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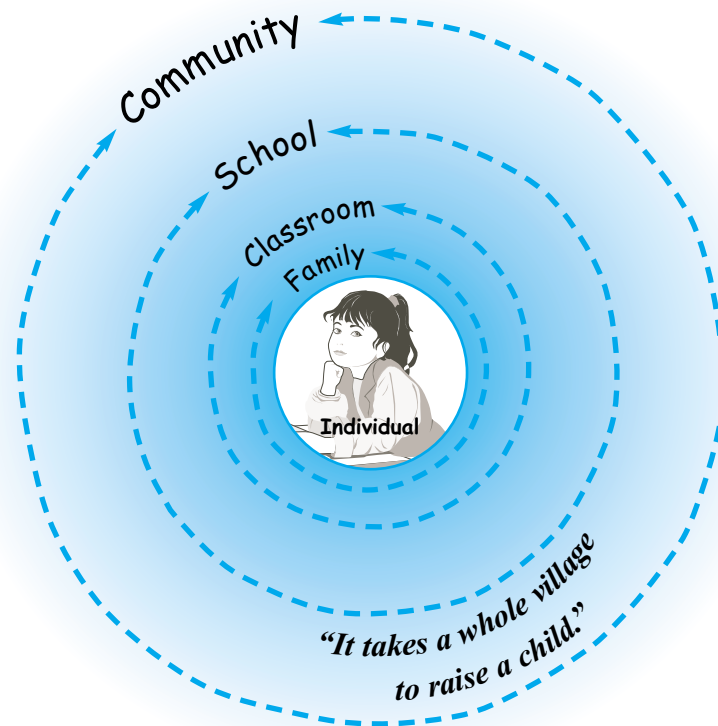
**Section 8:**  
**Working Together,**  
**Families — Schools — Communities**

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## 8. WORKING TOGETHER, FAMILIES — SCHOOLS — COMMUNITIES

Everyone has a role to play in raising a child. Families, classroom teachers, school personnel, and community members need to work together to ensure that the best interests of the child are addressed.



This section will focus on ways for the parents, school, and the community to work collaboratively in the best interests of all children, including those with behavioural challenges. To encourage involvement, schools should demonstrate to parents that their involvement is very much valued and desired.

## Benefits of Parent-School Partnerships\*

Educators need to be aware of the benefits of the active involvement of parents in schools.

- Research has shown that students will be more successful in school when their parents are actively involved (higher test scores and grades, better attendance, more positive attitudes and behaviour, and higher graduation rates).
- Parents will become more supportive of schools when they have first-hand knowledge of what the school is trying to do, and when they view the school as a partner, sharing responsibility for their children's learning. The levels and types of parental involvement increase when parents and the school work together.
- Parents and schools will benefit from two-way information sharing and collaborative problem solving. Parents will feel more comfortable in meeting with school personnel when they have been actively involved in school activities and events.
- Home-school partnerships help all youngsters to succeed in school and in life. When the school and parents deliver a common message about the value of attending school, staying in school and working hard, students are more likely to listen.



\*The term “parent” is used throughout this document to refer to parents, guardians, families, or others who have responsibility for caring for students.

## Parental Involvement

If parents are to work with the school to solve problems affecting their children, they must first feel comfortable with the school. The school should reach out to families and show them that their involvement is very important. Building relationships and parental involvement can be encouraged by the school in a number of different ways. Schools might consider the following:



- Involve parents in meaningful ways within the school. Joyce Epstein has developed a framework of six types of involvement in order to encourage schools to develop more comprehensive programs that involve parents. They include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.
- Invite parents to visit the classrooms, participate in school activities, and become involved with the school.
- Encourage the development of a parent room in the school to encourage parents to drop in and meet other parents on an informal basis. Often the parents will initiate activities in the parent room, such as informal speakers on educational topics, toy lending library, discussions on parenting, etc.

