

Nelson Waldorf School – Parent Survey on Fundraising – April 2009

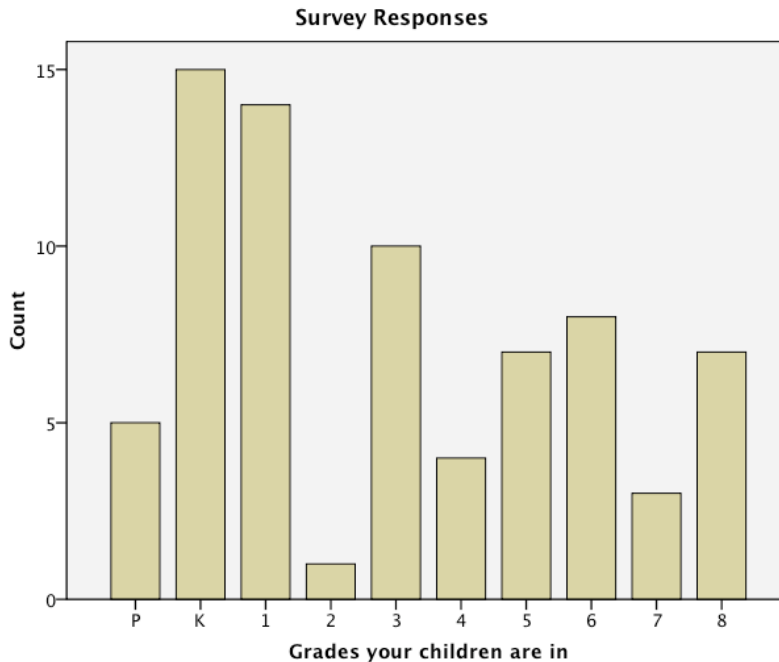
Survey Designed, Administered, and Analyzed by Iain Pardoe*

Summary

Completed surveys were received from almost half the school. There was broad agreement with the first three statements. 90% agreed or strongly agreed that they “generally feel well informed about school events/festivals,” with comparable figures of 94% for “it is reasonable and fair to expect all parents to help with events/festivals by volunteering to the best of their ability” and 82% for “I generally feel well informed about tuition and financial assistance.” 43% reported “average” involvement with events/festivals, with 41% reporting “above average” or “well above average” and 16% reporting “a little” or “none.” There was broad support for the ideas to increase parent involvement. 91% selected “would help a lot/a little” for “clearer expectations regarding parent responsibilities,” with comparable figures of 88% for “increased volunteering from more parents across the school,” and 72% for “introduction of a formal volunteer plan.” The following section on **Numerical Results** provides more details. Many parents also wrote additional comments – these are summarized in the **Written Comments Summary** (page 8) and provided in full in **Appendix A** (page 11). The survey is attached in **Appendix B** (page 19).

Numerical Results

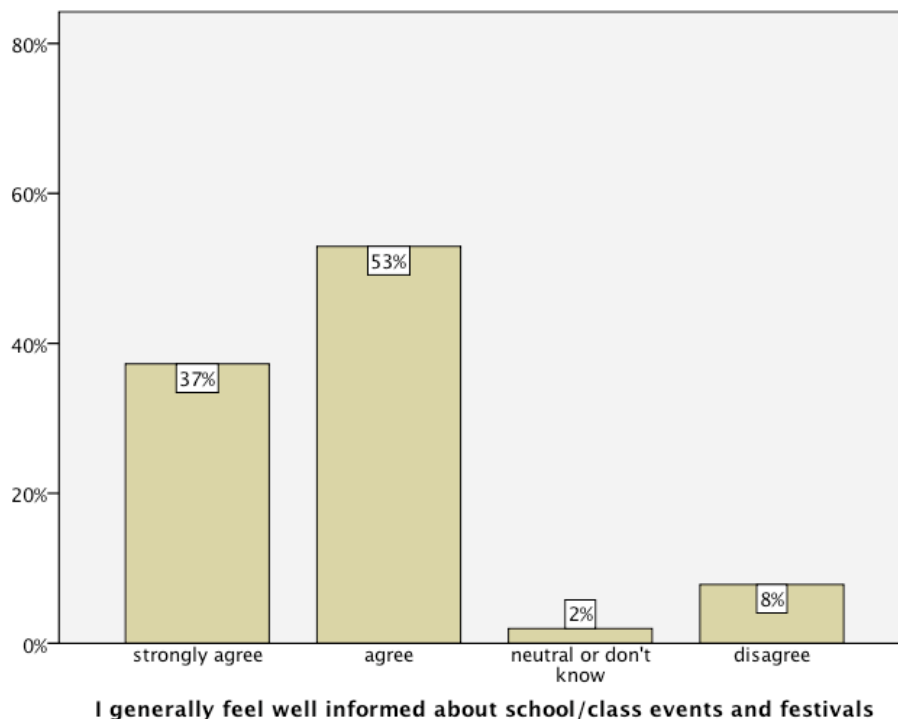
The Nelson Waldorf School (NWS) Fundraising Committee sent out a survey (see Appendix B) in the April 8 School Bulletin to find out parents’ thoughts and opinions on fundraising at the school. Parents completed 53 surveys, representing 77 children enrolled at the school. With current enrollment of approximately 170 children (including Kindergarten and Preschool Daycare), 77 out of 170 represents a 45% response rate. The breakdown by class is summarized as follows:



