

# Directors' Attitudes Regarding Parental Involvement In The Middle School Choral Setting

by *Jeff Rapp* : North Lakes Academy Charter School

## Introduction

Educational research strongly suggests that parental involvement is beneficial for academic achievement and scholarly studies have pointed to parents' seminal role in the education of young children as well as the need for continued nurture. Researchers indicate that parental involvement, however, tends to diminish over time and in many cases nearly disappears altogether during the middle-school years. This decline in parent-child connection, as Rutherford and Billig (1995) suggest, occurs at a most inopportune time in that the early teen years are crucial in making personal, relational, and educational decisions that have both immediate and lasting impact. In their study of successful teens, Csikszentmihalyi, et al. (1993), warned that teens who disengage from parents too early are more susceptible to negative peer pressures and tend to underachieve, while the most successful children are able to forge interdependent relationships with their parents. They conclude that so long as parent-child interactions remain non-threatening, parental influence remains a crucial element in the child's development.

The aim of this study was to investigate middle school choral directors' attitudes and efforts in enhancing parental involvement in their programs. A model for investigation was devised by combining the approaches of previous researchers—primarily Ramirez (1999), Brand (1985), Macmillan (2004), Davidson (1996), Zdzinski (1994, 2002) and Sichivitsa (2001)—and inquiry was made into: (1) the directors' general attitudes regarding parental involvement; (2) methods and frequency of communication used by directors to promote involvement; and (3) directors' intentional efforts to promote involvement—further categorized as parental musicianship, parental supervision, and parental support.

## Research of Parental Involvement In Choral Education

In the past decade, at least two researchers have investigated the correlation between parental involvement and continued participation in choral music programs. Sichivitsa (2001) designed a Choir Participation Survey to determine the reasons behind students' persistence in choral music. In summarizing her research, Sichivitsa states that students who continue in vocal music through the collegiate level typically have musically competent parents who actively support their child's decision to participate in choir. Siebenaler (2006) presented corroborating evidence to Sichivitsa's findings when he discovered that strong family values regarding music are among the most reliable predictors of singers' participation in high school programs and concludes his report, in part, by saying, "This survey confirmed that more students continued to participate in school choral music whose parents were also involved in music and who came from homes where music was relatively important."

In regard to the correlation between parental involvement and actual student achievement, several studies have been conducted that provide data relating to instrumental music students, but little research was discovered that focused on students in vocal music. Zdzinski (2002), however, suggested that more research in this area is needed. In comparing the effects of parental involvement between choral and instrumental students, he found a strong relationship between parental involvement and music achievement for middle school level and vocal music students, but only a weak correlation for instrumental students. He summarizes his study by noting that, in general, "parental involvement made more of a difference in the music achievement scores for junior high students, female students, and vocal music students than for senior high students, male students, or instrumental music students."

#### **Components of Parental Involvement**

Although it is difficult to create a precise definition for parental involvement, the present study defines the term as the direct and indirect influence of primary caregivers as it relates to student achievement. In modern culture, many people may provide this type of care—be it mother, father, grandparent, foster parent, adoptive parent or others. Authors of scholarly literature refer to the influence of these figures in a student's life with a variety of terms (home environment, parental influence, home factors and parent/pupil interactions, to name a few), but the term parental involvement seems to be the most widely accepted. In reviewing previous studies, several recurring themes appear and provide a framework for understanding this concept. Researchers suggest that parental involvement in music entails at least three major components—parental musicianship, parental supervision and parental support.

#### **Parental Musicianship**

Kaplan (1966), Hartman (1970), Gordon (1990), Brand (1985), Zdzinski (1994, 2002), and Sichivitsa (2001, 2003) all point to the component of parental musicianship—parents' personal interaction with music as performers and listeners—as predictive of musical achievement, enjoyment, and retention in their children. Factors that they find relevant include the presence of musical instruments in the home, parents who sing or play a musical instrument, conversations about music, the number of recordings in the home, parent's variety of musical taste, attendance of non-school concerts, and especially, making music with their children.

#### **Parental Supervision**

Doan (1973), Kaplan (1966), Brokaw (1982), Zdzinski (1994, 2002), Macmillan (2004), Davidson (1996), and Sichivitsa (2001, 2003) all include the component of direct parental supervision as a factor in their investigations. Items of interest to these researchers include attendance by parents at lessons, rehearsals and concerts, direct supervision of at-home practice and assistance with music homework assignments.