**Parental Involvement:** Based on the work of Dr. Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland.

- Encourage family activities on an informal basis, such as community barbecues, parent-child recreation evenings in the gymnasium, etc.
- Develop a supportive relationship with parents early in the school year. When a phone call to the home is required, the teacher should ensure that the tone and the purpose of the call is perceived as a request for support and cooperation in solving the problem together.
- Make students and parents feel welcome through phone calls prior to school starting, visits to homes, cards sent to homes to acknowledge positive work or actions by the student.
- Initiate informal “coffee” meetings with parents to discuss joint concerns.
- Make it easy for parents to attend meetings by addressing the practical problems they may have, e.g., providing child care, accommodating families’ work schedules.
- Develop connections with families through the use of the Internet and regular newsletters.



For additional information on involving parents in the school, see:

Manitoba Education and Training. *Parents and Schools: Partners in Education*, 1995.



Epstein, J.L., L. Coates, M.G. Sanders, and B.S. Simon. *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*, 1997.

## Parents and Meetings

Parents should be encouraged to meet with staff on a regular basis. These meetings can include start-of-year orientation meetings, parent-teacher meetings, regular IEP meetings, and social meetings.

From time to time, it will become necessary to involve some parents in a school meeting to discuss their child’s unique learning needs. How the meeting is conducted can greatly influence future relationships with the parents. Consider the following suggestions to ensure a smooth and successful meeting.

- Establish a meeting format that is not threatening to parents.
- Be supportive and utilize language that encourages the parent to be involved in the meeting.
- Provide comfortable surroundings; round tables promote the concept of equal participation and a team approach.
- Ensure all parties are prepared for meetings.
- Ensure the number of professionals invited to the meetings is not overwhelming for the parents. Only key people should attend the meeting. Other involved professionals can send written reports if necessary.
- Ensure that parents feel as though they are important contributors to the solution of the problem.

**“Together we are stronger.”**

- Arrange meetings at times that are convenient for parents. If a mutually convenient time cannot be arranged, perhaps the school staff and parents could alternate whose schedule will be accommodated.
- Maintain a focus on the child and his or her needs, not on personalities or blaming.
- Do not take criticism personally.
- Agree to ground rules and identify the parameters of acceptable topics.
- Agree to deal with the behaviour issues as a team: “We will work on this problem together.” “We will support one another.”
- Deliver bad news about the child with a sensitivity to all participants.
- Develop a proactive approach to address the needs of the child.
- Keep meetings to a reasonable length of time (30 minutes) and always begin with a discussion of the child’s strengths and positive developments.
- Include a short summary that focuses on the action to be taken for all the meeting participants.
- Ensure the meeting agenda establishes the problem, brainstorms solutions, evaluates the solutions, selects a solution to try, and establishes a follow-up meeting to see if the solution is working.
- Remember that parents will advocate for their children.
- Handle conflicts respectfully. On occasion, a meeting might require a neutral chairperson.

**Parenting Programs**

All parents can benefit by being able to access information and training on appropriate ways of dealing with their children. Schools should encourage all parents to consider parenting programs and ensure they are not seen as “courses for bad parents.” Instead, parents should be encouraged to take the courses to broaden the range of strategies and approaches they have available to use with their children.

Schools should be aware of organizations and community groups that are offering parenting courses and include information on the course in school newsletters. Some of these parenting courses are listed below:

- Developing Capable People (Capabilities Inc., H. Stephen Glenn)
- How to Talk so Your Child will Listen and How to Listen so Your Child will Talk (Avon Books)
- Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) programs (American Guidance Services)
- Active Parenting (Active Parent Canada [Calgary])

For parents who can’t or won’t attend, it may be useful to send home chapter summaries, materials, or lend copies of program videos and texts.

**Suggested Topics**

- Setting Limits for Your Child
- Conflict Resolution
- Learning Disabilities
- Sleep Disorders
- Differentiated Instruction
- Behavioural Issues for Parents

**Parent Information Evenings**

As well, school divisions or individual schools can offer parent information evenings on a variety of topics. These information evenings can be offered jointly by several local agencies working together to develop appropriate program topics. Schools can use their newsletters to receive suggestions from parents on the type of program they would like to attend.

**“Supporting the family is supporting the child.”**

**Accessing Supports for Families**

Parents of children with difficult behaviours face many problems and frustrations every day. One way of gaining support is for the parents to talk to other parents who are having the same experience. This can be accomplished through a parent support group.

In different areas of the province, support groups are available for parents on a variety of topics.