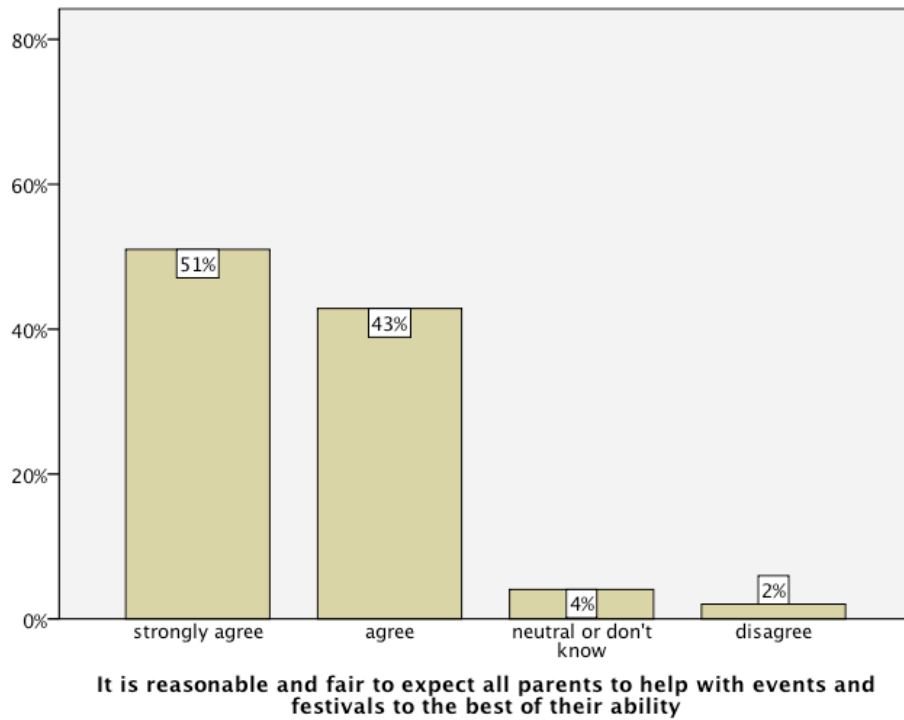
* With assistance from the NWS Fundraising Committee.

Seven specific questions were asked, the results for which are summarized below. The survey also collected information on the grade(s) of the parent's child(ren), the number of years at NWS, and the number of years in Waldorf education (including NWS). This made it possible to see if results for any of the seven specific questions vary according to the grade level of the oldest child at the school or the number of years the family had been at NWS or in Waldorf education. In most cases results are consistent across grades and years at NWS or in Waldorf education, but where there are differences this has been discussed below.