#### **Parental Support**

A third aspect that the aforementioned researchers agree to be essential to musical achievement and enjoyment is the value and support of music shown by the parents. Specific behaviors that describe parental values and support in music include conversations about the student's musical progress, attendance of parents and pupils together at school concerts, participation in booster activities, and providing transportation for music events.

#### **Survey Overview and Design**

This descriptive field study collected data using a postal survey distributed to one hundred middle school choral directors throughout the state of Minnesota. Participants (n = 39) were asked to respond to a series of twenty prompts that probed their attitudes and activities in enhancing parental involvement. Specifically, inquiry was made into: (1) the directors' general attitudes regarding parental involvement; (2) methods and frequency of communication used by directors to promote involvement; and (3) directors' intentional efforts to promote involvement.

#### **General Attitudes Toward Parental Involvement**

Participants in the present survey were first asked to respond to a series of prompts concerning their general attitudes toward parental involvement. In each instance, the subjects were asked to select from a series of options presented in a four-point Likert-type scale. In Prompts 1 and 2, subjects were allowed to choose "Disagree Strongly," "Disagree Somewhat," "Agree Somewhat," or "Agree Strongly." Prompt 3 contained four choices as well – "Not True," "Somewhat Not True," "Somewhat True," and "True."

**Prompt 1:** I view parental involvement as a key element in the musical success of the students I serve.

**Prompt 2:** I believe it is my responsibility to promote parental involvement.

**Prompt 3:** I intentionally design activities within my curriculum that encourage parents to interact musically with their children through listening to music together, talking about music and making music together.

#### **Method and Frequency of Communication**

**Prompt 4:** I communicate regularly with all parents via newsletter, mail, e-mail, telephone or other media.

**Prompt 5:** I make intentional effort to contact one or more parents each week, formally or informally.

**Prompt 6:** I make intentional effort to contact parents for reasons other than discipline.

**Prompt 7:** I have held conferences with approximately \_\_\_\_\_ percent of the parents of students I teach in the past year.

In response to prompts 4 – 6, participants were asked to select one of four responses— "Not True," "Somewhat Not True," "Somewhat True," or "True." Prompt 7 allowed the subjects to choose their response by percentage—"0 – 25%," "26 – 50%," "51 – 75%," or "more than 75%."

#### **Directors' Intentional Efforts to Promote Involvement**

The final thirteen survey prompts asked subjects to express the frequency that they performed certain parental involvement related behaviors. This series of prompts each begin with the words, "In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to..." followed by the specific action. "Encouraged," in this instance, was further defined for the respondents as "any efforts you have intentionally made, via verbal or written communication, to promote parental involvement (i.e., giving an assignment or sending home an invitation.)" Subjects were allowed to select from four responses that ranged from "Not at all" to "More than four times."

**Prompt 8a:** In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to talk about music with their child?

**Prompt 8b:** In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to talk

with their child about their musical progress?

**Prompt 8c:** In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to listen to recordings with their child?

**Prompt 8d:** In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to listen to/assist their students in vocal practice?

**Prompt 8e:** In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to assist with music homework or music problem solving?

**Prompt 8f:** In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to tape-record practice or performance?

**Prompt 8g:** In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to sing with their child?

**Prompt 8h:** In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to attend school concerts?

**Prompt 8i:** In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to attend non-school concerts?

**Prompt 8j:** In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to attend "choir booster" meetings?

**Prompt 8k:** In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to attend rehearsals of the school choir?

**Prompt 8l:** In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to attend voice lessons with their students?

**Prompt 8m:** In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to provide transportation to music activities?

#### **Research Findings**

##### **General Attitudes Toward Parental Involvement**

Choral directors in this study overwhelmingly indicated (94%) that they consider parental involvement to be a key element in musical achievement and acknowledged (84%) that it is their responsibility to promote it. The respondents, however, were less enthusiastic about their own role in encouraging parents' participation. Only one director (3%) claimed that the prompt regarding "intentionally designing" parental involvement in their curriculum was completely true of them, while more than two-thirds (68%) of directors felt that the same prompt was either "somewhat not true" or "not true" for them. Ramirez (1999) found similar results in his study when he noted that ninety-nine percent (99%) of teachers agreed that parental involvement was important for a good high school and ninety-four percent (94%) concurred that parental involvement increases student achievement, but sixty-four percent (64%) of the respondents in his survey admitted that they showed only weak or no personal support of parental involvement. In addressing the causes of this contradiction, he lists several barriers to parental involvement, including narrow views of parental participation, poor attitudes of teachers and administrators, inadequate teacher training, cultural objections and parental insecurities.

