

**Influencing Community Involvement in School: A school
community council**
**Influencer l'implication de la communauté en milieu scolaire :
un conseil scolaire communautaire**

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the role a School Community Council (SCC) played in encouraging community involvement in a kindergarten to grade 12 school. Via 35 interviews, thematic data reflected that the SCC's influence was limited. As analyzed through social capital theory, SCC members shared thin levels of trust, which influenced the association's impact on community involvement. Research implications underscore the need for policymakers to reconsider SCC membership timelines.

INFLUENCING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL: A SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

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ABSTRACT. The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the role a School Community Council (SCC) played in encouraging community involvement in a kindergarten to grade 12 school. Via 35 interviews, thematic data reflected that the SCC's influence was limited. As analyzed through social capital theory, SCC members shared thin levels of trust, which influenced the association's impact on community involvement. Research implications underscore the need for policymakers to reconsider SCC membership timelines.

INFLUENCER L'IMPLICATION DE LA COMMUNAUTÉ EN MILIEU SCOLAIRE : UN CONSEIL SCOLAIRE COMMUNAUTAIRE

RÉSUMÉ. L'objectif de cette recherche qualitative était d'explorer le rôle joué par un Conseil scolaire communautaire (CSC) dans la promotion de l'implication communautaire au sein d'une école accueillant des élèves de la maternelle à la cinquième secondaire. Les données thématiques recueillies grâce à 35 entrevues ont démontré que l'influence de CSC était limitée. Analysée en regard de la théorie du capital social, les membres du CSC ont communiqué un faible niveau de confiance, ce qui a influencé l'impact de cette association sur l'implication communautaire. Les résultats de la recherche mettent en lumière l'importance pour les décideurs de réviser l'historique de l'adhésion des CSC.

Throughout Canada over the last 15 years, a variety of amendments to provincial/territorial *Education/School Acts* have redefined the roles of school councils (see Preston, 2009). The most recent of these Acts, passed in 2006, mandated the implementation of a School Community Council (SCC) into every public school within the province of Saskatchewan. Within Saskatchewan school settings, SCCs commonly consist of five to nine elected parents and community members who serve as an advisory body for the principal and school board. The purposes of SCCs are to “develop shared responsibility for the learning success and well-being of all children and youth,” and “encour-

age and facilitate parent and community engagement in school planning and improvement processes” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005, p. 8). As summarized by Saskatoon Public Schools (2008/2009), “The SCC in each school is designed to encourage active involvement of parents and community, thereby supporting student learning and well-being” (p. 28). Legislatively enshrining these aims demonstrates the provincial government’s recent commitment to supporting parent and community involvement within Saskatchewan’s public educational system.

Information pertaining to SCCs is significant for many reasons. First, even though SCCs have been in existence for a short period of time, limited research has been conducted on them, stressing the timeliness of this article. Second, given that Saskatchewan’s *Education Act* mandates the existence of SCCs in every public school within the province, SCCs are now a central feature within Saskatchewan’s educational system. In turn, this paper has potential to be of interest to stakeholders within every school in the province. Third, over the past four years, I have researched how school councils affect community involvement in a school. During this time, I have only found six studies (Epstein, 2001, 2005; Parker & Leithwood, 2000; Sanders & Lewis, 2005; Sanders & Simon, 2002; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004) that directly relate to a school council’s influence on community involvement in a school. This paper represents an effort to address the research void pertaining to school councils and community involvement in school.

The purpose of the research was to examine the role an SCC played in influencing community involvement within a kindergarten to grade 12 Saskatchewan school. In what follows, I provide background information pertaining to the topics of community involvement and school councils. An overview of the methodology used for the study is supplied, and a thematic representation of the data is provided. Data results are analyzed via social capital theory, which spotlights the importance of nourishing trusting relationships within volunteer associations. I end this article with policy-focused and practical implications that stem from this research.

LITERATURE BACKDROP: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT, SCHOOL COUNCILS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

What does community involvement in school mean/look like? What impact do school councils have within a school? How does community involvement in school directly and indirectly benefit students? Why analyze this study through social capital theory? Below, I supply the answers to these questions.