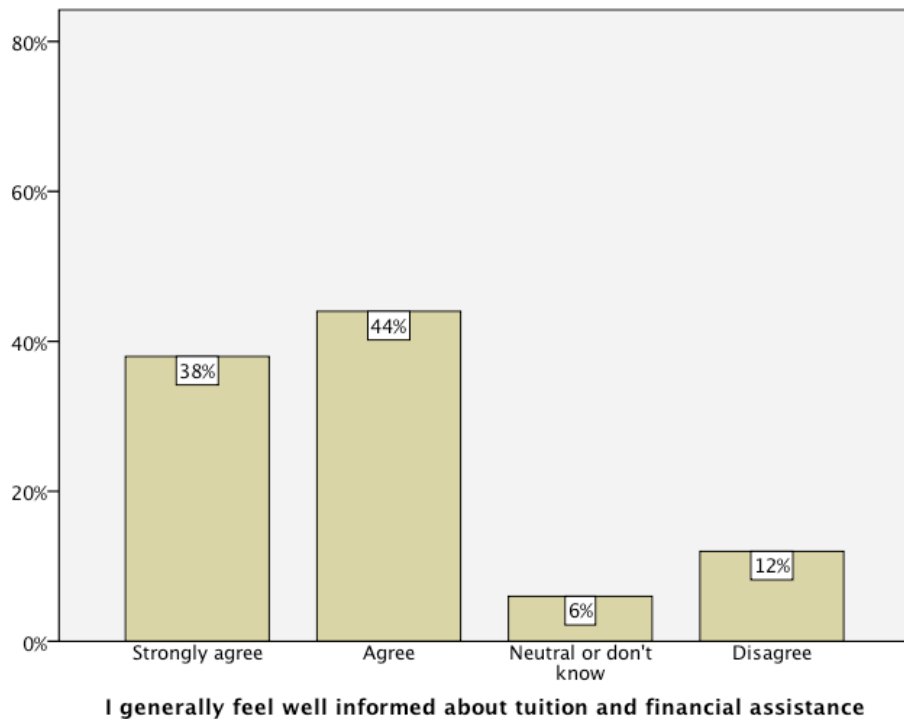
The **first question** asked how much you agree with the statement **“I generally feel well informed about school/class events and festivals.”** 37% selected “strongly agree,” 53% selected “agree,” 2% selected “neutral or don’t know,” 8% selected “disagree,” and no-one selected “strongly disagree.” The chart below illustrates. There is no significant difference in how parents responded to this question according to the grade level of their oldest child at the school or the number of years the family had been at NWS.