Crozier's (1999) findings amplify Ramirez' remarks and point directly to teachers' limited conception of the nature of parental involvement as well as parents'—particularly working class parents—perceptions that they are not welcome in schools as prime factors in the

lack of parental involvement, especially in the middle school years. In her conclusion, she calls on teachers to take a proactive role in reaching out and drawing parents in on their own terms.

#### **Methods of Communication**

Keeping parents informed of music events and classroom activities is, without doubt, a first step in enhancing parental involvement. One way to enhance parental involvement is through clear and consistent communication of expectations, activities, challenges and accomplishments in the classroom. Parents who are well informed may be more likely to participate in their child's musical progress. The findings of the present study indicate that while most directors value written and oral communication as a primary means of enhancing parental involvement and many participants stated that they communicate regularly with parents via written or telephonic means, few do so weekly.

The data collected in Prompts 4 – 7 indicate that directors prefer to communicate with parents via written communication such as newsletters or e-mail rather than face-to-face encounters. Most directors (64%) stated that they communicate regularly with parents, but the majority (also 64%) admitted that this communication did not happen weekly. Most directors (79%) made intentional effort to contact parents for reasons other than discipline, but few (29%) met face-to-face with more than half of their parents at conferences.

More specifically, the survey results show that most teachers believe that they contact parents regularly, but only six respondents felt that they intentionally contacted parents weekly. It may be surmised, therefore, that directors may do more to increase the frequency with which they communicate with parents.

Relations between parents and teachers may be further enhanced when communications are positive and for non-disciplinary reasons. The results of the present study seem to indicate that choral directors frequently attempt to communicate with parents beyond disciplinary action. Thirty-one out of thirty-nine (79%) of survey participants believed that they contacted parents for reasons other than discipline while just five directors (13%) stated that they contact parents primarily for disciplinary reasons. These findings indicate that most choral directors are cognizant of the value of positive relations with parents when it comes to students' continuance in music and musical achievement.

Face-to-face conferences with parents provide an excellent opportunity for directors to promote parental involvement both in the home and at school. At conferences, parents and teachers may dialogue about the student's progress, confirm important dates and events, and find opportunities to be personally involved in the music program. Unfortunately, the results of this study indicate that very few of the directors surveyed met for conferences with more than a small percentage of parents. Nearly half of all survey participants (46%) indicated that they meet face-to-face at conferences with twenty-five percent or less of the parents, while only three participants (8%) stated that they conferenced at least annually with more than seventy-five percent of the parents they serve. Two respondents gave a clue, indicating with anecdotal statements in the margin, that this might be due, in part, to the way in which many schools schedule conferences. Schools, they offered, often schedule specific conference times for "core" areas while "specialists" are only seen on a drop in basis. This leaves music teachers, as well as those in art and physical education, to meet only with those parents who make an extra effort to conference with them.

It may be concluded from these findings that choral directors have a limited view of how to enlist parental involvement and often prefer to communicate with parents by less personal means such as newsletters or e-mail. The survey indicates that directors seldom avail themselves of the opportunity to meet face-to-face with parents. This limited personal relationship may be, as Ramirez and Crozier indicate, for a variety of reasons—including lack of time, school conferencing policies or insufficient interest on the part of the teacher. Teachers need to continue to make the most of every opportunity to engage

parents personally if they are to enlist their participation in the students' musical success.

#### Enhancing Parental Musicianship

Kaplan, Hartman, Gordon, Brand, Zdzinski (1994, 2002), and Sichivitsa (2001, 2003), all point to the component of parental musicianship—the parents' personal interaction with music as performers and listeners—as predictive of musical achievement, enjoyment, and retention in their children. Brand, in his findings, shared that parents who displayed their musical expertise by playing an instrument were more likely to have musically successful children and Davidson, et al., list parents' musicianship as a reliably predictive factor in determining students musical achievement. Factors that they find relevant include the presence of musical instruments in the home, parents who sing or play a musical instrument, the number of recordings in the home, and parents' variety of musical taste. Davidson, et al, also note that students' musical achievement is enhanced when parents express their musical taste, interest and expertise to their children.