Parents may require greater supports as the stresses of raising a child with behavioural challenges continue to accumulate.

Schools should develop a list of contacts with local agencies such as Child and Family Services, Mental Health Services, or the Regional Health Authority in order to refer parents for additional services. In some cases, the school counsellor or clinician may need to assist parents in completing referral forms for accessing these community resources. In some extreme situations, the school should know how to arrange emergency placements for a parent or child.

**Strategies for Engaging Parents**

When parents become angry or upset with school personnel, it is often the administrator who becomes involved in trying to rectify the problem. The following suggestions have proven to be useful in diffusing difficult situations.

- Shake hands and welcome parents into your office.
- Utilize a comfortable setting where all participants are seated.
- Utilize effective listening skills.
- Keep calm and remain confident.
- Establish time limits for the meeting.
- Apologize if the school or a staff member has made a mistake.
- Get past the anger and frustration and get to the key reason for the meeting.
- Empathize with the parents.

*(continued)*

**“Effective communication involves two-way dialogue.”**

- Ask the right questions to uncover all aspects of a problem.
- Redirect the problem to the person who is most involved.
- It may be necessary to deliver bad news to parents, but try to deliver it with tact and gentleness.
- Welcome constructive criticism.
- Say what needs to be said — respectfully.
- Consider cultural differences in communication.
- Take your time. Take extra time to further investigate a problem before deciding on a course of action.
- Don't tell them, show them.
- Find a way to work cooperatively.
- Give options to parents.
- Focus on problems, not personalities.
- Leave the meeting on a positive tone.
- Agree to meet again.

### **Resistant Parents**

On occasion, schools will encounter parents who will not cooperate and will not come into the school to meet with the staff. When faced with this type of situation, schools should continue to pursue ways of involving the parents. Schools might consider the following suggestions:

- Proceed with the necessary programming for the child even without the parent's involvement.
- Continue to invite parents to come to the school.
- Document the attempts made to contact the parent.
- Try to find a key contact outside the school who is willing to work with the staff to involve the parents, e.g., neighbour, relative, worker.
- Offer to meet the parents at a site outside of the school.
- Utilize other school division personnel to contact the parents, e.g., attendance officer, community liaison worker.
- Consider involving outside agencies who might be involved with the parents already, e.g., Child and Family Services, health agency, local friendship centre.
- Keep trying, with the underlying assumption that the correct way to address the situation has not been found.



## Parents and Individual Education Planning

Prior to involving parents in an Individual Education Planning meeting, the school should ensure that parents understand what an IEP meeting is about and how they can prepare for the meeting. The following suggestions from *Individual Education Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing IEPs* (Manitoba Education and Training, 1998) should be given to parents prior to the meeting.

<p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;"><i>Individual Education Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing IEPs</i></p> <p><b>Parents and IEP Planning</b></p> <p>Individual education planning is the process by which families, teachers, and other support personnel work together to meet the needs of students who need adjustments or supports to achieve their full potential.</p> <p>Parents are valuable members of this process. As a parent, you provide a unique understanding of your child's past experience and his or her goals, interests, and responses. The work you can do with your child at home is often important in meeting the goals set through the IEP process.</p> <p>You can take part in IEP planning by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• having regular contact with the school</li> <li>• taking an active role in the decisions made for your child</li> <li>• asking to be put in touch with other parents involved in IEP planning</li> <li>• asking about the services and resources available</li> </ul> <p>Before going to the IEP meeting, you may want to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ask for a copy of the agenda from the classroom teacher</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: x-small;">4.6</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;"><i>Individual Education Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing IEPs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ask how your child may be a part of the IEP process</li> <li>• write down the thoughts and questions you want to talk about in the meeting</li> <li>• think about your goals and hopes for your child</li> <li>• think about the concerns you want addressed</li> </ul> <p>At the IEP meetings, feel free to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make it clear how long you can stay for the meeting</li> <li>• provide information about your child and how he or she learns and behaves outside school</li> <li>• ask questions if anything is unclear</li> <li>• ask how you can help work on some of the goals at home</li> </ul> <p>After meetings, you can help by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• keeping in touch with the teacher and/or case manager</li> <li>• working on the goals of the IEP at home</li> <li>• telling the teacher of any change in the home that may affect his or her ability to work at school</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: x-small;">4.6</p>
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**“Families, schools, and community organizations all contribute to student achievement, the best results come when all three work together.”**

Once the initial IEP meeting has occurred, the parents need to keep in touch with the school. Formal team meetings to review and update the IEP usually occur two to three times per year. Therefore, it is important that the parents maintain contact with the teacher or in-school case manager between meetings. It may be possible to develop a home-school communication book that will keep both the school and the home informed as to recent developments and progress being made with the child.