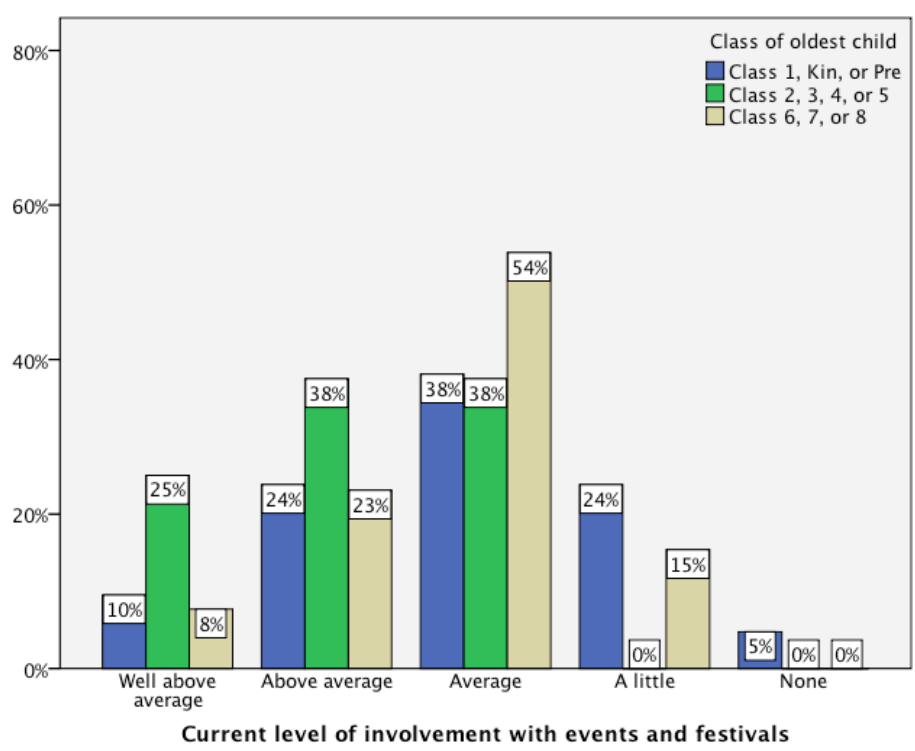
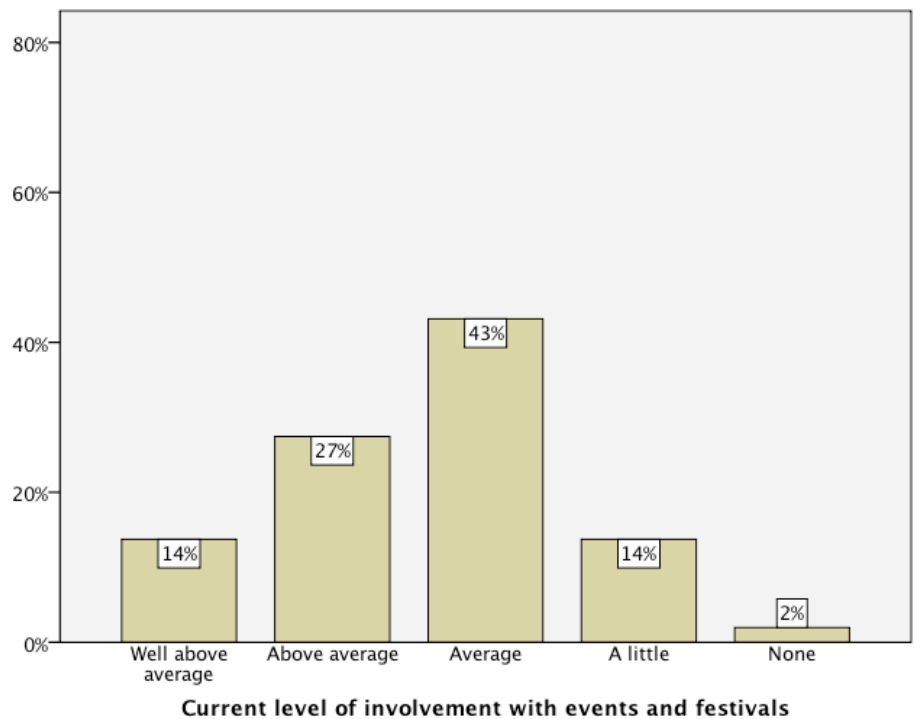
The **second question** asked how much you agree with the statement **“It is reasonable and fair to expect all parents to help with school/class events and festivals by volunteering time, money, or services to the best of their ability.”** 51% selected “strongly agree,” 43% selected “agree,” 4% selected “neutral or don’t know,” 2% selected “disagree,” and no-one selected “strongly disagree.” The chart at the top of the next page illustrates. There is broader agreement with this statement than the first one. There is no significant difference in how parents responded to this question according to the oldest child grade level or years at NWS.