The survey items in this category are designed to ascertain the frequency which directors encourage activities that might be classified as parental musicianship and deal primarily with encouraging parents to display their general interest and expertise in music to their children.

#### Parental Musicianship

The results of this set of prompts indicate that the directors in this study seldom encourage involvement that might be classified as parental musicianship. For instance, sixty-nine out of one hundred fifty-six possible responses (44%) to the prompts in this category were recorded as "not at all" while only nineteen responses (12%) were recorded as "more than four times." Two of the prompts in particular—"listen to recordings" and "sing with their child"—showed that the majority directors did not engage in these activities at all.

#### Enhancing Parental Supervision

Scholarly research in the area of instrumental music—such as that of Doan, Brokaw, Zdzinski and Davidson, et al.—shows a correlation between parental supervision of practice, lessons and performance with musical achievement. Sichivitsa (2001, 2003), makes similar claims for vocal music, encouraging parents to be involved in very direct, supervisory ways with their child's music education.

#### Parental Supervision

<u>In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to:</u>				
	Not at all	1-2 times	3-4 times	More than 4 times
a) assist in practice	24	12	3	0
b) assist in homework	18	14	2	5
c) tape-record practice	34	2	3	0
d) attend rehearsals	30	4	4	1
e) attend lessons	35	3	1	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>

Most participants in this survey indicated that they seldom encourage direct supervision of

student practice or rehearsal. Relatively few directors reported that they encourage parents to assist in at-home vocal practice and homework, and even fewer acknowledged that they provided opportunities for parents assist with tape-recording their child, attending rehearsals or sitting in on lessons.

The results reported in this table indicate that the participants, contrary to the recommendations of contemporary research, very rarely encourage direct supervision of at-home practice or attendance at lessons and rehearsals as a means of improving parental involvement. Out of one hundred ninety-five possible responses, one hundred forty-one (72%) were recorded as "not at all" while a scant 6 responses (3%)—five of which relate to homework—indicate that participants regularly encourage parental involvement in this way.

Davidson, et al. (1996), surmise that practice is most effective when parents have detailed instructions and an understanding of the short-term goals to be accomplished between lessons or rehearsals. Although it is beyond the scope of the present study to suggest possible obstacles that preclude directors from being more proactive in encouraging parental supervision, it may be reasonable to conclude that directors need to do more in this area.

### Enhancing Parental Support

Siebenaler (1994, 2002) and Sichivitsa (2001, 2003), both state that emotional support of parents is key to a student's continued participation in vocal music. Supportive comments from parents, they claim, coupled with practical expressions of support—attendance at concerts, providing transportation, and participation in "booster" meetings—give the student confidence that their parents approve of their participation in music.

### Parental Support

<u>In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to:</u>				
	Not at all	1-2 times	3-4 times	More than 4 times
a) talk about progress	8	14	6	11
b) attend concerts	0	5	6	28
c) attend booster meeting	35	2	2	0
d) provide transportation	8	10	8	13
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>52</b>

The data in this table indicate that directors are much more likely to encourage parental support than either of the other two categories of parental involvement investigated in this study. Directors encouraged parental support-type activities more than twice as often as parental supervision activities and substantially more often than parental musicianship activities. Except for the item relating to booster meetings, the directors in this survey were very active in encouraging activities that elicit parental support. All directors in the study invited parents to attend at least one concert in the past year and most participants directly encouraged parents to talk about musical progress and to provide transportation, when needed, for music events.

The prompt regarding "booster" meetings—while suggested by some researchers as a possible factor in student achievement—may not have been applicable to many middle school directors and, thus, is likely to have adversely affected the findings. When these

data are removed, the findings are even more remarkable with 101 out of 117 respondents (86%) replying affirmatively to the parental support prompts.

#### Comparison of Parental Musicianship, Supervision and Support

In comparing the data revealed in answer to the research questions above, it becomes clear that the directors in this survey favored certain types of parental involvement more than others. The table below represents this comparison and identifies types of involvement that directors select most often.

#### Comparison of Parental Musicianship, Supervision and Support

	Not at all	1-2 times	3-4 times	More than 4 times
Parental Musicianship	69	48	20	19
Parental Supervision	141	35	13	6
Parental Support	51 <sup>[1]</sup>	31	22	52
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>77</b>

<sup>[1]</sup> These data include thirty-five negative responses to the prompt regarding “booster meetings” which—the findings of this study revealed—may not be applicable to the middle school choral setting.

