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A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY ON THE VIABILITY OF USING A CLASSROOM WEB SITE AS A SCHOOL-TO-HOME COMMUNICATION TOOL IN A SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

A Dissertation

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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By

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A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

Computers and the internet have become a main source of communication in today's society. Individuals are becoming more comfortable with using the World Wide Web for many tasks that were formerly completed by other means. A student can gather information for writing a term paper by using the web rather than spending hours in a library. A mother can purchase clothing for her child by using the web rather than driving to a department store. The web has provided society with enough information access to change our methods of how we conduct day-to-day tasks.

The same web that provides the student with information and the mother with clothing options is the same web that teachers can use to establish another line of communication with the parents of their students. Web sites that have been carefully and purposefully constructed by classroom teachers can be great sources of school-to-home information sharing, and teachers, once they have determined that enough of their parents have access to the web, must consistently keep these web sites updated and informative for their students and parents.

This study examines the concept of using classroom web sites as tools for parent communication by focusing on parents' views of how useful the web sites were for them, and how useful they could have been with appropriate information on them. Classroom web sites can be useful communication tools if they contain useful information, and this study will describe what parents believe is useful.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, society has seen a massive surge in the use of electronic technologies. In the 1970s, individuals could purchase a carousel slide projector and produce colorful slide shows. Now, computers have replaced slide projectors. Loaded with a variety of software, they can display colorful photographs, as well as provide capability to use audio and video clips. Fifteen years ago the fastest way to send printed materials such as multi-page reports was to use overnight mail service, or a facsimile machine, both of which took a minimum of several hours to transmit documents. Today, computers can utilize email software to send a wealth of information to other countries in a matter of seconds. The use of computers has seemingly redefined many aspects of our lives.

In today's world, a very popular use of computers is the utilization of the World Wide Web. The web has provided society with an almost limitless span of information sharing, and many people have discovered new ways to accomplish daily tasks. In public education, individuals are becoming more knowledgeable about the variety of ways technology can assist in communication and learning. Schools are purchasing computers and software, providing professional development on the uses of technology, installing intranet networks, and connecting faculty members and students to each other and to the outside world. Teachers are recognizing the usefulness of the web as a communication tool for sharing upcoming events with students and parents.

Such an idea brings to question the viability of using web sites as an additional tool for school-to-home communication. Several concerns need to be addressed about the use of web sites for communication between school and home. What should the content include? Will parents access the page and how often? How many parents will have access to the page? How should the teacher who uses a classroom web site for parent communication address the communication needs of the parents who do not have access to the page? Educators must consider all of these concerns before creating and implementing a web site.

Background of the Study

Technology usage in society and education

Web sites have become a common tool in society. One rarely sees an advertisement without a web site indicated for that product or business. Motion pictures will often place a web address at the bottom of their movie posters or at the end of their television commercial advertisement. Much of society has definitely settled into a comfortable position with using the web. People all over the United States and the world use the Internet daily for, among other things, shopping, entertainment, research, and communication. According to a study conducted at the University of California at Los Angeles, 71.1% of Americans went online in 2002, with an average of 11.1 hours spent online per week. The study reported the top five most popular Internet activities as emailing and instant messaging-- 87.9% of users utilize the Internet in this way; web surfing or

browsing-- 76%; reading the news-- 51.9%; accessing entertainment news and information-- 46.4%; and shopping online-- 44.5% (http://www.ccp.ucla.edu/pages/internet-report.asp). The Internet has become a "one stop shop" for many tasks. Because of the increasing use of the Internet in most aspects of life, this study focused on the viability of using a web site as a tool of teacher-parent communication.

No one should doubt the usefulness of technology in education. Computers have taken an important role in organization, communication, and production in the classroom. Many educators are starting a journey down the road of using the web as a source of communicating from school to home, and the reason is quite simple. If such a large number of individuals in society are using the web for communication between vendor and customer, then certainly educators can use such a tool for communication between the school (vendor), and the family (customer).

The question still remains of how useful such a tool can be to the educator, for little research has been done in this area. Several educators who use a classroom web site have conducted their own research to study the web site's usefulness. A survey conducted by Sumner (2000) found that 13 of 29 classroom parents in a rural community school outside St. Louis had access to the Internet at home or at work, and every day more students would tell her about future computer purchases. Sumner maintains a classroom web site in which she mentions not only the fact that parents make many positive comments about the page, but also how many other teachers have started their own classroom sites.

Among other things, Sumner's site has a place for students to submit items and a guestbook for feedback and support.

Huseth (2001), a secondary science teacher, conducted a survey to find out what information parents would most desire to be included on her classroom web site. The survey was given to the parents of her students to help decide what content would be found on the site. Of the 186 surveys distributed, 172 responded, and 164 of the 172 indicated that they had access to a computer either at home or work. Huseth found the top three needs parents wanted to be included on the site: (a) a science calendar of assignments and due dates, (b) a current listing of student grades and missing assignments, and (c) research links to the World Wide Web.

Many teachers have the desire to use teacher-parent communication for improving student performance, and there has been some evidence that web sites can enhance this communication. Huseth observed a drop in percentage of missing assignments from 17% before initiating the web site to 11% after initiation. Although this does not necessarily indicate an increase in academic performance, this decrease in missing assignments does give hope to the notion of students giving themselves a better chance at academic achievement by completing and turning in assignments.