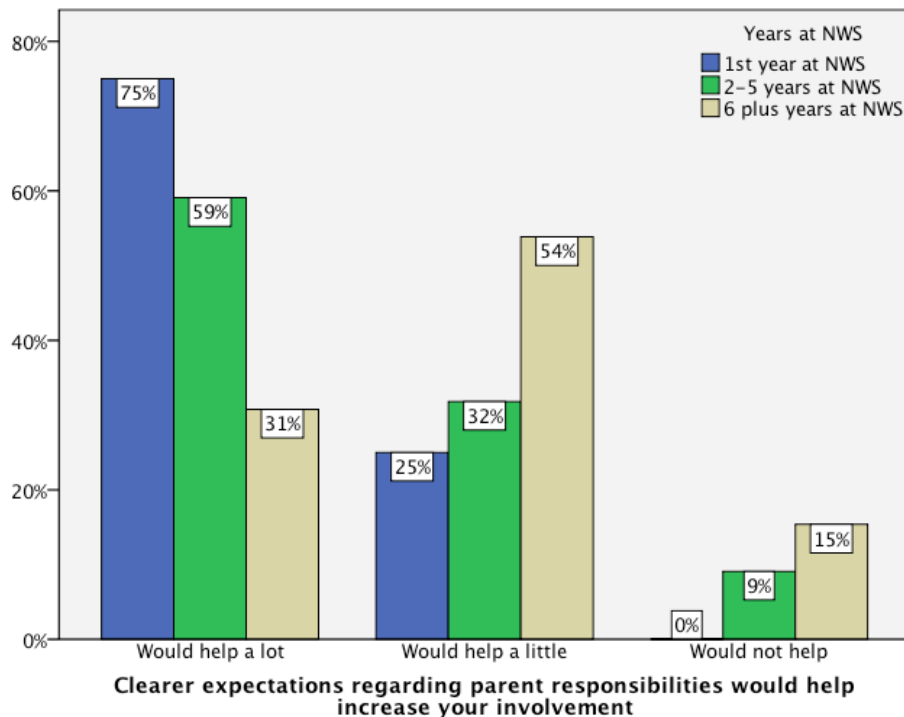
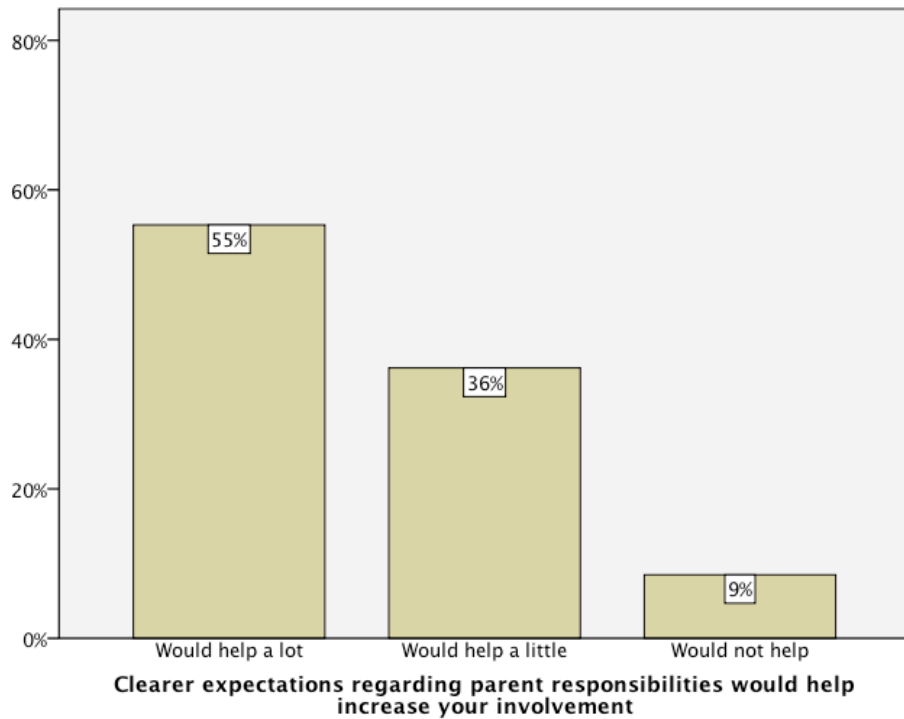
The **third question** asked how much you agree with the statement “**I generally feel well informed about tuition and financial assistance.**” 38% selected “strongly agree,” 44% selected “agree,” 6% selected “neutral or don’t know,” 12% selected “disagree,” and no-one selected “strongly disagree.” The chart below illustrates. There is slightly less agreement with this statement than either of the first two. There is no significant difference in how parents responded to this question according to the oldest child grade level or years at NWS.