The results of this analysis indicate that the type of parental involvement that directors in this study are most likely to encourage is parental support. Directors consistently ask parents to support their children through attendance at concerts, providing transportation and talking with their child about musical progress. Directors encouraged involvement in this way more than twice as often as the other two methods combined. A leading factor in this area is that all directors acknowledged that they invited parents to support their child through concerts at school—the only prompt that garnered unanimous affirmation. These findings are encouraging and are in harmony with Sichivitsa's (2001, 2003) suggestion that parental support is strongest predictor of continuation in choral music. She reasons that parental support leads to better self-concept in music, resulting in continued participation.

Conversely, directors seldom—if ever—encouraged parents to insert themselves in a supervisory role into the musical progress of their child. Negative responses to prompts in this category outnumbered positive responses nearly three to one with a total of one hundred forty-one (141) negative responses to just fifty-four (54) affirmative. These data roughly match the results obtained by Macmillan (2004) and may suggest that directors either have not considered the value of, or found an appropriate means to encourage, supervision of practice or attendance at lessons and rehearsals. Only six responses stated that directors encouraged any parental supervision activities more than four times per year.

Between these two extremes lies the category of parental musicianship. Directors in this survey acknowledged that they were active in encouraging parents to display their own interest in music, but not with the frequency that they encouraged parental support.

Considering the responses of "1 – 2 times" and "3 – 4 times," directors reported that they offered parents the opportunity to display their musicianship through singing and listening about fifty percent (50%) more often than parental support or supervisory activities. Those who identified that they provided parental musicianship activities "more than four times" in the past year did so about three times more often than supervisory activities and approximately forty percent less often than support activities.

**Analysis of Likert-Type Scale Scores**

The information provided above indicates that directors attempt to enhance parental participation in their choral programs, but do so in a somewhat limited fashion. In order to provide a comparison between the frequencies of specific actions engaged in by the directors in this survey, a Likert-type model was employed in which numerical values were assigned to the various responses. For survey prompts 8a – m in this instance, a value of one (1) was assigned to "not at all" responses, a value of two (2) was given to all "1 – 2 times" responses, a value of three (3) was assigned to all "3 – 4 times" responses and a value of four (4) was given to all "more than 4 times" responses.

A brief statistical analysis of this model yielded a minimum possible value of thirty-nine ( $m = 39$ ), a maximum possible value of one hundred fifty-six ( $M = 156$ ), and a mean average of approximately seventy-four ( $Mn = 74$ ). The median score in this analysis was sixty-eight ( $Mdn = 68$ ) and the standard deviation was approximately twenty-eight ( $SD = 28$ ). The results of this analysis are presented below and are arranged in descending score order.

**Comparison of Likert-Type Scores**

<u>In the past twelve months, how often have you encouraged parents to:</u>			
Prompt	Likert Score		
Attend school concerts	140		
Provide transportation	104		
Talk about musical progress	98		
Talk about music	88		
Attend non-school concerts	86		
Assist with homework	72		
Sing with their child	68		
Listen to recordings with child	59		
Listen/assist with vocal practice	57		
Attend rehearsals	56		
Tape-record practice	47		
Attend booster meetings	45		
Attend vocal lessons	44		
<i>m = 39 M = 156 Mn = 74 Mdn = 68</i>			

The Likert-type analysis of this study further validates three key findings of the summary

presented above and illustrates the types of parental involvement activities that directors most often engage in. The first three responses—Attend concerts, Provide transportation, Talk about musical progress—fall into the category of parental support and show again that directors are very aware of the need to provide avenues for parents to display their approval for their child's participation in music. This finding is heartening in that related research, particularly that of Siebenaler (2006), shows a strong correlation between parental support and students' continuance in choral music programs. Students who are told—especially by parents—that they are good at singing and who feel supported emotionally in their pursuit of music are much more likely to participate in choir throughout their school years.

