware of it. It’s never been really communicated to me.” (teacher)*
- *“I don’t think there is one that the staff has bought into.” (teacher)*
- *“I don’t think we have one! Everyone seems to be in it for themselves.” (teacher)*
- *“It is talked about every year, but I could not tell you what it is. We don’t know what direction we are going.” (teacher)*
- *“We have a vision, but implementing it is not happening.” (teacher)*
- *“They discussed the vision of the school board in their discussion with staff. At the board level, they don’t know if they want quantity or quality. They could be clearer as to what they want.” (teacher)*
- *“It is on paper, but there is no passion for it.” (teacher)*
- *“Departments have direction.” (teacher)*

- “We do not have meaningful discussion of goals and priorities.” (teacher)
- “There is no direction for the staff. This is leading to frustrations. (teacher)
- “We know the words, but they are not being lived by staff. We have no purpose, common direction.” (teacher)

Belief and Mission statements are practical tools intended to define criteria for decision-making. Each staff member must internalize and personalize these professional beliefs and resulting directions if consistency is to be maximized. A thematic analysis of comments related to school vision received from teachers and support staff revealed that the most frequently mentioned issues among teachers were related to lack of clarity in how the school vision is reflected in decision-making and school processes. The limitations placed on staff discussion, and continuing issues of attendance and graduation rates were also frequently mentioned. Support staff identified attendance issues most frequently as a vision-related issue.

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP: EMPOWERING AND POSITIVE LEADERSHIP

Effective schools invariably have effective leaders who are a visible and active presence in the school. They display common leadership qualities of assertiveness, willingness to assume responsibility, high standards for staff and students, personal vision, expertise, role modeling, and strength of character. Effective leadership, however, does not reside solely in one or two people. It is also a team quality and is therefore, a reflection of the professional staff and how its members are empowered through a culture of shared vision and shared decision-making. The opportunities for, and acceptance of, leadership among staff members is an important consideration in achieving school effectiveness. In sum, leadership in effective schools is *shared, collaborative, and empowering*. Parent, teacher, E.A. and student perceptions regarding aspects of leadership in this school are summarized in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Indicators of Leadership

Item	% Indicating 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'						
	Parents/ Caregiver	Teachers	EA/SS	Students Gr. 9	Students Gr. 10	Students Gr. 11	Students Gr. 12
The leadership in this school is effective.	26/62	30/68	12/82	52/29	48/34	44/44	35/55
The school staff work as a team.	21/46	16/84	18/65	59/14	53/16	48/31	46/36
The school staff serve as good role models.	45/36	75/25	65/29	61/24	61/25	54/35	49/41
Leadership in this school is distributed.		39/52					

Perceptions of aspects of leadership were relatively low across items for all groups, though Grade 9 and 10 students tended to be somewhat more positive in their assessments. All groups were most positive on the item, 'the school staff serve as good role models.' However, parents, teachers and EAs provided very low levels of agreement that the school staff work as a team. On a related note, only 39% of the responding teachers agreed that leadership in this school is distributed.' The following comments from the interviews and surveys provide some important elaboration regarding the above data:

- *The things I like about are school is that the principal keeps everything steady and won't let things get out of hand.* (Student)
- *"Administration is very helpful when I have a problem to discuss."* (Parent)
- *"I feel we have the freedom to try things, such as the Judo club."* Teacher)
- *"The school improvement program was driven by the teachers. Everyone chipped in. This is a good example of leadership."* (Teacher)
- *"I would like to see more assertive behaviour in the administration. Administration cannot seem to keep up with the committees (e.g., prom, grad, etc.)."* (Parent)
- *"I would like to see better communication between the principal and students."* (Parent)

- *“Currently, we have almost zero input into decisions.” (Student)*
- *“The school does encourage students to take part in voicing our thoughts for things like the graduation ceremony, but they ignore us, and go out of their way to do the exact opposite that we want. So we have a voice that is not heard.” (Student)*
- *“Communication is very poor.” Staff member)*
- *“The staff and administration need to be on the same page.”(Support staff)*
- *“Overall, one gets a sense of a lack of efficiency in the way the school is run.”(Support staff)*
- *“Our teachers’ union controls things here; administration runs scared.”(Teacher)*
- *“We’re a ship without a rudder and we’re all paddling in different directions.”(Teacher)*
- *“The staff doesn’t get to make a lot of decisions. They are asked for input and then when they give it, it’s not received. The result is that they don’t volunteer input anymore.” Support Staff)*
- *“My feeling is that people are withdrawing more and more from taking a lead role.” (Teacher)*
- *“Sometimes I wish it was more autocratic. Do we always have to vote on things? We shouldn’t have to please everybody. To be quite frank, I am prepared to trust others to make decisions.” (Teacher)*
- *“Who are the student leaders? Staff leaders?” (Teacher)*
- *“When dealing with issues involving students, decisions are made without consultation. There is very little follow-up.” (Teacher)*
- *“Decision-making is overly democratic. I’d like to see more decisiveness – make a decision and stick with it.” (Teacher)*

In summary, the thematic analysis of verbatim comments revealed that, among students, the most common leadership theme was a perceived lack of consistent discipline, particularly in relation to attendance. They also emphasized the need for

fairness (frequently in the context of the hat policy). Support staff also emphasized consistency and the need for improved communication. Among teachers, communication and the need for student leadership emerged most frequently, with the reference points concerning communication often being the quality of staff discussion, attendance and graduation rates. Parents most frequently addressed issues of consistency in discipline.

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP: THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

Much research on school effectiveness has been devoted to the concept of teachers working as a community of professionals. In particular, careful attention is given to the nature of staff collaboration, the opportunities for continuous teacher learning, and the extent of professional development initiatives. As well, the extent to which teachers jointly plan, engage in dialogue and discourse on teaching and learning, share their mental models, develop a shared sense of vision and purpose, are important determinants of student learning.

In recent years, numerous writers on school effectiveness have devoted serious attention to the professional community within the school, and its implications for collaborative cultures, as a significant enabling factor in school effectiveness. Following the work of Judith Little (1987) in clarifying the nature of professional collaboration, Barth (1990), Sergiovanni (1994), and Fullan and Hargreaves (1991), have shed light on the dynamics of this important dimension. This quality has also been related by writers such as Rosenholtz (1989) to an attitude of continuous self-renewal that becomes an integral part of school life. Most recently, Dufour (2001) has done significant work in demonstrating the value and the nature of professional learning communities as vehicles for enhancing student learning.

Table 4 presents Teacher and EA/SS survey data related to the quality of the professional community in this school. As illustrated in **Table 4**, seventy per cent of the responding teachers believed that planned professional development is supported and encouraged, while 64% agreed that continuous improvement is expected of teachers in this school. The majority of teachers and support staff felt their work is fairly supervised.

There were, however, numerous areas that teachers and support staff obviously believed to require attention.

Teachers and support staff provided low ratings on items relating to their levels of empowerment in the school, and the degree to which the school staff works collaboratively. Teachers expressed low agreement with the item, ‘expectations for teachers’ work are clear.’ Teacher responses were particularly low on the item: ‘there is a high level of trust on staff.’ While only 3% of responding teachers agreed that the quality of work life is high in this school, it should be noted that a significant proportion of teachers either did not respond or indicated ‘don’t know’ on this item.



Table 4. Indicators of Professional Community

Item	% Indicating ‘Agree’ and ‘Strongly Agree’ / % Indicating ‘Disagree’ and ‘Strongly Disagree’	
	Teachers	EA/SS
I feel empowered in this school.	39/61	35/65
Our school staff works collaboratively.	34/64	24/59
I have an adequate say in decisions that affect me.	50/50	35/53
The quality of work life is high in this school.	3/52	82/6
Continuous improvement is expected of us in this school.	64/30	47/29
There is a high level of trust on staff.	14/84	41/47
Planned professional development is supported and encouraged.	70/27	
Expectations for teachers’ work are clear.	36/55	
My work is fairly supervised.	55/36	65/24

In addition, there were many verbatim comments from teachers and EA’s regarding various aspects of the professional life of the school. The commonly voiced positive aspects of professional life were as follows:

- *“I love my job.” (Support staff)*

- *“This is a good place. I feel comfortable.” (Support staff)*
- *“I enjoy teaching. This school had the best contract in the province!” (Teacher)*
- *“We have a very good staff.” (Support staff)*
- *“We have lots of fabulous quality among the teachers.” (Teacher)*
- *“The people running this school are nice people!” (Teacher)*
- *“I love it! We have our own little sub-culture downstairs!” (Teacher)*
- *“We have good support for trying new things.” (Teacher)*
- *“We’re given lots of room to try new things.” (Teacher)*
- *“Coming to this school was like moving from purgatory to heaven.” (Teacher)*
- *“The school has a very laid-back environment.” (Teacher)*
- *I love it when the kids get it. You can see the light go on in their heads.” (Teacher)*
- *“I like connecting with kids and making a difference on their lives.” (Teacher)*
- *“I am motivated when the kids do well and when I see them reaching goals.” (Support staff)*
- *“Thompson is good to us.” (Support staff)*
- *“There is a lot of support for teaching and ideas for improvement.” (Teacher)*
- *“The principal is willing to hear creative ideas as to how we can improve our school.” (Teacher)*
- *“People have a chance to voice their opinions.” (Teacher)*
- *“Staff are allowed flexibility and freedom in how they approach their work.” (Teacher)*
- *“There is sharing between teaching staff in ideas and resources.” (Teacher)*
- *“It is a good place in our site with a team environment.” (Support staff)*

- *Administration is good at giving the training program.” (Support staff)*
- *“The vocational programs work collaboratively.” (Teacher)*
- *The staff is very welcoming professionally.” (Teacher)*
- *Socialization is good. The Thompson Teachers’ Association is good.” (Teacher)*
- *We have a group of staff that are really good at organizing things (e.g., curling, funspiels).” (Teacher)*
- *“For a school with this cross section of students all having diverse interests, I feel we have an awesome staff overall, and we work well as a collective for the greater good.” (Teacher)*
- *“As a new teacher, I have been much better supported recently. I know who to go to!” (Teacher)*

Among the less positive observations were the following:

- *“There is more of problem over trust with staff than with parents.” (Teacher)*
- *“It’s hard to get qualified subs.” (Teacher)*
- *“I hate it here. There is a total lack of education leadership and a lack of professionalism.” (Teacher)*
- *“The opportunity is there to engage in Personal Learning Community Groups.” (Teacher)*
- *“Mentoring is not done in an organized way.” (Teacher)*
- *“The older teachers do not communicate much with newer teachers.” (Teacher)*
- *“We are not a cohesive team!” (Teacher)*
- *“Staff activities feel like work.” (Teacher)*
- *“The vocational teachers feel isolated, perhaps due to the geographic location of the programs.” (Teacher)*
- *“I would like to see more problem-solving sessions.” (Teacher)*

- *“In the grade 9 alternative transition program, there is lots of collaboration.” (teacher)*
- *Teacher morale needs to be worked on.” (Teacher)*
- *“School spirit is lacking within the school and the staff morale is low at this point.” (Teacher)*
- *“School-wide Professional Development is critical.” (Teacher)*
- *“We need to empower our teachers and stop micro-managing them.” (Teacher)*
- *“While we have some really great and energetic staff, I think the morale on staff is low. Toxic workplace continues to be an issue. “ (Teacher)*
- *Staff are afraid to speak up in staff meetings and give their opinions because of a few ‘bullies’ on staff.” (Teacher)*
- *“Some individuals on staff are very toxic to the school climate.” (Teacher)*

In short, the major themes indicated by teachers concerned the quality of the professional environment were, the high quality of collaboration and collegiality *within* units, the strong focus of the school on student success, the lack of staff-wide communication, the existence of a professional climate of disrespect and tension, and the need to enhance the effectiveness of staff meetings. Among support staff, the key themes were a lack of communication, the need for more professional development/training, the lack of follow-up and discussion in their own evaluations, and the overall need for more support.