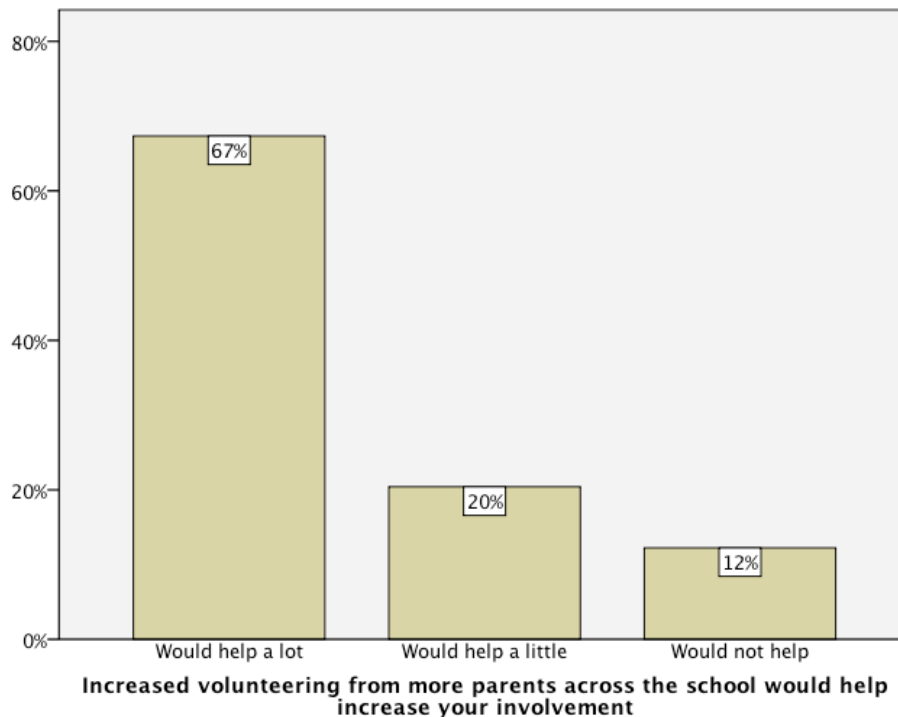
The **fourth question** asked, “**What is your current level of involvement with school/class events and festivals through time, money, or services?**” 14% selected “well above average,” 27% selected “above average,” 43% selected “average,” 14% selected “a little,” and 2% selected “none.” The chart below illustrates. There are significant differences in how parents answered this question according to grade level of the oldest child. There is a tendency for parents with the oldest child in a middle grade level (2-5) to select higher levels of involvement overall than for lower and higher grades: the second chart below illustrates. (Note that the grade level breakdown is by *oldest* child and these parents may also have children in lower grades.)



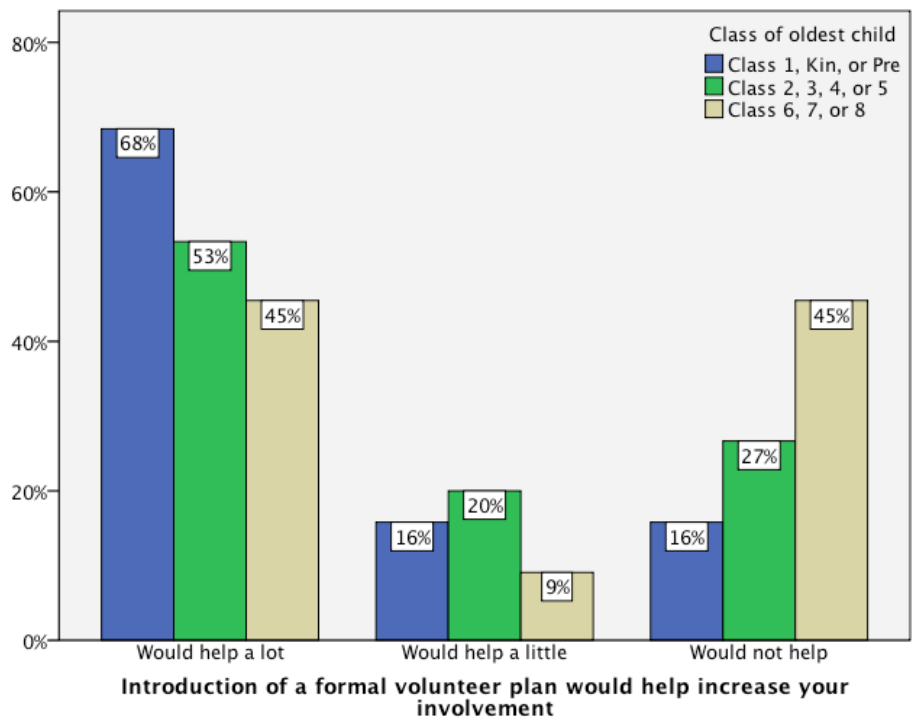
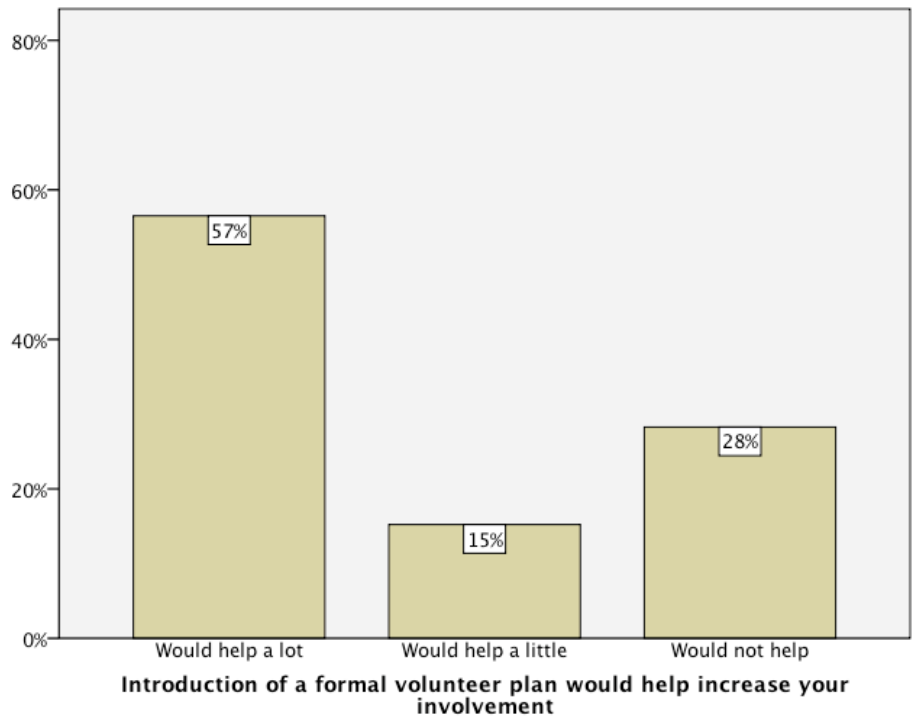
The **fifth question** asked whether the following might help you to increase your involvement with school/class events and festivals through time, money, or services: **“Clearer expectations and needs communicated from the school regarding parent responsibilities.”** 55% selected “would help a lot,” 36% selected “would help a little,” and 9% selected “would not help.” The chart below illustrates. There are significant differences in how parents responded to this question according to number of years at NWS. There is a tendency for parents with fewer years at NWS to select “would help a lot/a little” more often than those with more years at NWS: the second chart below illustrates.