Additionally, Macmillan's (2004) conclusion that directors seldom encourage parental supervision activities is supported by the fact that four out of the five lowest Likert-type scores in the present study were in the supervisory category and each of these scores was within ten points of the minimum score. In her research, Macmillan states that fewer than twenty-five percent of teachers actively enlist parental involvement at lessons and just twenty percent of teachers ask parents to supervise at-home practice. In the present study, just ten percent of teachers invited parents to attend lessons and thirty-eight percent of teachers indicated that they encourage parents to assist in vocal practice. One possible reason for the extremely low percentage of parents involved in lessons, as compared to Macmillan, is that her study dealt with teachers in a private studio while the present study queried directors in public and private schools. Directors in school settings have the additional obstacle of needing to ask parents to inconvenience themselves and adjust their schedules—or take time off work—to attend daytime lessons or rehearsals. It is unclear, from the present study, whether parents would be willing to make this sacrifice if teachers were to make a strong case for their attendance. Research by Davidson, et al. (1996, 1998), Brokaw (1982), and Zdzinski (1994, 2002), however, indicated that parents and students alike would benefit from the mutual understandings and increased cooperation garnered by participating in lessons and rehearsals together.

Finally, teachers in this study were somewhat apt to engage in activities that enhance parental musicianship—talking about musical tastes, singing with their child and attending non-school concerts—but not frequently. Davidson, et al. (1998), clearly state that the most successful students had parents who increased their personal musical involvement to match that of their children. They, like Gordon (1990), found that parents do not need to be highly skilled musicians, but merely provide a competent musical model and show a sincere interest and love for music. Approximately 36% of respondents in this survey indicated that they encouraged parents to listen to music with their children, attend non-school concerts together or sing with their child. These types of activities, according to Gordon, provide a basis for musical aptitude in young children and are similar to behaviors Csikszentmihalyi, et al (1993) insist are required to form interdependence that is crucial to success in the middle-school years.

The results of the Likert analysis suggest that directors do an adequate job in encouraging parental support but could do more to enhance parental supervision and parental musicianship. Specifically, directors do little to involve parents directly in vocal lessons or rehearsals and could do more to improve supervision of at-home vocal practice as recommended by related research.

#### Implications for Choral Directors

Educational research suggests that teachers are aware of the vital need to establish parent-child connections through the middle-school years but are not always able to convert this knowledge into viable practice. Ramirez (1999), for instance, observes that although ninety-nine percent of teachers surveyed agreed that parental involvement was key to student achievement, only half of those surveyed felt that they actively engaged in enlisting parental involvement and less than one-fourth actually participated in activities that would enhance involvement—communications, conferences, assignments, etc.

Additionally, research indicates that parental involvement needs to be expressed in a variety of ways in order to have its full effect. Parents may assist their children by displaying and improving their own personal musicianship, supervising students' practice and lessons, and by showing practical support and approval of their child's participation in music. Benefits suggested by these researchers include accelerated achievement, continued participation and greater personal satisfaction for the student. The present study indicates several implications that may be helpful to choral directors.

First, it is clear from the data presented that directors are keenly aware of the need to communicate regularly with parents and do so conscientiously. Most directors are also cognizant to establish rapport and contact parents for reasons other than discipline. Many directors, however, have not found a suitable way to make their communications a personal matter. For instance, less than one-third of the respondents made a conscious effort to contact a portion of parents on a weekly basis and only three of the thirty-nine directors met with 75% or more of their parents at conferences. By increasing the number of personal encounters with parents through conferences and opportunities for parents to participate in the classroom, teachers may afford themselves with valuable two-way communication of expectations, obstacles and successes.

Additionally, although directors universally agree that parental involvement is key to the success of their students and that they hold personal responsibility for promoting involvement, less than one-fourth of those surveyed claimed to intentionally include parental involvement in their curriculum design and only one respondent stated that this prompt was completely true of them. Choral directors would do well to consider how they might design their curriculum, in some ways, to better include students and parents. Directors may consider supervision of practice—demonstrated to improve achievement in instrumental music students—as a first addition to their curriculum. Other suggestions, drawn from research, that teachers may promote include parents and children singing together, attending concerts together outside of school and parents recording their children's practice.

Finally, it is clear from the data presented that directors overwhelmingly acknowledge and promote parental support activities. By inviting parents to attend school concerts, provide transportation and encourage their students to continue in choral music, directors ensure that this vital link to achievement is fastened. This research, however, should caution directors to look beyond the traditional concert invitations and search for new and more comprehensive ways to promote involvement. Directors should continue their efforts in parental support but should supplement these activities with opportunities for parental musicianship and parental supervision that are shown by research to be equally important.