Pushor (2007) acknowledged that the meaning of community involvement has a unique connotation for every school. For instance, community involvement in one school could mean “creating opportunities for families to connect with one another, with school staff, and with community groups” (p. 8). Community

involvement in schools may also include opening the school building for community events, working with families to develop a community-based learning program, or having school personnel working with families to help solve community issues (Pushor, 2007). In another school, community involvement could mean inviting businesses to interact with students and their families regarding job shadowing and employment opportunities. Other community-focused and community-strengthening ideas include: involving seniors in school activities, setting up welcoming committees for new families entering the area, organizing community members who volunteer for bus patrol, organizing daycares within the school, creating adult and youth special interest clubs, and sponsoring a community-wide Career Expo within the school (Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2007). For the purpose of my study, I employ a broad definition of community involvement in school. I define it as any type of connection between schools and community members, organizations, and/or businesses (e.g., educators, parents, school councils, businesses, social services, etc.) that directly or indirectly support the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs of students.

Literature that underscores the merits of school councils indicates that these volunteer associations have the potential to increase parent and community involvement in the school. Epstein's (2001) research highlighted that when school councils (or *action teams*, as she labeled them), are in existence for at least three years and supplied with the proper training, they increase community involvement in the school. Follow-up studies pertaining to action teams (that are supplied with professional development) show that they significantly influenced the quality and quantity of family and community connections within the school (Epstein, 2001, 2005, Sanders & Lewis, 2005; Sanders & Simon, 2002; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004). Additional research indicates that the presence and activities of school councils improves parent-teacher relationships, increases the number of parent advocates for the school, and increases parenting skills (Cotton & Wiklund, 1989). Hrycauk (1997) described school council members as school ambassadors. Members of a school council are often fundamental in the acquisition of local resources and information relating to curricula (Dukacz & McCarthy, 1995). Pelletier (2002) believed an active school council is a pillar of support for teachers, and Wyman (2001) found that school councils can improve the working conditions of educators. Furthermore, the school may experience minor financial benefits resulting from the low-cost/volunteer aspects associated with school councils. Stelmach and Preston (2008) concluded that SCCs can be a communicative bridge between school and community members. Summarizing these results, the predominant effects of school councils appears to centre upon improving home-school networks and relationships.

Counterbalancing the above, some research suggests that school councils have little impact on a school. To gauge the effectiveness of school councils, Cor-

ter, Harris, and Pelletier (1998) distributed a survey to teachers, parents, and school council members across several Ontario school boards. Their research indicated that most parents did not know the names of their school council representatives. Also, their findings highlighted that school council members did not represent the ethnicities present within the school community. Parker and Leithwood (2000) found that, at best, school councils marginally influence the school's programs and had little to no impact on the students' academic achievements. A key concern surrounding the efficacy of school councils are the administrative and training costs associated with school councils, especially if they only have a minor influence upon the school landscape. As reported within Corter and Pelletier's (2005) research, an official from the Ontario provincial ministry questioned whether the \$25 million invested in establishing school advisory councils was actually worthwhile.

Past research highlights that fostering close school-community collaboration affects the learning experiences of students. Community involvement in schools has been associated with increased learning opportunities for students (Durkin 1998; Epstein, 2001), academic gains, especially for language-minority students (Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990), a reduction in negative student behaviors (Nettles, 1991), and a more positive parental attitude toward school (Sanders, Epstein, & Connor-Tadros, 1999). Simon (2001) commented on the positive effect that community involvement has on student attendance when she stated, "In close-knit neighborhoods where teenagers are held accountable to the community's adults – not just their own parents – parent networks may prevent teenagers from skipping school because they know that other parents may be keeping tabs on them" (p. 13). Tolbert and Theobald (2006) claimed authentic, hands-on learning is produced when community issues are directly incorporated into classroom themes. As well, community involvement reflected through school-business partnerships (e.g., sponsoring scholarships, organizing work experiences) is linked to enriching student knowledge about career opportunities (Foley, 2001). As reflected within the literature, the benefits of community involvement in school are represented through a mixture of academic, social, and career rewards for students