## Parenting Practices

Both teachers and parents can benefit from many of the research findings of the *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth* and the related research on parenting styles. The research has led to several conclusions regarding how parents and teachers can best interact with children. These conclusions include:

- Provide a warm and caring environment
- Encourage independence
- Be consistent and positive
- Encourage responsibility
- Teach respect for self and others
- Encourage cooperation
- Set moderate limits



Chao, Ruth, and Douglas Willms. *Do Parenting Practices Make A Difference?*, 1998. (Paper presented at "Investing in Children: A National Research Conference.")  
 Minister of Industry and Human Resources Development Canada. *Growing Up In Canada: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*, 1996.

Both parents and teachers can use this type of research to work effectively with children at home and in classrooms.

## Community Partnerships

It is important that the school collaborate with the community in a number of ways. The community includes several constituents including businesses, cultural organizations, government services (local, provincial, federal), social agencies, job training services, recreational services, and health services.

Developing relationships with the broad spectrum of community services and businesses is important to the schools. Both parties have a great deal to gain by supporting and collaborating with one another.

The **school** benefits through:

- Access to a broader range of services for its students, e.g., recreation, health services, treatment facilities, after-school clubs
- Assistance provided by business, e.g., work experience, cooperative education, mentoring, portfolio development
- Keeping current on the communities' expectations for schools, e.g., computer skills
- Access to supportive resources, e.g., fundraising by a local business for the school, adopt-a-school programs, contributions of products from businesses
- Access to speakers who can come to the school to speak to students or parents
- Access to expertise through contacts in various agencies and services, e.g., cultural groups and activities, career speakers
- Improvement of public relations by opening the doors to the community
- Joint operation of programs, e.g., Police athletic clubs in the schools

The **community** benefits through:

- Understanding the needs and issues facing the schools
- Sharing the costs of joint programs, e.g., parenting programs, summer programs
- Attracting students to future jobs
- Improved community relations
- Ensuring that schools are teaching job skills that are current and in demand
- Utilizing the school to share information on community programs and services

Partnerships with the community are particularly effective when both parties receive a benefit. A partnership should have an educational focus and should be designed to enhance learning. Community partnerships can take many forms. Examples of partnership projects that have been successful are listed below.

- Mentoring partnerships
- Cooperative education programs
- Adopt-a-school programs
- Joint-use recreational projects
- School reading programs
- School nutrition programs
- Alternative educational programs
- Computers for schools

All of these partnerships have the potential to provide additional services and programs for youth within the school community.

### **Addressing Community Problems**

From time to time, a local school community will identify issues that need the school's attention. The types of issues that might be raised include:

- Bullying
- Harassment
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Racism
- Gang involvement
- Vandalism
- Shoplifting and theft

For the school to begin to address these issues effectively, they should involve families and the local community in the solution to the problem.

## Close-up on the Development of a School and Community Plan that Addresses School Bullying

The following close-up will be used to highlight the development of a planning process for addressing a community issue. The following case study will illustrate how a community committee addressed **school bullying**.

### Close Up

*“The community and school will work collaboratively together to develop a safe and caring environment.”*

The principal of an elementary school received several letters and phone calls from parents within the school community complaining that their children were being bullied both in school and on the playground. She decided to form a study committee to review the concern using a community-oriented approach.

The principal formed a committee to explore the issue of bullying. Because the issue involved community concerns and issues, she decided to have both school and community representation on the committee. Representation included:

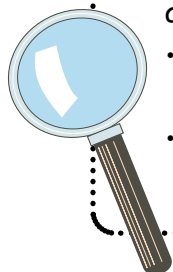
- Parents of children in both primary and intermediate grades
- An educational assistant who supervises at recess and lunch hour
- The physical education teacher
- The school counsellor
- The president of the local community club
- A classroom teacher who lives in the community

The principal agreed to act as chair for the committee.