### **Conclusion**

This investigation confirmed previous research that indicates directors overwhelmingly acknowledge the value of parental involvement and also demonstrated that directors do promote parental involvement, but in very limited ways. To some directors, the material presented may open up new ways of viewing the partnership of teacher-student-parents, while for others it may represent a challenge and call to action. One director expressed her newfound awareness for this issue by attaching a note to the survey that read, "Thank you for opening my eyes on [sic] being better about parent involvement!" Another director wrote, "Thank you for bringing to light this very important aspect in my teaching. I don't do as much as I should."

This study, though not intended as an indictment against choral directors, has been successful in illuminating some possible "blind spots" in regard to parental involvement. The findings of this study suggest a variety of avenues—some new, some tried-and-true—for implementing a comprehensive approach to parental involvement in the choral

program. Hopefully, this investigation will serve as a springboard to action for those who consider and reflect upon the findings herein.

#### References

Baker, Amy. "Parent Involvement for the Middle Level Years." *Schools in the Middle* 9, no. 9 (May 2000) 26-30.

Bandura, Albert . "Self-efficacy." In V.S. Ramachaudran (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Human Behavior*. 4, 71-81. New York: Academic Press. Reprinted in H. Friedman [Ed.]. *Encyclopedia of Mental Health*. San Diego: Academic Press, 1998. accessed 16 July 07 at <http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/BanEncy.html>.

Borrgatti, Steve. "Glossary of Research Terms." [internet resource]; accessed 23 June 08 at <http://www.analytictech.com/mb313/glossary.htm>

Brand, Manny. "The Development and Validation of the Home Musical Environmental Scale for Use at the Early Elementary Level." *Psychology of Music* 13, no. 1 (1985): 40 – 48.

"Relationship Between Home Musical Environment and Selected Musical Attributes of Second-Grade Students." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 34, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 111 –120.

Brokaw, John. "The Extent to Which Parental Supervision and Other Selected Factors are Related to Achievement of Musical and Technical-Physical Characteristics by Beginning Instrumental Students." PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1982.

Creech, Andrea and Susan Hallum. "Parent-Teacher-Pupil Interactions in Instrumental Music Tuition: A Literature Review." *British Journal of Music Education*, 20, no. 1, (2003): 29 – 44.

Crozier, Gill. "Is it a Case of 'We Know When We're Not Wanted'?" *Educational Research* 41, no. 3 (1999): 315 – 328.

"Parental Involvement: Who Wants It?" *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 9 no.2 (1999): 111-130.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi, K. Rathunde and S. Whalen. *Talented Teenagers: The Roots of Success and Failure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Davidson, Jean, Michael Howe and John Sloboda. "The Role of Parental Influences in the Development of Musical Performance." *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 14 (1996): 399-412.

"Characteristics of Music Teachers and the Progress of Young Instrumentalists." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 46 no. 1 (1998): 141 – 160.

"The Role of Parents and Teachers in the Success and Failure of Instrumental Learners." *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 127 (1995/1996, Winter) 40 – 44.

Department for Education and Science (DES), CACE. "Children and Their Primary Schools: The Plowden Report." *London: HMSO Central Advisory Council for Children*, 1967.

Doan, Gerald R. "An Investigation of the Relationship Between Parental Involvement and the Performance Ability of Violin Students." PhD diss., Ohio State

University, 1973.

Dregalla, H.E. "A Study of Predictors of Music Achievement Among Students from Selected High Schools of Nebraska." *Dissertation Abstracts International* 44 no. 2, 5420A. University Microfilms No. DA8314579, 132.

Gordon, Edwin. *A Music Learning Theory for Newborn and Young Children*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, Inc. 1990.

Hartman, Virgil . "Parental Desires for the Music Education of Children." PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1970.

Jorgenson, Estelle. *In Search of Music Education*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997.

Kaplan, Max. *Foundations and Frontiers of Music Education*. New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1966.

Kehrberg, D.A. "An Investigation of the Relationships Between Musical Aptitude, General Music Achievement, Attitude Toward Music, School Music Participation, School Music Achievement, and Students' Outside-of-School Environment in Rural Ethnic Community." PhD diss., University of Illinois at Champaign – Urbana, 1982.

Kirkpatrick, W.C. "Relationships Between the Singing Ability of Prekindergarten Children and Their Home Musical Environment." PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1962.

LeBlanc Corporation. *The Influence of Parent's Attitudes on Children's Musical Activity*. Kenosha, WI: Author (1961).