For the purpose of my study, the influence that a school council has on community involvement in a school can be studied from a number of philosophical perspectives. With that stated, because the efficacy of school councils is closely aligned with interpersonal relationships (Epstein, 2001, 2005; Kerr, 2003, 2005; Melvin, 2006) and because common definitions of *community* encompass the idea of social networks between people (Bauman, 2004; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 2001; Putnam, 1993, 1995, 2000), for this study, school councils and their impact on community involvement was examined utilizing social capital theory and its related concepts of trust (Putnam, 1993, 1995, 2000, 2007).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND BACKGROUND

All research is located within a paradigm that reflects a conceptualized means of processing research phenomena. Through this case study research (Stake, 2005), it was my intention to understand and re-present the experiential knowledge and views of SCC members, teachers, and community members. Thus, the methodological framework I used to collect and represent data was the constructivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Collected over a seven-month period, the primary data source was 35 semi-structured individual interviews involving 17 participants: 14 people participated in two interviews, two people participated in three interviews, and one participant was interviewed once. Of these 17 participants selected through purposeful (Mertens, 2005) and random sampling (Creswell, 2005), five individuals were SCC members, three individuals were teachers, and nine individuals were community members. Fourteen participants were female, and three participants were male. The final group of participants reflected diversity of gender, age, socioeconomic status, and profession. The participants' ages ranged from about 18 to 70 years old. All participants lived in or around the community of Sunshine. (For purposes of anonymity, throughout this article, pseudonyms are used in place of actual names.) About half of the participants had children enrolled in Sunshine School; those participants who did not have children in Sunshine School were either teachers working at Sunshine School or community members. Table 1 is synopsis of participant characteristics.

TABLE 1. *Participant description*

Name	Member Affiliation	Place of Residence	Sex	Number of Interviews	Child(ren) attend Sunshine School?
April	SCC	Within Sunshine	F	2	yes
Lilly	SCC	Outside Sunshine	F	2	yes
Lynn	SCC	Outside Sunshine	F	2	yes
Ella	SCC	Outside Sunshine	F	2	yes
Zoe	SCC	Outside Sunshine	F	2	yes
Janelle	Teacher	Outside Sunshine	F	2	no
Tanya	Teacher	Not in community	F	2	no
Mandy	Teacher	Not in community	F	2	no
Sandy	Community	Within Sunshine	F	1	no
Rick	Community	Within Sunshine	M	2	yes
Alice	Community	Within Sunshine	F	2	no
Amy	Community	Within Sunshine	F	2	no
Kate	Community	Within Sunshine	F	2	yes
Mark	Community	Within Sunshine	M	3	no
Cory	Community	Outside Sunshine	M	2	no
Crystal	Community	Outside Sunshine	F	2	no
Tabitha	Community	Outside Sunshine	F	3	yes

To support data credibility, after I personally transcribed the interviews, transcripts were returned to participants for member check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants had the opportunity to change, alter, and delete any aspects of the transcripts, as they saw fit. Upon the participant's written assurance that the transcripts reflected a realistic representation of his/her intended meaning, I

reviewed the transcripts to create a preliminary list of key ideas, commonalities, and differences, which converged into larger themes in response to the purpose (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 1998; Stake, 2005). Transcripts were reread ensuring that the data representing the themes were accurate. In addition to semi-structured interview data, I incorporated augmented data (Angrosino, 2005; Stake 2000), which included my attendance at three school council meetings, 11 community/school visits, and the maintenance of a reflective journal. These data were documented in written field notes and excerpts within my reflective journal. The augmented research experiences allowed me to triangulate what people said they did (as through interviews) with what they actually did (as observed in meetings) (Heck, 2006). This point improved the trustworthiness of the emergent themes (Angrosino, 2005; Stake, 2000). When representing the data findings, I used direct quotations from participants, which supported the credibility of results.