Details about EA/support staff perceptions of their work-life are summarized in **Table 5.**

Table 5. Adaptive Leadership: Educational Community Indicators of Educational Assistants and Support Staff Work Life

Item	% Indicating 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree and 'Strongly Disagree'
I am provided with adequate opportunities for on-the-job training.	47/47
This school provides adequate preparation for me in dealing with student* behavioural problems.	35/59
I am well qualified for my work.	100/0
In this school, there is good communication between support staff and teaching staff.	47/29
Teachers in this school are well prepared for working with support staff.	24/41
I feel that I am respected as a member of the educational team in this school.	18/71
I have a good working relationship with the teachers I work with.	94/0
I feel that I am recognized for good work.	71/29
I am clear about my role as a support staff member in this school.	53/18
Expectations for my performance are made clear.	47/47
I am given advice and assistance in working with children.	59/24
Expectations for my work with students are reasonable.	65/12
I get along well with other EA's in this school.	88/6

The highlights of these data are as follows:

- EA/SS reflected exceptionally strong levels of agreement (>80%) that they:
 - are well qualified for their work;
 - have good working relationships with the teachers they work with;
 - get along well with other EAs in the school.

EA/SS reflected strong levels of agreement (>70%) that

- are recognized for good work.

- EA/SS responses were less positive (<50%) in their levels of agreement with the statements that they:
 - have adequate preparation and assistance in dealing with student behaviour problems;
 - Are provided with adequate opportunities for on-the-job training;
 - Are clear as to the expectations for their performance;
 - experience good communication with teachers;
 - work with teachers who are well prepared for working with support staff;
 - are respected as members of the instructional team in the school; and,



From the above summary, it can be seen that the more common concerns among EAs and support staff related to role understanding, preparation for working with children, and levels of connection and interaction with the total professional community in the school. It is noteworthy that these represent common issues among schools where the growth in the number of EAs has been significant in recent years. These issues are reflected in the comments shared by EAs and support staff:

- *“We have poor provision and training, especially for Autism and FAS.” (Support Staff)*
- *“We only had one professional development day. I would like there to be more.” (Support staff)*
- *““Most of the support comes from the teacher and the team; administration is quite removed.” (Support staff)*
- *“ Communication with teachers is like trying to beat a dead horse.” (Support staff)*
- *“Support was better when there was a clear Department Head structure.” (Support staff)*

- *“The evaluation sheets don’t get to the specifics of my job.” (Support staff)*
- *“I’ve become my own supervisor. People stay in their own little world.” (Support staff)*
- *“I received my evaluation form in the mail, but I had no opportunity for discussion.” (Support staff)*
- *“People don’t work together that often. We’re just doing the best we can.” (Support staff)*
- *“L3 site is a great working team!” (Support staff)*
- *“The instructors are the strengths right now.”(Support staff)*
- *“Teachers seem to care about the kids they teach.” (Support staff)*
- *“I can only speak on the strengths of the L3 site: We work well as a team. We think of our site as a family. Our students feel comfortable with us and safe.” (Support staff)*
- *“The strengths are teachers, sports and the vocational programs.” (Support staff)*

CARING AND RESPECTFUL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: SCHOOL CLIMATE.

In effective schools, concerted attention is devoted to the creation and maintenance of a safe, caring environment that is conducive to learning. This includes the establishment of a climate in which students can enjoy school and the various relationships they experience within it. It relates, in turn, to the nature of school rules, school discipline, how people get along with each other, and the overall school spirit which prevails. In these contexts, very specific regulations and guidelines are laid down and they are clearly understood by everyone. A summary of parent, teacher, EA, support staff and student perceptions of the school’s climate is recorded in **Table 6**.

From the document review, it was apparent that the school continues to have a long term relationship with the Manitoba School Improvement Program (MSIP). It appears that this has led into the development of school improvement planning and

subsequent data collection over time to monitor and assess change in such things as school climate from a student perception. As well, targets were set for attendance and graduate rates which have been important issues over the years. Documents were submitted to the review team that assessed student satisfaction using a Likert type scale and student comments. Expectedly, this information was used for future planning. One report documented improved graduation rates from 48.19% to 58.45%. The long term goal that was set targeted the provincial graduation rate of 78%.

As well, there was a document provided that was from a previous study conducted as early as 2003 for R.D. Parker Collegiate that engaged staff, students and parents in surveys.

Table 6. Indicators of School Climate

Item	% Indicating 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'						
	Parents/ Caregiver	Teachers	EA/SS	Students Gr. 9	Students Gr. 10	Students Gr. 11	Students Gr. 12
Students enjoy school most days.	63/36	73/15	53/24	62/33	65/31	64/36	53/45
This school has a caring atmosphere.	40/54	59/41	65/24	51/37	54/35	42/52	41/57
Expectations for student behaviour are fair.	64/31	57/43	41/53	67/23	73/17	61/33	65/27
Discipline is fair.	44/39	41/59	29/65	61/26	58/31	49/41	53/41
Students show respect for one another in this school.	22/68	48/50	59/41	37/54	31/59	26/73	29/66
This school has good school spirit.	27/62	9/89	35/65	59/33	46/43	35/56	37/56
The school provides a safe environment for students.	48/47	70/30	59/29	58/33	62/28	54/41	49/46
*Teachers respect students at this school.	43/47	70/30	59/29	68/25	57/31	64/30	58/35
Students respect *teachers in this school.	25/65	59/39	35/65	41/46	31/54	26/65	33/59
Bullying is not a problem in this school.	7/75	11/84	12/82	57/28	24/58	14/73	21/68
Bullying is dealt with in this school.	24/49	25/61	35/41	48/38	47/39	31/51	35/49

As illustrated in the data in **Table 6**, generally, the most positive aspects of school climate were student enjoyment of school and expectations for student behaviour were clear. These items showed the most consistent agreement across respondent groups. Teachers were more inclined to be positive about the school climate especially on the items ‘students enjoy school most days,’ provision of a safe environment’ and ‘teachers respect for students.’

It was apparent from the data that there is a pervasive view by the majority of the respondent groups that many areas of school climate need to be addressed including presenting an atmosphere of caring, developing a climate of respect, enhancing school spirit and reducing the problem of bullying in the school. With regards to bullying, respondent groups identified that bullying was a problem and a significant percentage of each respondent group felt it was not being dealt with. If students are concerned about physical bullying, this could account for the concern about the school providing a safe environment for students.

Additional perspectives on school climate were provided in the variety of verbatim and interview comments of respondents. The qualitative data presents comments that provide a more balanced view of the climate and presents a slightly more positive outlook. However, there are numerous comments made by respondent groups that support the quantitative data as illustrated in the table above.

When students were asked to identify strengths in the school, there was a common theme about being with their friends at school and socialization was a positive. Another theme identified by both students and parents that encouraged a positive feeling about the school was student involvement in the extra-curricular program. Teachers commented on the school’s diverse population and its cultural sensitivity as a strong point.

Themes that emerged from the respondent groups also supported the data shown in the Indicators of School Climate. Student themes were lack of school spirit, safety concerns, gangs, the school’s poor reputation and student cliques. Teachers were

concerned about issues of respect, consistency of applying policy and favouritism. Parent and educational assistant themes covered all of the foregoing.

In more specific terms, some of the staff member interviewed felt that the school could be more welcoming. Although there was general agreement from the student focus groups that there could be a more welcoming environment, they were adamant that the school climate was dependent on the teachers in the classroom.

Members of all stakeholder groups acknowledged the presence of gangs and drugs in the school. The cafeteria and outside school yard were mentioned as areas to avoid. Students in the focus groups were more concerned about verbal bullying than gangs. While there was mention of some discrimination and student groups such 'druggies', 'preppies', 'losers' and 'normal', member of the student groups said that they found a new mix of friends in high school. There was a nodding of heads when one student expressed that student's at R.D. Parker 'are not cliquish like in the movie *Mean Girls*.

When questioned about school spirit, members of the various stakeholder groups experienced some school spirit in aspects of the school such as within their department (teachers) or within the athletic events) (students). Students in the focus groups indicated a lack of school spirit and would like to see cheerleaders, a school cheer, spirit day, and pep rallies. They also mentioned that school clothing was not pleasing to wear, the yearbook is not representative of all students and the school assemblies were dreaded. The following comments from interview and survey data provide support for both the positive and negative view points as presented above. From a positive viewpoint:

- '*teachers hold the school together*' (teacher)
- '*friends are here*' (student)
- '*security guard make the students feel safer*' (student)

- *‘ I like that there is discipline in the school and teachers respect the students and other staff.’ (student)*
- *‘ I like this school has lots of different groups of people, and on the whole, are respected.’ (student)*
- *‘ most of the grade 9 kids feel supported. We do a pretty good job of the transitional orientation’ (teacher)*
- *‘ teachers are very accepting and caring of other students’ (teacher)*

As well, as those who presented a picture of the school climate in more positive terms, there were those who felt improvements could be made.

- *‘ this school is fairly safe. There have been incidents, though, which are related to the crime wave in the city. Students are being recruited into criminal activity – this means safety is a concern.’ (teacher)*
- *‘ the image is that school is unsafe’ (teacher)*
- *‘ the environment isn’t very welcoming people don’t know who you are!’ parent*
- *‘ the school has an undertone of racism – them versus us’ (teacher)*
- *‘ there is bullying and threats from some people. Some people are scared and some have left because of this.’ (teacher)*
- *‘ parents are apprehensive to come to school and are apprehensive of having their children here. (teacher)*
- *‘ we try to be welcoming , but we are falling short. There is not a lot of school spirit. For example – when we had the Battles of the Bands – no one came out’ (teacher)*
- *‘ most students are unhappy with where they are. They come to school, but don’t go to class; they hang out in the library and the hallway. (teacher)*

Administrators in the school are cognizant of many of the issues raised in the surveys and interviews affecting school climate. As stated by one member, The City of Thompson is a growing and changing community and the school has to make adjustments in their operation to suit the new environment. This makes it difficult to find the right

course of action and some staff would like to see a return to ‘how it used to be,’ which is not going to happen.