At its first meeting, the committee reviewed its members' perceptions of bullying in both the school and community. Everyone agreed there was a problem, but there was uncertainty about the extent of the problem. The committee decided that additional information was required. As well, the committee decided to review current literature and programs dealing with the problem of bullying.

The committee decided to form two sub-committees to address the two key areas.

- Develop two surveys on bullying, one for parents of all students in the school and one for students in the school.
- Conduct a brief review of the literature on bullying, focusing on intervention strategies.



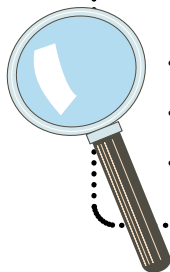
The surveys were developed and sent out to parents and other community organizations. The student survey was developed and administered with students. (Two versions were used; Grades 1-3 using visuals and Grades 4-6.) The results were compiled and, based on the data, the committee concluded:

- Bullying is a major concern to the parents in the community, particularly at the intermediate level.
- Bullying often involves special needs students and students from minority groups (name calling).
- Bullying was reported by a high percentage of students in Grades 3-6.
- Bullying occurs most often at recess and after school. Bullying occurs most often on the playground. Parents also mentioned that bullying occurs at the local hockey rink.

The other sub-committee reviewed a number of existing studies. One of the key areas noted was that bullying is reduced when supervision is increased. Other research indicated the importance of involving the students and their parents in the solution to the problem. A number of resources were reviewed, including materials from the Lions-Quest program, the Alberta Safe and Caring Schools Project, and the Committee for Children bullying prevention resources.

Based on community and school perceptions and the research, the following goals were established.

- Develop a brochure entitled "How to Stop Bullying" for distribution to parents and the community.
- Develop a five-lesson program on bullying that would be given to all students in the intermediate grades.
- Conduct a bullying prevention promotion in the school and community.
- Explore ways in which the school and community club can work together to improve sportsmanship in team sports.
- Examine ways of increasing supervision at recess time.
- Develop a policy on dealing with bullying.
- Address concerns related to name calling.



After further discussion with the staff and community representatives, an action plan was developed. The components of the plan included:

- The committee will develop a brochure entitled "How to Stop Bullying," to be sent home to all families addressing bullying issues.
- The counsellor and classroom teachers will develop a five-lesson presentation on bullying to be delivered to all students in the intermediate grades. Lessons will include videos, role playing, and empathy for others. It will be based on a variety of materials from the Lions-Quest program and the Safe and Caring Schools materials from Alberta. The local police officer will provide a short presentation to the intermediate grades on the seriousness of bullying and harassing others.
- The school will have a theme month entitled "No Bullying Month." This activity will be introduced at a student assembly.
- The physical education instructor and local community club will implement sections of the Play Fair strategy for all team sports. The Fair Play resources will be used with all team sports.
- The principal will explore methods of staffing that will increase the presence of supervisors at recess, noon hour, and after school. The principal will assign an extra educational assistant to help at recess time.
- All staff members will intervene whenever bullying is reported or observed.

A newsletter was prepared by the school and sent home to all families. The newsletter contained a short summary of the survey results and a list of the interventions that would be used to address the issue of bullying.

The committee decided to use the school newsletter to conduct a follow-up survey with teachers after the conclusion of the "No Bullying Month" pro-motion. An example of this follow-up survey is included at the end of this section.

The principal arranged a luncheon in June for the members of the committee to celebrate their hard work and the success of the interventions. Initial discussions occurred for the follow-up work of the committee for the next school year.



## Intersectoral Committees

In many communities across Manitoba, intersectoral working committees have been formed to address community issues and concerns. These committees are composed of representatives of the major organizations, government departments, and agencies operating in a local area. These interagency committees:

- provide an opportunity for networking with the staff representing the various agencies or departments.
- serve as a clearing house to share information and announcements.
- provide a forum in order to discuss programming and service needs for the local area.
- develop local projects or initiatives serving youth.
- serve as a decision-making committee for accessing community services.
- provide a mechanism for the discussion of individual cases.
- advocate for additional services based on the needs established through data collection in the local community.