At the time of this study, the town of Sunshine had a population of fewer than 400 people. Ethnic and socioeconomic data supplied by Statistics Canada (2009) indicated that people within the greater community of Sunshine were predominantly White, middle class citizens. The general populace of Sunshine enjoyed a slightly higher salary in comparison with the average Saskatchewan person. Agriculture and its related businesses was the dominant employment sector for Sunshine's community members. Sunshine School, with a population of under 500 students, employed about 35 staff members, most of whom did not live in the school community. Sunshine's SCC was inaugurated in the fall of 2006, and, during the time of my study, this advisory council had been active for almost two years. Sunshine's SCC had seven representative parent and community members elected by the school community. For the most part, these elected members were middle aged, White females, professionally employed outside the home. Additionally, Sunshine's SCC had one appointed member and five permanent members representing the school administration, teachers, high school students, and community associations. For this study, SCC participants comprise four elected and one appointed member.

DATA RESULTS: THE SCC DEVELOPING AN IDENTITY

The participants who volunteered for this study represented three groups: SCC members, teachers, and community members. Based on participant perceptions, the thematic data indicated that the SCC's influence on community involvement in school was limited. The SCC was newly-established within the past two years, and its identity and influence on community involvement in school was still evolving.

Perceptions of SCC members

Participants recognized that they were undergoing a steep learning curve, which they believed detracted from their immediate ability to influence community

involvement within the school community. April indicated, “The first term of the SCC was set upon learning who [we] were, what [our] mandate was, and how to go about doing that.” Lilly indicated that as a group, the SCC had not yet secured a collective identity. She said, “As a Council we don’t really feel we are a cohesive group yet.” Ella identified the need for training to help ease the steep learning curve experienced by the SCC: “It would have been good if we all had training on how to be on a board. I think that would have been the most valuable at the beginning — things about motions and quorums.” Most SCC participants perceived that SCC members needed time to understand its mandate and, likewise, the SCC, as a whole, needed time to develop and secure a shared identity.

Some participants acknowledged that gaining an understanding of the SCC’s purpose and mandate was not a straightforward, one-time process. Zoe, who had been on the SCC for two years, explained that during the council’s first year of existence, members faced challenges associated with understanding the mandate of the SCC. Then, during the SCC’s second year, newly-joined members faced similar challenges. “So when we had a new member start, we were set off kilter a bit.” An underlying message resonating within Zoe’s statement is that accompanying an influx of new members, the established and new SCC members needed to re-examine and re-affirm its goals and purposes. Lynn, a new SCC member within the past three months of the study, spent much of the time during meetings listening because she had not yet secured the SCC’s overall purpose. “At the meetings, I mostly listen, because I don’t want to lead something that I don’t know anything about. All I can do is support until I have an idea about things and a firmer grasp on things.” Helping new members become familiar and more confident with the SCC and its focus took time.

SCC members described what they believed to be their achievements pertaining to community involvement. Zoe stated that efforts to make community members more knowledgeable about the existence of the SCC were vital first steps toward the promotion of community involvement. “We combined it [meeting the SCC] with Meet the Teacher Night. We introduced all the teachers [and said] ‘This is the SCC.’” Lilly believed educating parents about the school’s new elementary math program was an example of how the SCC influenced community involvement. “The parents work through example problems so they...know how their children are being taught in those grades. Parents...learn what it [the program] means and what it looks like, so they can actually help their kids with homework.” Ella talked about a community focus group meeting conducted by the SCC when she said, “You know when we had that focus group meeting last year, we got so many good ideas from the community members.” In these comments, the SCC’s influence on community involvement in school was predominantly exemplified through school events sponsored by the SCC.

As opposed to sponsoring events, other participants suggested that the SCC had a more subtle influence on community involvement in school. Ella noted that the existence of the SCC had the potential to promote stronger parent-teacher relationships. Ella commented, "I think in some ways it [the SCC] has facilitated better relationships between the staff and/or the parents who are on the Council, which then filters down on through into the community." April stated that the SCC members present at meetings were representative of a larger community voice:

The Council is really a web of people. We are not just singular there. We bring all of the contacts and experiences that we have with us to meetings. We are able to make more decisions based on the contacts in our social lives.