The administration continues to be concerned with attendance and the significant loss of students that were initially enrolled in school at the beginning of the term. Administration have put programs and policies in place that have the potential to address some of these issues, but have not been fully effective do, in part, to poor follow through. Related to the foregoing, there is an underlying feeling on the part of administration that they have the support of some teachers, but face an uphill battle with others. With regards to discipline, there appears to be dissonance between administration and some staff. A segment of staff feel the administration is too soft on student behavior and would like to see strong action from administrators such as expulsion from school. Administration has the view, they are in the business on keeping students in school, and their subsequent action on a discipline/attendance matters may favor a student thus creating dissonance between administration and some staff.

Overall, the major issues appear to be a concern about providing an environment of respect and dealing with issues of bullying that quite often lead to a concern over safety. There was an underlying feeling that the school could be more welcoming for both students and parents.

CARING AND RESPECTFUL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The physical environment is an important supporting condition by which the key qualities of school life can be enhanced. Basic standards of appearance, attractiveness, and cleanliness relate to the upkeep of the facility and speak eloquently to the priorities and attitudes of those who work in the school as well as those who are responsible for its maintenance. The extent to which the physical environment contributes to safety, and the teaching and learning process is a critical consideration.. Parent, teacher and student responses to survey questions about the physical environment at R. D. Parker Collegiate are summarized in **Table 7**.



Table 7. Indicators of Physical Environment

Item	% Indicating 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'						
	Parents/ Caregiver	Teachers	EA/SS	Students Gr. 9	Students Gr. 10	Students Gr. 11	Students Gr. 12
I am satisfied with the school facility.	54/44	66/34	59/35	63/30	68/26	60/37	56/39
I am satisfied with the school grounds.	49/43	52/48	41/47	59/33	56/39	48/49	50/45
The school is clean.	77/20	68/30	71/29	58/35	58/37	48/49	51/45
Vandalism (writing on the walls, etc.) is not a problem in this school.	25/58	45/52	18/59	31/54	29/65	31/65	24/66
The school facility is designed to ensure student safety.	38/44	55/34	59/35	61/29	66/24	66/22	57/36

This is a 1960's vintage building that has seen some additions and renovations over the past 20 years. The facility itself is quite spread out with parts of the school built on three levels; upper level, main level and basement. It has a large theatre that could seat several hundred people, a spacious gymnasium that can be divided into several teaching stations, extensive shops and trade areas, a serviceable cafeteria, as well as a library that was quite central to the school. In the centre of the school on the main level was a circular bowl area called the 'forum' used for informal gatherings and certainly contributed to student's informal socialization. Classroom space appeared to be adequate in meeting instructional needs. Essentially, the school is quite spacious and classroom availability did not appear to be at a premium for class scheduling. It seemed from a visitor's perspective to be clean with some cracks in flooring and older materials that made maintenance and cleaning quite difficult especially in washrooms and entrances. On our tours of the school, the study team did not see graffiti or vandalism in any areas of the building. From all appearances, movement in the hallway was orderly during class exchanges, at noon hour and after school. There was some hallway loitering that was observed that could contribute to lateness or attendance problems. Students typically were friendly and courteous to the study team.

From the data contained in **Table 7**, it was quite clear respondent groups have mixed feelings about the quality of the physical environment of R.D. Parker. Students

were generally more satisfied with the facility than were parents. Parents, teachers and support staff were quite positive about the cleanliness of the school while students, particularly senior students were most critical. On the other hand, students were more positive about how the school design contributed to safety than were parents and staff. There was a consistent feeling among all respondent groups the vandalism was a problem in the school.

The qualitative data from surveys and interviews provided more specific commentary that will contribute to the understanding of the Indicators of the Physical Environment in **Table 7**.

The administrative personnel and most the teachers interviewed along with students the focus groups considered the school to be a safe place. The presence of the RCMP and security guards has contributed to the assurance of safety; however, safety is still voiced as a concern for members of the support staff. Facilities that were specifically mentioned in a positive view by members within the student focus groups were the breakfast room, student services room and the weight room. The major themes considered as strengths that were consistent among the student open-response comments and the focus groups interviews were the gymnasium, track, and the cafeteria. On the other hand, they perceived the cafeteria as “crappy” and “claustrophobic” and the student washrooms in dire need of repair. Students and parents overall seemed to be pleased with the school’s overall cleanliness. Students and parents quite often commented on the space issues and in particular the narrow hallways that contribute to overcrowding. Vandalism was a common concern of students and parents, dated facilities and garbage littering the school grounds in the survey and interview comments. The following specific comments support the overall themes mentioned above.

- *‘ the original part of the school could use a facelift.’ (teacher)*
- *‘ we have a leaky roof and windows. There is poor upkeep at times.’ (teacher)*
- *‘ we need a new school; rather than refurbishing what it needs, it would be cheaper to build a new one.’ (support staff)*

- *‘ we need bigger windows and bigger rooms. But the building is in good shape. Caretaking is good.’ (teacher)*
- *‘ we have a good facility. We have minor issues regarding upgrades here and there.’ (teacher)*
- *‘ the hallway is too narrow with lockers’ (teacher)*
- *‘ the facility is getting old. It needs an overhaul. It is harder to get clean as materials are older.’ (teacher)*
- *‘ I like the cafeteria, the totally ‘jammin’ theatre, and last but not least, the breakfast Club of joy.’ (student)*
- *‘ I do enjoy the library because it is a nice quiet environment to just go to get away and read and do work. I like the forum too; its structure interests me and is also comfortable to be in.’ (student)*
- *‘ I like that there is space and room in the vocational program of carpentry and we have our own building for the two different majors and also an extra building for aviation majors and this provides a lot of work space.’ (student)*
- *‘ make the school bigger – I’m tired of the ridiculous jamming of the hallways.’ (student)*
- *‘ there should be a window in every class.’ (student)*
- *‘ the building needs a lot of renovations and isn’t really that safe.’ (student)*
- *‘ the building and grounds are deteriorating quickly’ (teachers)*
- *‘ the school grounds has too much garbage (support staff)*
- *‘ resources could be pooled to create better facilities for both the division and the city – after all, it is all taxpayers dollar.’*

There was a general view that the school building was quite serviceable and had several areas that met program and student needs quite well. The school itself is getting older and drew many comments related to upgrades and renovations. Most respondent groups felt the school was clean, but felt less positive about the grounds.

RESPONSIVE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION: ACADEMIC EMPHASIS

One of the crucial concerns for any school is its emphasis on academic work as a continuing priority. Effective schools are distinguished by a marked focus on high student achievement and it is reflected in the amount of school time and professional energy devoted to it. Time-on-task is maximized and homework is assigned regularly and used as a basis for remediation. Effective schools provide programs that meet the learning needs of their student clientele. Adequate attention is devoted to the basic skills of reading, writing, and computing. Students are taught to think critically, to communicate competently, to solve problems, and to use technology to enhance their learning. Of course, a school's student attendance rate is also an indicator of the concerted effort placed upon academic learning.

Survey data related to Academic Emphasis in specific programs are displayed in **Table 8.**



Table 8. Indicators of Academic Emphasis

Item	% Indicating 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Parents/ Caregiver	Teachers	Students Gr. 9	Students Gr. 10	Students Gr. 11	Students Gr. 12
On the whole, homework assignments are reasonable and fair.	81/13	73/9	59/39	73/21	73/25	73/24
Sufficient emphasis is given to the academic program in this school.	54/35	52/48	62/10	58/15	64/20	58/32
Students are given the opportunity to work on individual projects.	71/12	82/11	74/18	78/16	78/12	83/15
We are satisfied with how much students are learning in this school.	40/55	41/50	73/21	73/22	72/25	57/40
We are satisfied with students' reading skills.	76/22	39/48	84/11	86/8	84/13	85/12
We are satisfied with how much students are learning in English Language Arts.		--	82/14	79/15	80/15	74/20
We are satisfied with how much students are learning in mathematics.	59/39	43/20	78/18	74/19	75/19	58/37
We are satisfied with how much students are learning in science.	65/30	41/23	84/9	80/14	67/24	58/29
We are satisfied with the students' learning in the area of writing skills.	64/35	38/27	76/20	75/18	76/19	75/23
We are satisfied with how much students are learning in social studies.	68/22	55/9	82/12	73/20	70/21	58/27
We are satisfied with how much students are learning in fine arts.	56/17	52/2	61/16	52/20	55/16	43/27
We are satisfied with how much students are learning in physical education.	77/18	66/5	84/10	81/12	79/12	59/16
We are satisfied with how much students are learning in health.	79/10	68/2	71/16	82/12	71/16	55/22
This school does a good job of teaching computer skills.	40/27	30/36	64/25	59/29	62/33	62/28
The resource room is important to my learning.	56/14	82/16	53/33	56/36	52/41	54/40

Survey data related to Academic Emphasis in specific programs are displayed below in **Table 8**. When reviewing the 17 items that made up the Indicators of Academic Emphasis, only ‘students are given the opportunity to work on individual projects’, ‘satisfaction with learning in health and physical education’ and ‘satisfaction with student learning in English Language Arts’ showed consistently high levels of agreement for all respondent groups.

There was general agreement from most respondent groups on a number of items. ‘Homework assignments were reasonable and fair’ had most respondent groups in agreement with the statement except for grade 9 students where 39% of the students disagreed with the statement. Interesting to note, students and parents felt very positive about their level of satisfaction with reading skills while only 43% of the teachers agreed with the statement ‘we are satisfied with students’ reading skills’. There was a similar concern expressed by teachers with student writing skills.

Parents, teachers and grade 12 students were concerned about how much students were learning in school and, in particular, their level of learning in mathematics and science. Items that showed consistently low levels of satisfaction across most respondent groups were ‘the school providing sufficient emphasis on the academic program’, ‘satisfaction with learning in fine arts’ and ‘the school is doing a good job of teaching computer skills’. All respondent groups indicated low levels of agreement for the resource room being important in their learning except for teachers who showed a level of agreement at 82%. There was indication from all respondent groups except for grade 9 students that homework assignments were reasonable and fair.

There were a number of comments made from all respondent groups about the strength of the teaching staff. Comments quite often indicated how most of their teachers were prepared to provide extra help when needed.