Macmillan, Jenny. "Learning the Piano: A Study of Attitudes to Parental Involvement." *British Journal of Music Education* (2004): 295 – 311.

"Involving Parents: A Review of the Literature." *Piano Professional* (2004): 1 – 13. [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.pianoprofessional.com/>; Internet; accessed 16 July 2007.

Mallet, Catherine. "An Examination of Parent/Caregiver Attitudes Toward Music Instruction, the Nature of the Home Musical Environment, and Their Relationship to the Developmental Music Aptitude of Preschool Children." PhD diss., University of Nebraska, 2000.

Mizener, C. "Attitudes of Children Toward Singing and Choir Participation and Assessed Singing Skill." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 41, no. 3 (1993): 233 – 245.

Neill, S.L. "Motivating Factors for Student Participation in High School Choral Programs and Vocal Enrichment Activities." *Dissertation Abstracts International* A59 (04)1105 (1998).

Ramirez, A.Y. "Survey On Teachers' Attitudes Regarding Parents and Parental Involvement." *School Community Journal* 9, no. 2 (1999): 21 – 40.

Rutherford, Barry and Shelly Billig. "Eight Lessons of Parent, family and Community Involvement in the Middle Grades." *Phi Delta Kappan* 77 (September 1995) 64–66.

Sandvoss, James. "A Study of the Musical Preferences, Interests, and Activities of Parents as Factors in Their Attitude Toward the Musical Education of Their Children." *Dissertation Abstracts International* 30 (12), 5474A. (Microfilm, National Library

of Canada, Ottawa) (1969).

Shelton, John. "The Influence of Home Musical Environment Upon the Musical Response of First-Grade Children." PhD diss., George Peabody College for Teachers, 1966. *Dissertation Abstracts International* 26, 6765 – 6766 University Microfilms 66 – 4419 (1966).

Sichivitsa (2001, 2003),, Veronica. "College Choir Members' Motivation to Persist in Music: Application of the Tinto Model." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 51, no. 4 (2003).

"College Choir Members Motivation to Persist in Music: Application of the Tinto Model." PhD diss., Auburn University (2001).

"Influences of Parental Support in Music, Prior Choral Experience, Self-Efficacy, Formal and Informal Integration Upon College-Student Persistence in Music." *Journal of Integrative Psychology*. 2, (Spring 2002).

Siebenaler, Dennis J. "Factors That Predict Participation in Choral Music for High-School Students." *Research and Issues in Music Education* 4, no. 1 (September 2006) [journal on-line] Internet; accessed 16 May 2007.

Sloboda, John and Michael Howe. "Biographical Precursors of Musical Excellence: An Interview Study." *Psychology of Music* 19 (1991), 3 – 21.

Sosniak, Lynn. "Learning to Be a Concert Pianist." In B.S. Bloom (Ed.), *Developing Talent in Young People* New York: Ballantine (1985).

Toleno, John. "Measuring Perceptions and Activities Associated with Parental Involvement at the Middle School Level." EdD diss., Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2005.

Thames, Michael. "Effects of Parental Background on Attitudes Toward Elementary Music Instruction." *Dissertation Abstracts International* 40, (10), 5358A. (University Microfilms No. AAD80-08121, 119) (1979).

Williams, Ann. "Factors Influencing Children's Participation in Chorus." (MAME thesis, University of St. Thomas, 2004).

Zdzinski, Stephen. "Parental Involvement, Gender, and Learning Outcomes Among Instrumentalists." *Contributions to Music Education* 21 (1994).

"Parental Involvement, Musical Achievement, and Music Attitudes of Vocal and Instrumental Music Students." *Contributions to Music Education* 29 no. 2, (2002).

"Relationships Among Parental Involvement, Music Aptitude, and Musical Achievement of Instrumental Students." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 40, no. 2 (1991).

**About the Author** - Jeff Rapp has a passion for seeing parents and students connect through music. He has taught vocal and instrumental music in Wisconsin and Minnesota since 1986. He holds a Bachelor of Music Education from the University of Wisconsin – River Falls and a Master of Arts in music education degree from the University of St. Thomas. Mr. Rapp is currently music director at North Lakes Academy Charter School in Forest Lake, Minnesota and resides in Western Wisconsin with his wife, Tamara, and four "musical" children.

[PRINT](#) : [EMAIL TO A FRIEND](#)