The **sixth question** asked whether the following might help you to increase your involvement with school/class events and festivals through time, money, or services: **“Increased levels of volunteering from a larger proportion of parents across the whole school.”** 67% selected “would help a lot,” 20% selected “would help a little,” and 12% selected “would not help.” The chart below illustrates. A larger proportion of parents selected “would help a lot” for this statement than for the previous one, but fewer selected “would help a little.” There were also slightly more parents who selected “would not help” for this statement than for the previous one. There is no significant difference in how parents responded to this question according to the oldest child grade level or years at NWS.



The **seventh question** asked whether the following might help you to increase your involvement with school/class events and festivals through time, money, or services: **“Introduction of a formal volunteer plan in which the school asks each family to volunteer a set number of hours per year, with a “buy-out” option available.”** 57% selected “would help a lot,” 15% selected “would help a little,” and 28% selected “would not help.” The chart at the top of the next page illustrates. Although 72% of parents selected “would help a lot” or “would help a little,” this is less than either of the two previous statements (91% and 88% respectively). There are significant differences in how parents answered this question according to grade level of the oldest child. There is a tendency for parents with the oldest child in lower grade levels to select “would help a lot/a little” more often than for higher grades: the second chart on the next page illustrates. (Note that the grade level breakdown is by *oldest* child and these parents may also have children in lower grades.)



Written Comments Summary (complete written comments are in Appendix A)

1. I generally feel well informed about school/class events and festivals.

One parent noted, "I feel well informed because I make an effort to be informed – the school makes this easy." Another parent also mentioned this, but suggested that this information sometimes lacked specific details. Two parents commented that more notice could be given for events/festivals, which would make juggling work easier. Another parent suggested that the anthroposophical reasons for events could be provided.

2. It is reasonable and fair to expect all parents to help with school/class events and festivals by volunteering time, money, or services to the best of their ability.

A number of parents noted that individual families vary in their ability to volunteer and expectations should take into account things like work schedules, single parents, low incomes, and childcare, and parents who cannot volunteer as much as others should not be made to feel guilty. One parent suggested that volunteering needs should be more clearly communicated, while another identified time and energy as being the primary volunteer needs, not money.

3. I generally feel well informed about tuition and financial assistance.

One parent noted that tuition information is available on the school website, although another found the exact criteria for determining tuition assistance to be opaque, and another mentioned lots of misunderstanding between those who require assistance and those who don't. One parent commented on the government not fully funding NWS.