- *“ I feel that I have teachers that are willing to go the distance in part of my learning experience and are very effective when I need help.” (student)*
- *“ Certain teachers go the extra mile to encourage and facilitate student learning.” (Student)*

From the document review, it was clear the R.D. Parker offers a broad program of studies to meet the varied interests and needs of students. In accordance with the provincial curricula and local determination of programs, the school offers diverse programming as indicated in the Student Information booklet. The school provides an academic program for students in English and French as well as having an array of options that includes programs in computer technology, career work experience and technical-vocational areas.

When asked about the strengths of R.D. Parker School on the survey and through interviews, there was a reoccurring theme from all respondent groups that the school has many program options and opportunities for student choice. Essentially, the school has something for everyone. Some comments made to support this view were:

- *“ this school’s strength is its program” (EA)*
- *“ the opportunities at this school are wonderful. It is so diversified” (support staff)*
- *“ the special needs program here is fabulous. We have lots of life skills and even adaptive gym” (teacher)*
- *“ there is a huge variety of opportunity for the kids” (teacher)*

The technical vocational program was thought to be a very strong feature of the school. The school offers programming in construction, power mechanics, electronics, welding, cosmetology, photography, graphic arts and aviation mechanics which is a new program and the only one in the province. Although there was considerable strength in this area students felt there could be more done in welding, heavy duty mechanics and a new shop for power mechanics.

- “ *there is something for everybody: academic and vocational*” (teacher)
- “ *the technology program offer strong opportunity for apprenticeship programs in a variety of areas*” (teacher)
- “ *I like the technical vocational program*” (student)

Teachers, support staff, parents and student respondents all talked about the effect the Inco mine has on student attitudes about finishing school. Although the school has a variety of programs to retain students at R.D. Parker, there is still a positive attraction to take a job with Inco and earn a very high wage rather than completing grade 12. As well, there was a strong feeling that businesses in Thompson encourage students to work more hours causing irregular attendance and reduced grades. It was reported as well that the school has developed important partnerships with Inco and other businesses that should be nurtured. Perhaps this is an avenue for discussion that would facilitate improved attendance and student retention.

Respondent groups from their comments felt that the music program at R.D. Parker was one of their key programs areas. Many considered the instrumental band program to be a high quality program. As well they spoke about the choice between band and choir as popular feature of the school.

- “ *the only reason that I am still even going to school right now and have not dropped out is because of the music program*” (Student)
- “ *the music program is one of the best in the province*” (parent)

A number of respondents made positive comments about the physical education program in the school. In this regard, on several occasions track and field was singled out.

- “ *I like the track and field program because it keeps kids in shape*” (Student)
- “ *Track and field is amazing – Most teachers are extremely supportive* (Student)

Although some students were positive about the athletic program others favoured increased emphasis on programming that wasn't elitist and allowed all to participate..

- “ *We need more intramural sports*” (students)
- “*The school needs more opportunities for students other than athletics or music.* (Student)

There was a feeling from respondent groups that the extensive programming at R.D. Parker School was a particular strength. Students appeared to be quite positive about the development of basic skills more so than their teachers who may have much higher expectations.

RESPONSIVE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

School effectiveness research suggests a positive relationship between student achievement and the expectations that teachers hold for them. The underlying theory is that all students have the capability to meet intellectual goals in various areas. In particular, *Multiple Intelligences' Theory* supports the notion that every child has some area of strength and that other areas can be developed utilizing appropriate instructional strategies. Generally, teachers who hold appropriately high expectations for learning, compared to teachers who hold lower expectations, tend to have students who achieve at higher levels. Teachers who regularly employ a variety of instructional strategies, who make expectations for student work clear, who are available to provide extra help when needed, and who keep students motivated to succeed, have students who achieve better. Survey data on Instructional Strategies are presented in **Table 9**.



Table 9. Indicators of Instructional Strategies

Item	% Indicating 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Parents/ Caregiver	Teachers	Students Gr. 9	Students Gr. 10	Students Gr. 11	Students Gr. 12
Teachers create an atmosphere which promotes student learning.	64/29	95/0	59/31	62/29	58/38	51/47
Teachers make expectations for class work clear to students.	70/24	93/0	78/16	81/14	69/24	74/22
Teachers are available to give extra help when needed.	66/28	93/2	88/9	81/10	81/15	81/15
Teachers expect work to be done to the best of students' abilities.	74/21	86/0	91/6	88/6	81/10	84/12
Teachers are prepared for class.	54/23	91/0	85/12	80/12	82/14	74/23
Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies.	43/27	91/0	75/17	67/24	69/26	59/35
Teachers provide students the opportunity to work with one another.	58/14	89/0	86/9	73/19	74/18	73/23
Teachers expect students to use the resource room/library regularly.			48/32	46/40	46/46	37/42
Teachers adapt their instruction to meet the needs of their students.	40/40	86/5	46/40	44/48	40/56	39/53

The Indicators of Instructional Strategies are shown above. Most respondent groups felt quite positive about 'teachers making expectations for class work clear to students', 'teachers are available to give extra help when needed' 'teachers expect work to be done to the best of students' abilities' and 'teachers are prepared for class.' The lowest level of agreement from respondent groups was with the items 'teachers expect students to use the resource room/library regularly and 'teachers adapt their instruction to meet the needs of their students.' Parent and teachers were not asked to respond to the library survey question.

For all 9 items, teacher's level of agreement with the item statements were generally higher than parental and student responses. For example, on the item 'teachers create an atmosphere that promotes learning, none of the teachers disagreed with the statement while all other respondent groups had levels of disagreement from a low of 29% level of disagreement to a high of 47%.

Consistently high ratings across all groups of respondents suggested that teachers in this school make expectations for class work clear to students, expect work to be done to the best of the students' abilities, and are available to give extra help when needed. There was also a strong perception that these teachers are well prepared for class and provide students with the opportunity to work with one another, except for parents who rated this item a little lower. Adapting instruction to meet student needs and raising expectations related to using the library were considered weaker areas particularly by the students.

Respondent group survey and interview comments in many respects supported the views expressed in the Likert scale survey. When assessing the instructional strengths, students, teachers and parents all mentioned the teaching staff. In many cases they commented on how most teachers were available to give extra help when students needed it. The teachers themselves felt that they were strong instructionally and were creative in their approach to planning for instruction. Parents thought that many of teachers really invest in their students and work hard to help them learn.

- *'many of the teachers are supportive and recognize good quality work and help you understand subjects.'*(student)
- *'I like the way teachers are supportive and recognize good quality work, and they help you understand subjects. (student)*
- *' One strength is our tutorial program in the evenings (teacher)*

As well, each audience expressed certain concerns about the instructional program in the school. Although the students felt that the teaching staff was strong, they typically qualified it by saying 'most teachers' or 'some teachers' that suggests teaching quality wasn't always consistent. There was an underlying feeling that not all teachers were there for them when they needed help. They mentioned that some teachers did not vary their instruction or make changes when students were not learning. Some students thought that some of their teachers were not well qualified in a subject and were teaching outside of their expertise. Finally, a number of students felt that expectations for homework were too high. This was particularly evident at the grade 9 level.

- *‘ I think having more activities and different kinds of classes would be better’ (student)*
- *‘there needs to actually be time set aside for our later literacy teachers to work with individual students one on one, rather than somehow expecting later literacy to be done during class by the classroom teacher’ (teacher)*
- *‘Teachers must use more variety and learning activities to enhance students learning to replace the traditional methods of teaching.’ (teacher)*
- *‘teachers need to spend the amount of time recommended by the Manitoba Department of Education in the classroom teaching the student. I believe they are falling well short of the recommended time in the classroom.’ (parent)*
- *‘there are a lot of teachers in this school that go by the book which is not a good thing if they don’t understand the things they are teaching.’ (Parent)*

RESPONSIVE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION: RESOURCES

Resources available in the school are important contributors to the quality of instruction and consequently enhanced student learning. The availability and appropriateness of materials, books, computers and equipment are all essential supports for the instructional program. The Learning Resource Centre in the school should be accessible and provide a range of materials that assist staff in support of student learning. Perceptions of respondents regarding these qualities are summarized in **Table 10**.



Table 10. Indicators of Resources

Item	% Indicating 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'						
	Parents/ Caregiver	Teachers	EA/SS	Students Gr. 9	Students Gr. 10	Students Gr. 11	Students Gr. 12
The school is well equipped.	40/33	64/34	47/35	75/13	69/23	65/29	64/28
The school has adequate instructional materials (e.g., books, visuals, computers, etc.) to help students learn.	36/43	59/32	29/47	75/17	76/19	76/19	65/30
Students have adequate access to computer technology in the school.	47/22	61/34	47/35	79/16	81/15	77/18	81/13
The Learning Resource Centre materials adequately support all school programs.	31/20	55/23	29/24	55/17	55/15	53/23	58/27

Overall, on the Indicators of Resources, parents, teachers and support staff were less supportive of the resourcing of the school than the students. Parents and EA's and support staff were particularly negative on all of the items where teachers were a little more accommodating. The Learning Resource Centre was not viewed as adequately supporting all the school programs.

When reviewing the survey and interview comments in the area of instructional resources, students cited the library and computers as being strong. Although this might be strength, it was also seen that there was a need upgrades. Support staff appeared to be sympathetic to a money shortage and although the resources seemed good there could always be more. Teachers were generally satisfied with instructional resources, but indicated the need for upgrades in technology and textbooks and increased accessibility.

The following quotes support the strengths in the area of resources.

- *'the new computers in the library' (student)*
- *'I like the resources we get to use for studying and taking care of our way to learn.'* (student)

- *‘ the school has the resources – library, special needs, work education, resource teachers, aboriginal studies etc.’(teacher)*
- *‘excellent –these guys are phenomenal about giving you the supplies, etc. You want.’ (teacher)*

As well, there were comments that suggested and supported the notion that improvements were needed.

- *‘ we need better and more computers in the library.’ (student)*
- *‘the textbooks need updating.’ (student)*
- *‘I’d like to see our textbooks get updated.’ (teacher)*
- *‘ the books in the library are not recent.’ (student)*
- *‘this is a problem – I came into a completely empty classroom with no resources for it. Some of it I brought myself.’ (teacher)*

There were likely some equipment and materials needed to make programming at R.D. Parker better or easier; however, it was apparent that generally this school was quite well resourced and teachers were provided with the things needed to do a good job in the classroom in meeting student learning needs.