In these comments, participants perceived that the existence of the SCC, in itself, was an example of community involvement in school.

Because Sunshine's SCC had not formulated a secure identity, SCC members indicated that communicating with the school community was difficult. Lilly paraphrased this point when she said, "One of the problems we are facing as well is that community members, by and large, really don't know what we do, what we are allowed to do, or even who we are." April identified communication with the school community as a challenge to the SCC when she said, "For the School Community Council to impact the community, we need to bridge that communication gap and get the community involved in whatever [our] goals are, whatever the activities are." Lynn ardently supported the idea that an SCC presence needed to be more widely recognized across the school community, and she had set ideas of what this endeavour might look like:

I think we could have a communications officer in each area so that you can hand out flyers to families, homes, and businesses that don't have a personal interest in the school. I also think we need to do more advertising and promoting of what we are doing – to communicate our endeavours and successes in newspapers like [name of local newspaper].

Such comments indicated that SCC members acknowledged that their communication with the school community was in need of improvement. In turn, they hoped that increased SCC communication would assist the association securing a greater presence within the school community.

During my data collection, not only was the SCC new to the school community, but as a result of a recent SCC election, about one third of its members were new to the organization within the last three months. In turn, members had not yet solidified strong levels of trust between themselves or with members of the school community. Putnam (2000) claimed that trust within an organization is the degree to which individuals confide in each other, tactfully discuss sensitive issues, and are confident that fellow members will not abuse their trust. Coleman (1988), Fukuyama (1996), and Zak and Knack (2001) claimed that trust between members of an organization indicates strong levels of social

capital exist within that organization. Poulsen and Tingaard Svendsen (2005) went so far to say, “Trust is social capital” (p. 3). Putnam (1995) formally defined social capital as “features of social life — networks, norms, and *trust* [emphasis added] — that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (p. 664–665). Applied to this research, Sunshine’s SCC members had not yet shared enough time to develop and experience high levels of trust (a form of social capital); therefore, their potential to impact community involvement within the school was not fully enabled.

On the topic of communication, Halpern (2005) acknowledged a link between fluid communication and high levels of the social capital present within a community. As indicated above, social capital is created when people form relationships or network with each other. Communication is the linchpin to positive, productive relationships. In turn, in order to create and use the community’s social capital to positively impact community involvement in school, SCC members need to communicate with each other and other members of the school community.

Perceptions of teachers

Janelle, Mandy, and Tanya provided relevant information relating to the SCC’s stage of evolution and the SCC’s influence on community involvement within the school. Janelle believed that, for the most part, Sunshine’s teachers did not understand the responsibilities and purpose of the SCC. As Janelle stated, “Now frankly, I think most staff members say, ‘Well, what is that SCC anyway?’” Mandy knew what the SCC acronym stood for but confessed, “I don’t know what they are about or what they are supposed to do.” Similar to SCC members, Tanya was confused about the SCC’s responsibilities. Tanya erroneously assumed the SCC’s responsibilities were directly focused on fundraising for the school. “Maybe we might want some fundraising or some money for a new playground or something big down the road.” In sum, comments from teachers indicated that Sunshine’s educators appeared largely unaware of the SCC’s roles and/or existence.

Just as with SCC members, I asked the teachers if and how the SCC influenced community involvement in school. Janelle was extremely complimentary of an oral address that an SCC member provided during the Remembrance Day ceremony. Janelle was also knowledgeable about the community focus group that the SCC conducted. She said:

One of the best things that they [the SCC] did, and maybe some of the SCC members have told you, is they invited people from the different surrounding areas of the community to a focus group to talk about the needs of the community.

Mandy commented on a school-wide art activity sponsored by the SCC in which the SCC distributed a prize for the top student achiever. Mandy also knew

that the SCC was responsible for some recent construction done within the school community. Tanya noted, "There is a website about our SCC." Tanya also knew that the SCC supported a guest speaker to talk to parents about the school's new math program. "They [the SCC] were involved with supporting the math night. Some parents came out for that, and more of that would be fantastic." Thus, teachers were aware of some of the events sponsored by the SCC within the past two years.