4. What is your current level of involvement with school/class events and festivals through time, money, or services?

Many parents noted that work commitments determine the extent to which they (and others) can volunteer. Some suggested that volunteer activities take more account of people's lack of availability during working hours. A couple of parents noted that family commitments can limit volunteering also. Two more parents pointed out challenges for new parents in finding opportunities to volunteer and "breaking in." A few more impediments to volunteering that were mentioned include living a long way from the school and burn-out for parents who have been at the school a long time. One parent noted that involvement can vary by class, while another suggested that volunteering needs/expectations were lower at NWS compared with the parent's previous Waldorf school.

5. Clearer expectations and needs communicated from the school regarding parent responsibilities [would help increase parent involvement].

One parent supported this idea and also suggested communicating expected volunteer workloads and examples of volunteer options. Another parent cautioned that expectations and commitments be provided without burdening parents. One parent noted that his/her volunteer limits are personal, not a school responsibility issue, and another mentioned that expectations and needs are a class function dependent on class representatives.

6. Increased levels of volunteering from a larger proportion of parents across the whole school [would help increase parent involvement].

One parent suggested that increased volunteering from more parents would help a lot in terms of morale, shared vision, connection, and gratitude for the school. Another parent agreed this would help from the school's point of view, but is not what prevents him/her from volunteering more, while another questioned whether increased levels of volunteering would help since his/her perception is that many people do volunteer. Another parent thought there would be increased volunteering if communication about responsibilities was clearer.

7. Introduction of a formal volunteer plan in which the school asks each family to volunteer a set number of hours per year, with a “buy-out” option available [would help increase parent involvement].

There were a wide variety of views expressed about the idea of introducing a formal volunteer plan. Of those that wrote comments, eleven were broadly supportive of the idea, with one citing the example of the successful plan at the Calgary Waldorf School. Three parents suggested that finding out volunteer needs at the beginning of the year would be very helpful. Many parents specifically mentioned the “buyout” option, with two in favour and eight opposed. One parent thought that implementation and tracking would be overwhelming, while four parents pointed out previous unsuccessful attempts to organize volunteerism at the school. Seven parents noted that volunteerism should be voluntary not mandatory and that guilt can be counter-productive. One parent posed two key questions that seem to come out of all the comments: 1) What contributes to volunteer burn-out at the school? 2) How can the school create an environment that inspires rather than demands volunteerism?

8. Specific fundraising ideas and other comments.

There were also a wide variety of fundraising ideas and other comments – see Appendix A for the complete list. The following summarizes these ideas and comments:

- Consider big picture of fundraising in the context of the school's mission.
- Fundraising should be for extras not core operations.
- Increase enrollment; revisit tuition assistance program; allow trade-in-services towards tuition; compare different enrollment/tuition scenarios.
- Reduce school expenses.
- Design a marketing program; increase advertising; improve school communication.
- Joint marketing effort with other Waldorf schools; national (Waldorf) fundraising.
- Organize volunteerism; reduce burn-out; address reluctance to volunteer in case one always gets called on thereafter; require postdated cheques (for volunteering buyout option?).
- Decouple fundraising from volunteering time; decouple fundraising from enrollment efforts.
- Hire a commissioned fundraiser.
- Tie fundraising to specific goals.

- Select specific class fundraisers with additional ones sharing proceeds with other classes.
- Research what works for other clubs/schools.
- Pass on fundraising knowledge each year for repeating events; try new fundraising endeavours to prevent staleness.
- Apply for grants.
- Greater outreach to the local community and to local business (particularly those with Waldorf connections).
- Have tables at local markets/festivals with baked goods, produce grown at the school, crafts, postcards/calendars/recipe books with NWS art, etc.
- Make all school events ticket-based and profitable and bring them into the Nelson community more often.
- Music events, magic show, talent night, fashion show.
- Use grounds in summer (for profit); summer camps.
- Grocery vouchers; 50/50 draws and raffles; silent auctions; multi-level dinner or lunch.
- Yard/garage/rummage sale, plant sale, grow/sell pumpkins, two chicken sales a year; sell chocolates; sell Rancho Vignola fruit and nuts.
- Have students fundraise rather than parents; sponsor students.
- Have families go door-to-door.
- Sell firewood from forest.
- Bottle drive; penny donations.