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING: FEEDBACK

Professionals in effective schools consider feedback on student work to be a core activity deserving of substantial time and effort. Reliable and timely feedback on academic performance means that teachers are constructive, consistent, continuous, and fair when assessing student work. Increasingly, teachers in effective schools are providing a tighter focus on student assessment through linkages with curriculum and attention to clarity and validity of assessment procedures. Effective teachers recognize good work, reward students for their efforts, evaluate fairly, regularly talk to students about their work, and provide feedback on assignments in a reasonable amount of time. Moreover, effective teachers use evaluation for the purposes of remediation and

encouragement of student effort. Teachers in effective schools are conscious of the linkage between instruction and assessment and use strategies that are appropriate in assessing learning. As well, teachers in these schools are familiar with a variety of assessment strategies and use them regularly. Furthermore, effective schools keep parents/guardians informed of student progress and work with them to ensure learning success. Data on Feedback are presented in **Table 11**.

There was solid affirmation in the responses that students in this school are evaluated in a variety of ways, students are evaluated fairly and are recognized for good work. There was little agreement among the respondent groups on many of the remaining items. Expectedly, teachers were more positive about their evaluation practices than were the other respondent groups except on the item 'students are recognized for good work'. Lower levels of agreement from most respondent groups were indicated for regular reporting of student progress, which suggests a communication issue. Grade 9 students were uniformly more positive on all of the feedback items than other grade levels. This was particularly evident with fairness of evaluation and being recognized for good work. Parent satisfaction with the feedback items was consistently lower than teacher and student respondent groups.

Table 11. Indicators of Feedback

Item	% Indicating 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' / % Indicating 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'					
	Parents/ Caregiver	Teachers	Students Gr. 9	Students Gr. 10	Students Gr. 11	Students Gr. 12
On the whole, students are recognized for good work in this school.	64/23	68/32	79/13	67/24	70/25	68/31
Teachers regularly report student progress to parents/guardians.	37/57	82/18	58/27	50/35	47/44	42/50
Generally, assignments are corrected and returned in a reasonable amount of time.	53/32	70/14	59/35	71/25	72/23	59/38
Students' work is evaluated fairly.	68/18	75/14	80/12	67/22	73/22	69/27
Teachers regularly talk to students about their work.	31/68	95/2	68/25	62/35	51/45	54/43
The feedback our child receives helps him/her to learn.	53/38		70/20	68/25	70/22	65/30
Teachers evaluate our child's progress in a variety of ways (tests, essays, etc).	82/8		84/9	82/10	80/15	85/12

The interview and survey open responses support the numerical data presented above, but also raised other issues that were not considered in the table items. There was a general theme from students and some parents that communication could be better when a student is not making adequate progress in their learning. However, this was not a consistent view as some students indicated that parents were called when a student was doing poorly and well as when they were doing good. Essentially, the claim is that earlier intervention and communication with parents has the potential to head off emerging issues as well as making parents feel that the school really cares about their child.

Several respondent groups including teachers were concerned about the assessment and evaluation policies in the school such as information on how grades are contrived and the speed at which tests and assignment are returned. These comments typically related to changing marks or consistency of practices. Some parents took issue

with the parent-teacher interview format and felt attendance could improve with a different organizational arrangement. Supporting comments are as follows.

- *‘ teachers should be more fast at marking tests’ (student)*
- *‘ I think it should be mandatory for teachers to provide information about your marks, or how well you are doing (student)*
- *‘ I would like to know how teachers are marking things’(student)*
- *‘ Teachers need to be more accountable and accessible to the parents and there needs to be a better, more consistent way of assessing and evaluating student progress’ (parent)*
- *‘ There needs to be better communication between administration and parents. I would like to be better informed of what is going on in the school and with my child.’ (parent)*
- *‘ No marking system orientation’ (teacher)*
- *‘ If student is failing with a 30 and admin. will pass them yet my son had a 48 and they would not budge – lack of consistency’ (parent)*

There was a strong perception that teachers are using a variety of assessment strategies for evaluating student learning. There appears to some issues regarding communication of assessment information to both students and parents.

AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS: PARENTAL/GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT

There is a significant body of research that advances the view that meaningful parental/guardian involvement is closely related to higher student achievement. Recent studies have also found that parental/guardian involvement is related to decreased absenteeism and to improved perceptions of school and classroom climate. As well, a few studies have noted that student behaviour tends to improve as parents/guardians become more involved in their child(ren)'s schooling. Consequently, parents/guardians have an important role to play in encouraging, monitoring and supporting their child(ren)'s educational efforts. Numerous studies have documented how children from dysfunctional

homes have a difficult time being successful in school. School staff and parents/guardians need to work together to ensure the child(ren)'s success with academic and social learning. Details of perceptions regarding Parental involvement at R.D. Parker Comprehensive School are summarized in **Table 12**.

Table 12. Indicators of Parental Involvement

Item	% Indicating 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' % Indicating 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'						
	Parents/ Caregiver	Teachers	EA/SS	Students Gr. 9	Students Gr. 10	Students Gr. 11	Students Gr. 12
The school communicates effectively with parents/guardians.	28/69	30/66	24/47	57/25	53/30	53/36	43/44
Parents/guardians are involved in their child(ren)'s academic work.	93/4	11/80	24/35	76/19	78/16	78/18	79/17
Parents/guardians feel welcome at this school.	70/28	68/25	53/35	68/16	59/14	64/22	64/24
Parents/guardians are kept informed about school matters.	26/70	45/50	47/35	60/24	52/31	44/44	31/57
Parents/guardians are asked for their opinions about the school.	19/75	34/50	18/53	36/39	31/45	24/58	22/60
Parents/guardians frequently participate in parent-teacher interviews.	79/15	39/59		61/27	52/41	52/38	42/52
Parents/guardians are aware of what their child is studying in school.	33/63	52/41		59/26	48/40	51/38	39/53

Analysis of these Parent/Guardian Involvement data should take into consideration the age of the students, the changing nature of families, and of work. The parents/guardians of secondary age pupils tend to be less involved with their child's school than is the case for elementary pupils. As well, many students now find themselves a part of a changing family structure that can result, especially in the case of secondary students, in less immediate parental/guardian supervision. Finally, the current economic situation often dictates that parents/guardians hold more than one job and work extended and perhaps irregular hours, often outside their immediate community. The net

result for the school is parents/guardians are not as available as they once were for direct involvement at the school. Parents/Guardians who are short of time have to pick their occasions for involvement and, typically, select parent/guardian-teacher interviews and extra curricular activities.

It is often said that Parent/Guardian Involvement ebbs and flows dependent upon the school situation. This statement is very appropriate in the context of R. D. Parker.

There was a general agreement that the parents are made to feel welcome at this school, and a good reinforcement of this point was the fact that 70% of the parents believed this to be the case. There was an interesting contrast between parents and teachers/staff on a few items:

- While parents and students agreed that they are frequently involved in parent-teacher interviews, the teacher strongly disagreed;
- While parents strongly agreed that they are involved in their children's education, the teachers very strongly disagreed with the statement;
- While the majority of responding teachers agreed that parents are aware of what their children are studying in school, parents and high school students were inclined to disagree.
- It should be noted that students across all grades provided strong agreement (over 75%) that parents are involved in their academic work.

Perhaps the most significant message across all groups was the *common disagreement that parents are asked for their opinions about the school*. Similarly, there was low agreement on the part of teachers/support staff and parents with the statement, 'the school communicates effectively with parents.' Some of the verbatim comments made in this area were as follows:

- *It's always the same parents. Those who show are supportive. Parents with students in music and athletics usually involved.* (Teacher)
- *"I have many exchanges of emails/phone calls with parents. I have good turnout (30%)."* (Teacher)
- *"I get a lot of parents because the French Immersion parents are involved in the school. They want to know the curriculum. They are positive and sometimes ask for more work for the students."* (Teacher)
- *"Some parents are not always comfortable. Some parents have frustrations with the school."* (Teacher)
- *"The school is doing what it can. But parents don't show until there is a problem."* (Teacher)
- *"Administration is trying hard to develop strategies in this area."* (Support staff)
- *"The Parent Council is not active. They meet once a month, but there is not full membership."* (Support staff)
- *"The parents back the students and blame the school. They need to give the school a break."* (EA)
- *"Teachers don't communicate with parents until you are about to fail."* (Student)
- *"Parents are too busy here."* Student)
- *"The Parent Council is not visible."* (Student)
- *"Arranging Parent-Teacher interviews is difficult. For K-8, parents are always there. In grade 9, about 50% of parents involved. For grade 10-12, fend for yourself."* (Teacher)
- *"We had poor parent turnout for interviews last semester. But the parents that came out were supportive and positive."* (Teacher)
- *"We try, but we don't portray ourselves very well in the school. We need alternative modes of involving parents (e.g., I don't have email addresses for parents – for progress reports, etc.)."* (Teacher)

- *“I find I have to defend the school. It is a socio-economic issue. The perception in the community is that the school is not communicating well with the community.” (Teacher)*
- *“There is limited parental involvement in the school. Parents are intimidated. “The teachers don’t call unless there is a serious problem – no preventative maintenance.”(Parent)*
- *“I wish there were more parents involved with the school; then maybe people would be more at ease.”(Parent)*
- *“Get with the times – with email or even texting, the school can easily communicate with parents of a student who is missing.”(Parent)*
- *“Teachers need to be more accountable and accessible to the parents and there needs to be a better, more consistent way of assessing and evaluating students’ progress.”(Parent)*
- *“The school needs more response of administration to parent concerns.”*
- *“I think teachers should contact the parents if the child is slacking or showing bad behaviour.”(Student)*
- *“The community does not support the value of our school or education in general. Students in the work force is more important than going to school.” (Teacher)*

AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS: STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Effective schools recognize the importance of high levels of student involvement in various aspects of school life. Student participation in school life is measured by the extent to which: (a) students are encouraged to make the school an attractive place to be; (b) students have a say in the decisions affecting them; (c) students are actively encouraged to become involved; and, (d) students want to become involved. Recent school effectiveness research indicates that as student leadership increases, student behaviour and learning outcomes improve. Student involvement develops student leadership skills and this leads them to positively identify with their school, which, in turn, results in a more democratic school environment. Further, student engagement (cognitive, emotional and behavioural) is a requisite element for student growth. Fullan (1993) posed the question, “What would happen if we treated the student as someone

whose opinion mattered?” It is striking how enthusiastically students can engage, and flourish in their school lives when assumed to be partners in their own learning. Democratic schools do this well. Details of responses to items related to student involvement are contained in **Table 13**.