Although research has documented that trust between school council members needs to accrue in order for school councils to be productive (Kerr, 2005), one core component that school council research has neglected is the consideration that trust also needs to exist between the SCC and teachers within the school. Within Sunshine School, teachers indicated their belief that most of the teachers knew little about their SCC. Before levels of trust can be employed as social capital leverage for increasing community involvement in school, communicating the existence and rationale of the SCC to the school staff is vital. That is, it is important that SCC members attempt to develop at least nascent levels of trust with as many teachers as possible because trust enables collaboration and communication (Putnam, 2000), which positively influence community involvement in school.

Perceptions of community members

Of the nine community members interviewed, only two participants had knowledge of the existence of the SCC; however, neither of these individuals could provide a direct or indirect example of how the SCC impacted community involvement within the school community. Only one participant could identify the name of a person who had assumed an SCC position. For the most part, community members did not know who they could contact (beside the principal) if they wanted to communicate with the SCC. Alice indicated, "And I don't know who is on the Council. Are they rural people?" Additional comments from community members included: "I don't really know what they are all about or what goes on with them" (Ricky); "I really don't have an understanding of the role of that Council" (Cory); and "I've never heard of it in my life — never" (Crystal). Tabitha added, "I don't think they've made their existence known to other community members." The community members interviewed could not list SCC meeting dates, topics discussed during SCC meetings, and/or the general intention of the SCC. From their comments, it was apparent that the SCC was not a well-known entity within the school community.

Although the majority of interviewed community members did not know of the existence of the SCC, these participants perceived that communication would be important if the SCC wanted to attract interest from the community. Kate said, "Verbal communication is the way to go, there is no doubt about that; however, trying to keep everyone in the community in the knowledge loop is

really tough.” When I asked Alice to provide personal advice for the SCC, she said, “Contact us. Let us know who you are and what you are doing. Send us invitations to the school events and to the meetings of the Council.” Mark, a community member who had no children attending the school, explained he had never been contacted by the SCC: “We have not received anything from the school other than a tax bill once a year for me to support the school. So it’s only a one-way street.” All community members appeared to be interested in the SCC and wanted to be informed about the SCC and its school-related activities. No community member could provide an example of how the SCC impacted community involvement within the school. Ricky’s remark summed up the community members’ perceptions pertaining to the SCC’s influence upon the school, “I don’t think a lot has changed due to this SCC.” Of the three groups of participants, the community members were the least able to provide details about the impact the SCC had on community involvement in school.

Related to a similar point noted above, before the SCC is able to generate improvements to community involvement in school, they must make their identity and mandate known among the community. Communication fosters awareness, responsiveness, and trust, which increase the potential for social relationships to form between/among the SCC and community members.

Additional components of the social capital discussion: All participants

A more specific way to describe the type of relationships SCC members experienced with each other, with teachers, and with community members is through a review of Putnam’s (2000) terms, *thin trust* and *thick trust* (pp. 136–137). An example of thin trust is the type of trust an individual may have with an acquaintance. By comparison, thick trust is “trust embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent, and nested in wider networks” (Putnam, 2000, p. 136). Indeed, there is a marked difference, for instance, between the thin trust established among acquaintances sitting next to each other on an airplane and the thick trust established among life-long friends. Since many of the members on Sunshine’s SCC were new to the organization, one characteristic of this SCC was that its members predominantly shared thin levels of trust. Beebe and Masterson (2009) believed trust within organizations matures when an individual can predict how other individuals will behave in a given situation. Contextualized within this study, because insufficient time had passed, thick trust had not developed, thereby detracting from the SCC’s ability to work as a cohesive goal-directed unit. This point negatively affected communication between the SCC and its school community. Ideally, as SCC members get to know each other and are somewhat successful in predicting the views and actions of their fellow members, their thin trust will manifest into thick trust. Furthermore, as Sunshine’s SCC members begin to share thick trust, communicating with each other, teachers, and community members will

become more natural and comfortable. In turn, SCC members will become increasingly confident in their professional and social roles.