For additional information on Family-School-Community Partnerships, see the following documents and websites:

- U.S. Department of Education. *A Compact for Learning: An Action Handbook for School-Family-Community Partnerships*, 1997. [www.ed.gov/PFIE/titlei.html](http://www.ed.gov/PFIE/titlei.html)
- Strong Schools Strong Families: Building Community Partnerships for Learning  
<http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/families/strong/index.html>
- Saskatchewan Human Services. *Working With Communities*, Saskatchewan Education, 2220 College Ave. 7th floor, Regina, SK, S4P 3V7.
- Dryfoos, J.G. *Full-Service Schools: A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth, and Families*, 1994.

This chapter has focused on ways that schools can utilize the supports provided by parents and the community. By involving and supporting both families and community businesses and organizations, schools gain valuable support as they attempt to deal with many students including those with behavioural difficulties. It is important that the schools take the time to develop these supports by making the families and community groups feel welcomed and appreciated.

## NOTES



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## **Section 8 Support Materials**

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- Bullying Survey
- Examples of Intersectoral Committees



### Bullying Survey

Please complete the following survey and return it to the teacher or office. Your responses are greatly appreciated and will be published in the next newsletter. Please place a check mark in the appropriate spaces. We have surveyed our students and would now like your views on this area as well. This is an area of focus for Buchanan School this year.

1. Do you think bullying is a problem at Buchanan School?  
 Yes                       No
2. Where do you think bullying occurs the most?  
 playground  
 school halls  
 bathrooms  
 change rooms
3. When do you think bullying occurs the most?  
 recess times  
 lunch hour  
 in class  
 before class  
 after school
4. Has your child ever been bullied?  
 Yes                       No
5. If you received a pamphlet on “how to stop bullying”, would you use it (e.g., discuss it with your child)?  
 Yes                       No
6. What do you think of “Anti-Bullying Month?”  
 Like it  
 Neither like or dislike  
 Dislike it
7. What can the school do to stop bullying?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Bullying Survey:** Copyright © 2001 by Buchanan School, St. James-Assiniboia School Division No. 2. Created by Laura Warrenchuk. Reprinted by permission.

## Examples of Intersectoral Committees

### **Brandon Youth Services Committee Brandon Multi-Agency Prevention Program (MAPP)**

This project is a multi-agency prevention program that is designed to assist youth and their families in the Brandon community. There are 10 participating agencies, including Brandon School Division No. 40, Brandon Police Service, Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba, Brandon Crown Attorney, and Community and Youth Correctional Services. The agencies collaborate to provide services and interventions for youth at risk involved with more than one agency.

### **Thompson Interagency Program**

This program is a joint effort of the following agencies: School District of Mystery Lake No. 2355, Child and Family Services, Community and Youth Corrections, Mental Health, Marymount North, Macdonald Youth Services, Boys and Girls Club of Thompson, and Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre. The program has been established to provide alternative services to youth between the ages of 12 and 16. The youth are involved with several agencies and require highly flexible programming and services.

### **CHOICES Youth Program, Winnipeg School Division No. 1**

This prevention program was established with a goal of reducing youth substance abuse, academic failure, dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, and gang activity. The program involves five components: personal and social skills training, wilderness/ experiential education, academic enhancement, parent skills training/parental involvement, and a CHOICES follow-up club. The program selects youth in Grades 6 to 8. The project is a joint effort of the Winnipeg School Division No. 1, Winnipeg Police Service, and Community and Youth Corrections, Manitoba Justice.

### **Elwick Village Centre Project**

This early intervention program has been developed at Elwick School in the Seven Oaks School Division. The program is an intersectoral project developed by Seven Oaks School Division No. 10, Nor-West Family Co-op, Winnipeg Child and Family Services, Maples Tenant Association, Family Centre of Winnipeg, the Elwick School Parent Community, and the Maples Community Police Department. The village Centre Project provides a number of programs and services that focus on parents of pre-school children.

**“Better education is everybody’s business.”**

— *The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education*