Table 13. Indicators of Student Involvement

Item	% Indicating 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' % Indicating 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'						
	Parents/ Caregiver	Teachers	EA/SS	Students Gr. 9	Students Gr. 10	Students Gr. 11	Students Gr. 12
There are ample opportunities for students to be involved in athletic activities.	79/15	84/14	82/12	80/9	80/14	76/15	73/19
Students have an adequate say in school decisions affecting them.	30/49	30/64	18/41	51/33	35/50	32/58	27/63
Students are encouraged to become involved in school life.	42/31	70/30	53/29	65/24	60/26	57/36	50/42
Students are encouraged to take leadership roles in this school.	44/22	64/36	59/24	69/20	59/28	52/39	55/37
Students actively participate in school activities.	58/21	48/48	53/35	75/19	66/24	55/35	52/36
There are ample opportunities for non-athletic activities	47/29	61/34	59/24	63/20	56/24	55/29	59/30
I enjoy the activities out of class.				77/15	78/13	66/25	57/34

There was very strong agreement across all groups that there are ample opportunities for students to participate in athletic activities. However, levels of agreement were somewhat lower on the opportunities available to participate in non-athletic activities. The majority of responding teachers, staff and students felt that students are encouraged to be involved in school life, and to take leadership roles in the school, though parents were less positive than were the other groups on these items.

With the exception of teachers, the majority of participants in each group agreed that students actively participate in school activities, and students, particularly those in Grades 9 and 10, agreed that they enjoyed the activities out of class.

From the overall responses, two areas were identified that could form a focus for further development in this area. These related to providing a more adequate say for students in school decisions (where possible and viable), and to enhancing the opportunities for students to be involved in non-athletic extracurricular activities. These two themes also received strong emphasis in the comments received in the interviews and surveys. The students made the following comments regarding aspects of student involvement:

- *“I want more fun school activities.” (Student)*
- *“I think having more activities and different kinds of classes would be better.” (Student)*
- *“We need more intramural sports.” (Student)*
- *“We are not included in decisions and we are not given responsibilities.”(Student)*
- *“The school should improve student leadership.”(Student)*
- *“Students should be able to voice their opinions about our school more often.”(Student)*
- *“There isn’t really a student council.” (student)*
- *“Students should be more involved in activities like Aboriginal Awareness Week.” (Teacher)*
- *“The school needs some opportunities for students other than athletics or music. Kids can travel and learn about subjects that way.” (Parent)*
- *“The school needs more extra-curricular programs such as athletic programs in which you don’t have to be an elitist to try out for.” (Parent)*

- *“The school needs more activities to improve school spirit and interest in the school such as games or spirit days to participate in.” (Student)*
- *“There should be more non-athletic programs offered at our school.” (Teacher)*
- *“I would like programs for people who need tutoring or extra help established.” (Teacher)*
- *“The students are cliquish and clump together with their preferred groups.” (student)*
- *“There are not many opportunities for intramurals and extra-curricular activities.” (student)*
- *“There is very little extra-curricular opportunities beyond music and sports.” (student)*
- *“There isn’t much ambition to do anything.” (student)*
- *“The students pretty well gave up; therefore, the teachers gave up.” (student)*

AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS: SUPPORTS TO LEARNING

Effective schools have a collaborative culture that extends the learning community beyond the school. These schools are active in pursuing partnerships and agreements with agencies, community organizations, and individuals who have skills that support the school's learning program. These relationships provide opportunities for students and staff to reach outside their facility for support and provide enhanced learning opportunities.

The concept of authentic partnerships assumes that supports to learning that have been traditionally available to students and staff will be integrated into the educational fabric of schools in a more formal way resulting in better support for students. For this to occur, staff in schools and in community agencies need to engage in joint planning and gain comfort with a culture of interdependence that had not hitherto been evident in many schools. One gauge of a school's effectiveness in this respect is the success with which the school links with the community and its agencies to address the needs of students.

Table 14 provides data on perceptions as to how effectively R.D. Parker School is linking with the community and its agencies.

Table 14. Indicators of Supports to Learning

Item	% Indicating 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree'/% Indicating 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'		
	Parents/ Caregiver	Teachers	EA/SS
Staff, parents and community work well together to address student needs.	31/55	16/82	24/65
The school and families work well with human service providers to support student needs.	34/27	27/50	18/24
The school is effective in using a broad range of community resources to expand student educational experiences.	46/23	48/36	47/35
Parents are involved in planning with teachers on a regular basis.	21/48	16/68	12/53

As can be seen in this table, there was a general disagreement that the staff, parents and community work well together to address student needs, and that the school effectively utilizes its community's resources to expand student educational services. Obvious improvement needs were evident in this area. All groups had low levels of agreement that parents are involved in planning with teachers on a regular basis, reflecting perceptions shared earlier regarding parental involvement. Also there was a significant perception that the school and families could work more effectively with human service providers to support student needs. The following comments were made by staff concerning the internal and external partnerships of the school:

- *“Most of the support comes from the teacher and the team; administration is quite removed.” (EA)*
- *“My communication with teachers is like trying to beat a dead horse.” (Support staff).*
- *“Support was better when there was a clear Department Head structure.” (Support staff)*

- *“If teachers worked more collaboratively, then there would be more time to assist students in their learning.” (Teacher)*
- *“L3 site is a great working team!”(Support staff)*
- *“The instructors are the strengths right now.”(Support staff)*
- *“Teachers seem to care about the kids they teach.”(Support staff)*
- *“I can only speak on the strengths of the L3 site: We work well as a team. We think of our site as a family. Our students feel comfortable with us and safe.”(Support staff)*
- *I feel the community does not support the value of our school or of education in general. Students in the work force is more important than going to school.”(Teacher)*
- *“The relationship between care givers and school needs to be developed.” (Support staff)*



COMPREHENSIVE PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

COMPREHENSIVE PREVENTION

When the needs of children are anticipated, supports can be activated before the effects of risk factors escalate. Effective schools are proactive in implementing programs that strengthen the resiliency of children and youth. Schools, families, and communities collectively create and promote learning environments that contribute to the well-being of all children and youth.

EARLY INTERVENTION

Effective schools are proactive in assessing learning and social problem and take effective action through their interventions. These schools work collaboratively within their environment and in the community to enhance their array of interventions strategies as a support to learning. They demonstrate the following qualities:

- The collaboration evident between administration and staff members, particularly special education personnel, when making educational decisions on students.
- The special focus and competence provided when working with ‘at risk’ pupils.
- The availability of special education teachers to support other teachers with program modification.
- Division leadership through provision of in-service on the use of the Adaptive Dimension in curriculum development and instruction of students experiencing difficulty with regular programs.
- The availability of very talented and committed EAs.
- The provision of creative and focused programs to address student success.

R.D. Parker School has a very diverse student population that requires appropriate programs and interventions to meet the complex and varied needs of students. In a number of areas they have been proactive in meeting these diverse student needs through a variety of program initiatives.

Central to early intervention and prevention programming in a school were the services provided through special education staff, counselors, an ever vigilant group of classroom teachers and specialized personnel linked to the school. The commentary from the various respondent groups provided a strong indication that the school had staff and processes in place for identification of student needs and program supports for learning. That is not to suggest that everything was perfect. Essentially, there were those that thought that more could be done in this area to better serve students. As well as many core services, the school has been proactive in implementing several initiatives that hold promise in overcoming learning and personal issues before they become severe problems in the school.

Many school divisions struggle with the placement of grade 9 students into a larger more departmentalized environment such as at R.D. Parker. In response to this need, the school has developed a unique team-family approach to grade nine students who are in transition from a more familial setting into this larger and perhaps more departmentalized, subject centred environment. This program is in early implementation and from the data appears to be serving students quite well.

Another program of note was the Make Education Work: Research Intervention Program (MEWS), the school has developed a program through provincial funding to support aboriginal students who are at high risk of dropping out of school. In a parent focus group made up of parent/caregivers of student involved in the program, MEW was seen as very positive with small class sizes, very personal attention with a teacher that is prepared to go the distance for the students. Parents felt that this was a good program to assist aboriginal students make a transition into the school.

The school offers an alternative program for students have experienced little success at school for a variety of reasons with the central criteria for admittance in the program as poor attendance and a history of skipping school. The program is called Futures and is offered in another facility outside of R.D. Parker School. The school does not work closely with R.D. Parker and uses resources such as the Thompson Public Library that outside of the high school.

Partnerships with the RCMP began as a reactive decision to address fighting and violence in the school. Over time this has proved to be a positive approach with the RCMP having a strong and daily presence in the school. Additional educational classes are provided on a variety of topic promoting prevention and advising on matter of the law. The RCMP presence provides a positive role model as well as developing a healthy perception of law enforcement officers.

Many staff indicated that with regard to personal problems of mild to medium severity that the school was doing well.

Some staff had identified potential supports for working with students who had severe personal problems.

- Divisional psychologists
- Speech and Language Pathologist
- Mental Health Worker
- School Counsellors
- L3 site
- Day care operator
- Student and Family Support

Effective interventions not only require strong programming in place, but as well, processes that all staff know and understand so action can be taken quickly and efficiently. There was a feeling on the part of some staff that this area could be revisited to make certain interventions are appropriate and efficient. As well, to review the various protocols with outside agencies to make sure there is proper coordination of resources so students do not fall between the cracks.

Table 15 presents perceptions concerning aspects of Comprehensive Prevention and Early Intervention at this school.

Table 15. Indicators of Comprehensive Prevention and Early Intervention

Item	% Indicating 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree'/ % Indicating 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'						
	Parents/ Caregiver	Teachers	EA/SS	Students Gr. 9	Students Gr. 10	Students Gr. 11	Students Gr. 12
The school has a variety of interventions available when students' needs are not being met or when personal problems arise.	41/30	64/32	53/35	62/18	55/25	55/29	53/36
The school does a good job of identifying student needs that effect learning.	24/47	66/30	47/29	64/20	52/32	56/31	47/37
The school is effective in its interventions when student needs are not being met.	18/51	48/48	18/53				
Preventive programs in the school are well known to staff, students and parents.	35/40	30/64	29/29				
The school does a good job of dealing with student problems before they become big problems.	25/53						
The school has the capacity to respond to most students needs.	47/33	70/27	47/35				

For this correlate, students on several items were not asked to respond due to their limited knowledge of this type of programming. Most respondent groups did feel there was a number of interventions available to staff and students to meet specific needs. Many of these initiatives were mentioned before. A very encouraging positive perception provided by all groups was that this school has the capacity to respond to most student needs. Interesting to note, parents and grade 9 students were more inclined to feel that the school was doing a good job in identification of student needs. There was uniform agreement that the school was not doing a particularly good job with their interventions, preventative programs were not well known to parents/caregivers, teachers and support staff. Teachers felt the school had the capacity to respond to student needs than were either parents/caregivers and support staff.