Putnam stated, “Trust lubricates cooperation” (p. 171). Within an organization, improved communication, cooperation, and member confidence promote innovation and productivity (Fukuyama, 1996; Putnam, 1993; 2000). As is the case with the SCC, promoting thick trust among/between the SCC members, teachers, and community members, directly and indirectly increases community involvement in school. The relationship between the SCC, teachers, and community members’ levels of trust, communication, and productivity/community involvement is illustrated in *Figure 1*.

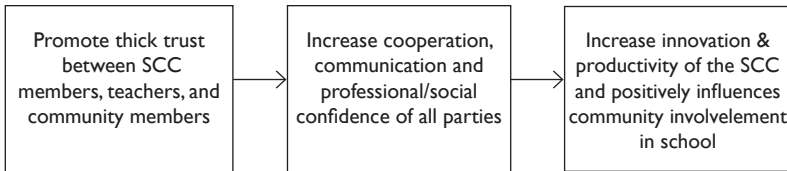


FIGURE 1. *The impact of thick trust shared between SCC members.*

Not only will developing thick trust within the SCC likely facilitate community involvement in school, nurturing such trust between/among SCC members, teachers, and community members is a crucial step toward enabling social cohesion within the entire school community. Participant comments reinforced this point. They had very specific views on how to nurture trust and provided examples of such actions. Participants believed that community involvement meant such things as having coffee with neighbours, supporting fundraising, cooking burgers at community events, and attending school functions strengthened the social cohesion of their community. Although participants did not label it as such, through such comments, they indirectly supported the merits of social capital theory. Kay and Johnston (2007) recognized the importance of socializing when they stated social capital is a by-product of social interaction; Coleman (1990) maintained that “social relationships die out if not maintained” (p. 321). Upon uniting the participants’ purviews of community involvement and social capital ideologies, SCC can enable greater levels of community involvement in school by creating myriad opportunities for the SCC, staff, and community members to interact for academic and social/recreational reasons.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Two key recommendations, one policy-focused and the other practical, arise from this study. Policymakers need to review SCC terms of office and election timelines and educational leaders and SCC members need to promote SCC communication throughout the school community. Because developing trust

takes time, the timeframe for SCC membership needs to be reconsidered. The SCC policy currently mandates that SCC elections are to occur on an annual basis for half of its members (Endsin & Melvin, n.d.). It is difficult for an SCC to establish high levels of internal trust when half of its members are potentially new to the organization during any given year. In addition, the thin trust associated with continual arrival of new members into the SCC is linked to lower levels of productivity, supporting the point that the SCC terms of office and election timelines need to be reviewed by policymakers.

Second, because effective communication has been known to increase community awareness and involvement (Halpern, 2005), SCC communicative efforts must be promoted throughout the school community. In order for the SCC to be an eminent school organization, it is vital that school district leaders, school administration, and SCC members devise quality communication tactics with the rest of the school community. For example, a possible task for a school division may be the creation and distribution of a regular SCC newsletter, whereby information about the SCC and its activities is accessible to all school communities within the school division. SCC information could be available through academic and social networks such as during staff meetings, parent-teacher interviews, and face-to-face interactions at school events and community meetings. The dissemination of SCC information is exemplified through having an SCC presence in community flyers, SCC member business cards, and SCC badges, buttons, and t-shirts. The school webpage, school newsletter, and signage in and around the school community could also relay SCC accomplishments, membership information, and invitations to SCC meetings. A picture of the SCC members could be a part of the school environment. Furthermore, administrators and educators need to welcome an SCC presence at all school events. In an effort to better understand the school culture and student needs, administrators and teachers could schedule several school-open house days where all SCC members are welcome to visit the school and classes in session. These ideas will enable SCC members to better communicate their role to the school community and positively impact community involvement in school.

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