- *Counselor are helpful with choosing classes and scheduling, addictions, having a bad day, pregnant or sick; can go to talk to them (Students)*
- *Students services department provides an important networking with other agencies in the community. (Teacher)*
- *There seems to be lack of communication between alternative program like Futures and the school that school (Teacher)*
- *Aboriginal students receive a poor welcome: that is why there is such a high drop out rate. (Parent)*
- *The special needs program needs huge improvement in the area of accessibility. (we don't have a ramp in the basement).*
- *The other kids are good to the students of the L3 site. (Support staff)*
- *A child can slip through the cracks here. (Teacher)*
- *The special needs area needs a modified gym, foods classes and life skills. (Support staff)*
- *An alternative school would work well here (teacher)*
- *In the grade 9 transition team there is lots of collaboration (teacher)*
- *Attachment is lacking. If kids bond with the teachers, they will stand a greater chance of remaining. (teacher)*
- *I can only speak of the L3 site: We work well as a team. We think of our site as a family. Our students feel comfortable with us and safe. (teacher)*
- *They always make sure you never stay hungry (student)*



This concludes the discussion of the findings for the school effectiveness attributes as they pertain to R.D. Parker Comprehensive School. In the following chapter, the major themes and priorities for action emerging from this review will be identified.

CHAPTER 3

MAJOR THEMES AND PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

The purpose of this Review was to provide all those interested in the quality of schooling at R.D. Parker School with a picture of the school as perceived by its various partners. An important part of this purpose was the provision of clear information that can be used in planning for the future.

In this chapter, a summary of major themes derived from the data is presented in terms of an overall rating of the school, and a summary of the major strengths and areas for enhancement identified in the comments and the survey data. Priorities for action, resulting from an appreciative inquiry examination of the results by staff and administration are presented.

OVERALL RATING OF R.D. PARKER COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

Students and parents were asked to rate R.D. Parker Comprehensive School by giving it an overall grade (A: excellent to F: very poor). The ratings are summarized in **Table 16**.

Table 16. Overall Ratings of R.D. Parker School

Rating	% of Each Group				
	Parents/Caregiver	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
A (Excellent)	1	5	7	4	2
B (Good)	18	32	28	27	19
C (Average)	33	40	40	42	44
D (Poor)	28	14	13	14	28
F (Very Poor)	16	7	6	9	5
Don't Know		3	6	4	2

As illustrated in **Table 16**, Grade 9-11 students were much more positive in their ratings of the school than were parents and Grade 12 students. Nineteen per cent of the parents, about 35% of the Grade 9-11 students, and 21% of the Grade 12 students perceived the school to be ‘good’ or ‘excellent.’ Twenty eight per cent of the Parents and Grade 12 students gave the school a ‘poor’ rating, though relatively low proportions (14%) of the Grade 9-11 students gave the school a ‘poor’ rating. However, relatively few respondents rated the school as ‘very poor.’ In fact, 52% of the parents 65 % of the grade 12 students and over 75% of the Grade 9-11 students rated the school as average or better. A summary of the verbatim comments from the surveys, offering a more specific view and some explanation of these ratings, is provided in the following section.

SUMMARY OF VERBATIM RESPONSES

Each respondent was given the opportunity to provide written elaboration on a number of issues. Two questions related to the perceived overall strengths of the school, and aspects that individuals believed could be improved. **Table 17** represents the categories that emerged from the responses in order of frequency of mention per group.

Table 17. Most Frequent Comments: Strengths and Needed Improvements

<u>What are the strengths of the school?</u>			
<u>Parents</u>	<u>Teachers</u>	<u>EA's/Staff</u>	<u>Students</u>
1. Student involvt.	Professional comm.	Student involvt.	Climate/respect
2. Academic choice	Student Involvt.	.Academic choice	Student involvt.
3. Leadership	Academic choice	Diversity/climate	Academic choice
4. Teaching strategies	Teaching methods	Professional comm.	Teachers
5. Caring teachers	Diversity/respect	Teacher leadership	Facility
<u>What can be improved?</u>			
<u>Parents</u>	<u>Teachers</u>	<u>EA's/Staff</u>	<u>Students</u>
1. Disciplinary consistency	Leadership	Climate/respect	Facility issues
2. Communication w/parents	Climate	Leadership	Climate/spirit
3. Teaching strategies	Professional life	Professional life	Leadership
4. Academic standards	Parent involvt.	Parent involvt.	Teaching methods
5. Facility issues	Academic focus	Academic standards	Student involvt.

The theme that represented the most commonly identified strength across groups was *the existence of a strong structure for student involvement, characterized by extracurricular options, particularly in music and athletic activities*. A second theme is that of *academic choice*. It is noteworthy that all groups commented frequently on *academic and general program options available to students*. This was perceived to be a distinctive feature of R.D. Parker School. The third theme related to the presence of caring teachers who devoted their energy to the development of strategies to assist student learning. For teachers and staff, this had its basis in the existence of teamwork within specific areas of operation (such as the nature of professional support in the L3).

In regard to areas for improvement, the following points emerged:

- The most common message from staff spoke to the need to enhance the quality of *communication, consistency and leadership* throughout the school. For students, this translated into issues of discipline and fairness; for teachers, it was manifested in deficits in efficiency and a team mentality; for support staff it found expression in a lack of consistency; and for parents, matters of disciplinary consistency and respect.
- Parents, teachers and staff groups all rated issues relating to parental involvement high among their priorities for improvement. Among the sub-themes in this area were the need for *improved communication with parents*, issues of parental responsibility and the need for creation and provision of opportunities for parent engagement in the school.
- Though it was an area of strength for many, numerous comments were directed at the facility needs confronting the school. Issues of space, the lack of windows, the quality of the bathrooms, overall upkeep and vandalism predominated. As major themes, these were most frequently mentioned by students and parents.
- A broad theme that might be generally termed ‘academic standards and focus’ represented another common improvement priority across all groups. For many of the school professionals and parents the main concern seemed to relate to strike an effective balance of program options, on one hand, and the provision of a greater focus on key academic skill areas, on the other.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

A one-day “Appreciative Inquiry Forum” was held with staff, teachers and administrators at R.D. Parker Comprehensive School on Thursday, September 24, 2008 in order to review the findings of the surveys and interviews, and to examine their implications for school planning. The specific purposes of this forum were as follows:

- 1. To examine the findings of the effectiveness review for each of the correlates of school effectiveness.**
- 2. To discuss what people appreciate about the school, and would like to see more of.**
- 3. To provide an opportunity for staff dialogue on the implications of the findings for the future of the school.**
- 4. To identify short-term and longer-term priorities for action deriving from the data.**

Groups of staff examined the findings for *five* broad clusters of school effectiveness attributes in turn, namely:

- 1. Adaptive Leadership,**
- 2. Caring, Respectful Environment,**
- 3. Responsive Curriculum and Assessment,**
- 4. Authentic Partnerships, and**
- 5. Comprehensive Prevention and Intervention.**

The following is a summary and discussion of staff deliberations concerning areas of reaffirmation, surprises, and priorities for each of these areas in turn as reflected in summaries of their group discussions. The related action items represent the suggestions most frequently provided during the forum.

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

What in the findings affirms our opinions about the school?

From the group discussions of issues in this broad area, the most frequently identified affirmations of their thinking, in order of frequency of mention, were:

- 1. The general concern over leadership and communication;*
- 2. The lack of clear vision and direction, and related confusion over school goals;*
- 3. The trust deficit and low perceptions of the quality of work life among school staff;*
- 4. The lack of an active role in the school on the part of the parents and school community.*

On a more positive note, a significant number of the groups were affirmed by the finding that 77% of the staff believed that they have an impact, and can make a difference in the lives of their students. As one group noted, “Thumbs up! That’s why we’re here.”

What surprises us in the findings?

The most commonly identified ‘surprises,’ in order of frequency of mention, were:

- 1. The fact that only 3% of the teachers believed the quality of work-life to be high;*
- 2. Students were more positive than was anticipated on most aspects of school life;*
- 3. The quality of trust in the school, though believed to be low, was lower than expected;*
- 4. The general dissatisfaction among Grade 12 students was more prevalent than anticipated;*

5. *There was some surprise in the finding that most people agree as to what the major issues are confronting the school.*

ACTION PRIORITIES:

Six areas of priority for the enhancement of this area of school life were emphasized strongly among the staff groups. In order of frequency of mention, these were:

1. *Devote concerted attention to developing teamwork between administration and staff, and within staff, with an emphasis on sharing responsibility and clarifying channels of communication;*
2. *Determine ways to keep the school's vision and mission statement (that everyone buys into) our focus. Consistently implement it;*
3. *Develop the professionalization of leadership in the school, with shared responsibility and delegated leadership;*
4. *Develop trust and feelings of empowerment, on staff, with meaningful input;*
5. *Reintroduce the Department structure for the school;*
6. *Develop approaches to enhance student leadership, school spirit and a sense of belonging for all.*

CARING, RESPECTFUL ENVIRONMENT

What in the findings affirms our opinions about the school?

From the group discussions, the affirmations were varied and wide ranging. The most frequently identified affirmations of their thinking, in order of frequency mentioned were:

1. *The discipline in the school needs to be addressed with consistency, diligence and effectiveness;*
2. *Bullying is a problem in the school;*
3. *The students have little respect for teachers in the school;*
4. *The school lacks 'school spirit';*
5. *High percentage of students don't feel safe in school;*
6. *The school is clean and any vandalism is cleaned up quickly;*
7. *Social life in school for students is positive.*

Although many of the discussion groups affirmed issues in the school, there were positives mentioned such as the broad and varied programming in the school, the grade 9 students appeared to be more positive about aspects of the school and the improved security in the school.

What surprises us in the findings?

The most commonly identified surprises in order of frequency are as follows:

1. *The grade 12's were more concerned about bullying than the grade 9's;*
2. *Surprised that some audiences thought the school was safe, but we have such a problem with bullying;*
3. *Many teachers feel they have the respect of students, but the results of student respect for teachers didn't show this;*
4. *Low level of student respect for each other;*
5. *Difference in perception of discipline between students and teachers;*

6. *The higher rating of cleanliness was surprising as this is not consistent throughout the school;*
7. *Staff felt strongly about the inconsistency of discipline;*
8. *Teachers seem to have more concern about school spirit than several of the other groups;*
9. *High percentage of staff feel there is a caring environment while a low percentage feel there is good school spirit.*

ACTION PRIORITIES:

1. *Improved school spirit and student involvement in the school with opportunities for improved student leadership and recognition;*
2. *Effective and applied discipline policies that have all teachers taking responsibility for enforcement and dealing with bullying problems;*
3. *More modeling of respectful behavior on the part of teachers – show what respectful behavior looks like;*
4. *Incorporating principles from the grade 9 program into higher grades;*
5. *School cleanliness and building maintenance creating a positive tone and image for the school – everyone’s responsibility.*

RESPONSIVE CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

What in the findings affirms our opinions about the school?

From the discussion groups, some common themes became evident. These are listed in the order of most frequently mentioned.

1. *Affirmation that the school has a dedicated staff;*

2. *There is a highly committed and dedicated staff;*
3. *The school has wide and diverse programming available for students;*
4. *Teachers are fair and reasonable in their expectations for student learning;*
5. *It affirms the belief that parents and students don't see that teacher adapt instruction;*
6. *That the school doesn't have the resources needed to teach in today's world. Resources are needed in the area of technology that are current and provide access);*
7. *Instructional strategies are well done overall in this school and academics are emphasized;*
8. *Lack of communication between teachers and parent.s*

What surprises us in the findings?

There were a number of surprises that surfaced in the discussion groups. Quite often they pertained to differences in the level of satisfaction of teachers in certain areas as compared to lower levels of satisfaction as perceived by student and parent respondent groups.

1. *Teacher satisfaction and perception are quite different from student satisfaction in many areas of academic emphasis. (Reading, writing, computer skills);*
2. *Surprising that only the teachers are recognizing the fact that students are poor readers;*
3. *Students think homework amounts are reasonable; however, the number of uncompleted assignments doesn't support this;*

4. *Teachers feel they are communicating with parents, but parents have a different view and report poor communication;*
5. *Student opinion about learning are positive yet the failure rates for subject areas don't seem to support this;*
6. *Teachers feel they are adapting instruction and providing extra help;*
7. *Teachers believe they have adequate computer access; surprising given that there is only one main computer lab and have to sign up for a week ahead.*

ACTION PRIORITIES:

1. *Provide as many opportunities for homework support for students who need it (different times after school and evenings);*
2. *More professional development for instructional strategies and adaptations to help all students learn (individualize instruction, assessment strategies and understanding learning styles);*
3. *Working computer Labs with on-site technician at all times (technical support, up to date technology and user friendly technology);*
4. *Improve communication with parents (more contact with parents, progress report 5-6 weeks, timely phone call to parents, electronic system for parent communication);*
5. *Teachers taking responsibility for each student who walks through their door;*
6. *Having adequate resources available for instruction (current textbooks available, appropriate texts for curriculum, textbooks in good condition, more resource materials EA's to support instruction).*

AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS

What in the findings affirms our opinions about the school?

Staff groups were very much in agreement concerning the degree to which several aspects of the findings about school partnerships confirmed what they had already suspected. This was particularly the case when it came to the nature of parent and student involvement. The most commonly identified areas identified, in order of frequency of mention, were:

- 1. Poor levels of parental involvement with school;*
- 2. High quality of sports extracurricular activities;*
- 3. Lack of communication with the home, and keeping parents informed;*
- 4. The level of staff dedication to the student learning and well-being;*
- 5. Lack of student voice in matters affecting their school lives.*

What surprises us in the findings?

In response to the question as to what staff found surprising in the findings on partnerships, the most frequent aspect was the disagreements between parent and staff groups on matters relating to parent involvement in students' academic work, and the quality of communication between school and home. In order of frequency, staff indicated surprise with the following aspects of the findings:

- 1. Parents see themselves as highly involved in their children's work while teachers believe parents to be inadequately involved;*
- 2. Parents believe that they feel welcome in the school...contrary to experience;*
- 3. The lack of communication between the school and the home;*

4. *Parents are involved as they say they are;*
5. *The notion some have that there are many non-athletic activities.*

ACTION PRIORITIES:

Discussions of the data provided five main recommendations in the area of authentic partnerships. In order of frequency of mention, these were:

1. *Employ specific strategies directed at enhancing the quality of communication between school and home, such as:*
 - a. *Notifying parents early enough to ‘nip problems in the bud;’*
 - b. *Call parents personally;*
 - c. *Engage teachers, parents and students in dialogue;*
 - d. *Parent-student ‘meet the teacher’ orientation;*
 - e. *Better contact with parents about attendance and discipline;*
2. *Explore activities that have potential to partner with students and boost school spirit;*
3. *Employ strategies directed at enhancing parental involvement. Such as:*
 - a. *Free bus passes on parent-teacher interview day;*
 - b. *getting parents into classrooms;*
 - c. *sending fliers out with school event dates;*
4. *Continue communication with the community through the local media;*
5. *Discuss with youth care providers strategies to improve communication*

COMPREHENSIVE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

What in the findings affirms our opinions about the school?

As is the case with many schools, staff knowledge of the details of comprehensive intervention and the involvement of related agencies in this regard varied considerably; all groups did provide perceptions of the quality of early intervention and prevention, and related needs for improvement. The following points were made most frequently in response to the question of what affirmed staff member perceptions about the school in this area of activity:

- 1. The results reinforced the feeling that most staff members are not aware of organized prevention programs;*
- 2. The data affirmed staff belief that the school offers many different types of intervention;*
- 3. There was an affirmation of the conviction that the school does a good job of identifying and responding to student needs;*
- 4. That teachers feel they have the capacity to meet the needs of their students was supported by the findings.*

What surprises us in the findings?

Some of the surprises staff had with the data involved the differences among groups in their perceptions of the school's work in prevention and early intervention. The following were the three most frequently identified points:

- 1. There was some surprise that prevention and intervention programs are not understood by Staff, students and parents;*

2. While parents believed that RD Parker School does not do a good job of identifying student needs, staff and students believed that it does; (some found it surprising that students knew the answers to some of these questions);
3. Some groups found it surprising that teachers felt the school is doing a good job of identifying and responding to student needs;

ACTION PRIORITIES:

Three major priorities for action emerged from staff discussions of the findings relating to prevention and intervention activities of the school:

1. *Specialists and school system personnel need to be more ready to listen and respond to RDPC personnel when making decisions regarding student needs;*
2. *Develop and provide in-service to give teachers skills and empowerment in this area; ensure people are aware of interventions;*
3. *Improve communication around the area of prevention and early identification in order to:*
 - a. *heighten awareness of the issues;*
 - b. *provide better, more clear, transparent protocols;*
 - c. *ensure that the resources that are available are used;*
 - d. *provide better connection among staff, social services and counselors.*

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This review of the effectiveness of R.D. Parker Comprehensive School was initiated to support the planning process at the school. In addition, the various activities of the review were conducted under the assumptions that:

- **Every school can improve;**
- **Individuals on staff have the desire to grow professionally;**
- **All groups associated with the school support improvement and growth;**
- **The staff should be the key leaders of the school planning and enhancement process; and**
- **It is always better to proceed from an appreciative, ‘possibilities-based’ orientation than from a ‘deficit’ one.**

The various interactions the review team had with the leadership and staff of this school has conveyed a powerful sense of the extraordinarily high level of commitment that this group of professionals has to the students of Thompson. The manner in which the staff of RD Parker approached the task of reviewing the findings of the review, and examining the possibilities for improvement was impressive. In the foregoing sections, we have described the broad findings based upon the perceptions of the major stakeholder groups associated with the school. One theme that has consistently shone through is that there is genuine and authentic concern among staff to improve this school and to maximize opportunities for its students.

Interestingly, several key themes reverberated consistently through the dialogue among the groups during our working day. These themes, combined with the information gathered from all sources, reflect *four* major areas of priority for school planning. These areas are very much interrelated, and improvements in one area will undoubtedly have considerable ramifications for many other aspects of school life. The overall intent is the creation of a ‘positive ethos’ governing all aspects of the life of the school. The four

priorities can therefore have far reaching implications for the school. They are presented here in what we believe to be the order of priority and urgency as to what is most significant and most crucial:

Leadership and Communication

1. Serious and concerted attention has to be immediately given to aspects of leadership and communication in the school. In the interests of building trust and enhancing the quality of staff-wide teamwork, specific attention needs to be devoted to the decision-making structures, staff meeting organization, and the active promotion of staff dialogue on issues central to school organization. One organizational change that has strong support from many sectors of the R.D. Parker professional community was the return to a departmental structure. In addition to the foregoing, enhancement of induction, support and mentorship for new staff members is also an important initiative for developing a culture of shared leadership and professionalism. We believe this to be a need that will become increasingly vital to the school over the next several years.

Caring, Respectful Environment

2. A thoughtfully planned and collaboratively developed strategy for the enhancement of the student experience at RD Parker is greatly needed. This need relates to a variety of areas, including student voice, student involvement (and related staff support) school spirit, and the quality of respect among students and between students and staff. Specific initiatives related to each of these areas would have significant effects; and both staff and students can make a considerable difference through creative (and collaborative) development of specific initiatives to enhance the quality of spirit and school life. There was apparent success with the implementation of the grade 9 transition program in the school. Perhaps the positive actions directed at this group could guide staff in extending possibilities to grade 10, 11 and 12. This is not to suggest that the grade 9 program be superimposed on other grades, but rather, staff could take

some of the common principles that led to the success of this program and apply them to upper level students in the school.

Parental Partnership

3. Parent engagement and the quality of communication between school and home is an important priority area with obvious implications for student success and for school image. Specific strategies to develop the culture of parental partnerships and connection to school can have significant long-term positive effects. The image of the school in the community from the perspective of stakeholder groups was not positive. Finding ways to reach out to parents and increase their engagement in the school would pay rich dividends in reversing student, parental and community opinions about the school. The provision of timely communication with parents of children who are having difficulty in class can make a large difference in how the school is perceived as a caring institution.

Responsive Curriculum and Assessment

4. A continuing high priority need in this school is the provision of more opportunities for professional development to support teachers in making adaptations to curriculum, assessment and a classroom environment that will enhance student learning. This will become more evident in the future with the provincial Ministry of Education's policy on inclusion that places special needs students in the regular classroom. All teachers and support staff will have to become more adept at personalizing programs for individuals and groups within the self-contained classroom. The challenge is to develop teacher knowledge and skill in adapting the program to meet individual student learning needs. This responsibility is for all staff in the school to focus on student learning; and if students are not learning, it is important to investigate what strategies are available to help them learn.

Next Steps

This chapter provided a thematic analysis of the discussion that took place at R.D. Parker High School on September 25, 2008. There were twenty five (25) action priorities identified in this chapter, essentially, far too many to deal with at once. Although the list of priorities from the workshop was extensive, it should be understood that many of the priorities are interrelated. By taking action in one area will trigger results in other areas. First of all, in developing an action plan, it is important that it be manageable and supported by staff. Secondly, the priorities identified require specific actions to bring them to life. Through collaborative action, the staff must develop a plan with an action orientation. Finally, many schools have adopted a strategy of developing goals that are student driven, attainable, measurable, results oriented and with a specific time consideration. (SMART goals) SMART goals provide a framework for action and assist the staff in being able to monitor progress in achieving the goals set out in their plan. It takes the fuzziness out of process.

In closing, this school review process identified many issues that over time, need to be addressed. The intention of the school review process was to have the staff fully involved in the process and to develop a plan that is considered bottom up rather than top down. There is a strong belief that the ideas and support for change will come from the current staff. Having a set of common priorities to address will facilitate the changes to make R.D. Parker a better place for its students.