The data previously mentioned indicate a great possibility of improved communication between school and home with the use of a classroom web site. The research shows two things: first, a growing number of families are gaining access to the Internet at home or at work, and second, families who have not only

access to the Internet but also access to a classroom web site are seeing an increase in student performance.

Need for the Study

Parent involvement

Parent-teacher communication is a needed tool in the process of involving parents in the education of their children. The call for more parental participation in schooling, basically acknowledges an undesirable and harmful distance between family and school (de Carvalho, 2001). In a 1997 report, the National Center for Education Statistics stated that children in both single-parent and two-parent families are likely to get mostly A's, to enjoy school, and to participate in extracurricular activities and are less likely to repeat a grade or be suspend or expelled if their fathers or mothers have a high level of involvement in their schools (National Center for Education Statistics, http://nces.ed.gov/pressrelease/father.asp).

The involvement of parents in their children's education has evolved just as education itself has evolved. According to Wood (2000), the parental involvement evolution in our country has been an interesting phenomena. Originally, parents were the teachers of their own children. Then, as schools began to form, teachers were hired to partner with parents to educate children. As time passed, teachers and educators became better educated, thus becoming more independent of parents. This education aided the field of teaching to become a profession, which caused teachers to convey to parents that teachers know what and how to educate their children. Today, educators realize that they need parents

to help solve the various problems in school, such as academic and behavioral issues. Parental involvement in education is critical in helping students achieve a high level of academic success.

Parental involvement is difficult without good lines of parent-to-teacher communication. Research has shown that parent overall evaluations of the teacher, their sense of comfort with the school, and their reported level of involvement was higher when they received frequent and effective communications (Ames, 1995). Joyce Epstein of The Johns Hopkins University named six types of parental involvement:

- Parenting—help all families establish home environments to support children as students;
- Communicating—design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress;
- Volunteering—recruit and organize parent help and support;
- Learning at home—provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning;
- Decision-Making—include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives;
- Collaborating with community—identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (http://www.ssta.sk.ca/partnership/types/types.htm)

In a phenomenographical study by DeMoss and Vaughn (1999), two concepts of parent involvement were revealed. First, involved parents are motivated to actively pursue involvement within the lives of their children both inside and outside of schools and with their children's friends. Motivational factors included the member's own children, social consciousness, and crises. Second, involved parents seek information about their children and their children's schools through various sources.

If the second concept mentioned in the previous paragraph is true, involved parents are in a perpetual search for information which will help effectively educate their children. That search for information should begin and end with the teacher. Educators must seek out ways to assist or, in many cases, jump start the teacher-parent communication process. When these various avenues of communication are discovered and utilized, the results should include more meaningful parent involvement.

Teacher immediacy

Educators are constantly looking for ways to improve the academic performance of students. Recent research has found the concept of immediacy in communication has received great attention from educators in the realm of human relations. Immediacy has been defined as the use of communication behaviors (e.g., movement, enthusiasm, use of gestures, humor, vocal variety) that reduce both the psychological and physical distance between two individuals (Myers, Zhong, & Guan, 1998). According to Butland and Beebe (1992), "teacher immediacy" in the classroom (verbal and nonverbal communication such as

smiles, head nods, use of inclusive language, and eye contact) is perhaps the most salient research variable to emerge in instructional communication research in the past two decades. Researchers have studied immediacy, both verbal and nonverbal, as an effective means of teacher communication, and have also linked it to possibly improving the academic performance of students.

Teacher immediacy can be effective with all students and their parents. Teachers see their students every school day, and on occasion have the opportunity to speak with their parents. Immediacy can have up to 100% coverage of families from the teacher. The implementation of a classroom web site may not have that same coverage. A teacher can show immediate behaviors toward a family with a low socio-economic status, but would likely have difficulty reaching that same family through a web site. Huseth's (2001) study, which focused on the use of a classroom website for parent-teacher communication, cited a group of subjects in which 164 out of 172 individuals claimed to have access to the Internet at home or school. Although 164 out of 172 is a high percentage, what happens to the eight who did not have access? If surveyed on a larger scale, would the percentage of those without access grow? If the survey took place in a lower socio-economic area, how would the percentage change? The need for this study is simple: are we as educators preparing ourselves through various technical training sources to use a tool that is available to a limited percentage of the population, and upon what might that availability be based?

This study focused on the effectiveness of using teacher-created web sites as a tool for school-to-home communication. The study investigated elements

such as level of parent satisfaction in the web site, level of communication achieved by the use of the web site, what items parents wanted to see included on the web sites, and several other areas of inquiry and information.

Teacher education implications

The need for this study can also be explained in a more direct way. The writer has been teaching an educational technology course in a higher education teacher preparation institution for three years. This course instructs teacher education students in various ways the computer and software applications can be used in P-12 classrooms. In the past three terms, course content instruction on how to construct web sites, and more specifically, how to construct web sites with the intent of providing an additional arm of communication between home and school besides the common "note sent home" or parent-teacher conference were added. Although the instruction appears to be valuable to the teacher candidates, and seems to have relevance to technology in today's society, this college professor needs to know: (a) if this type of instruction reflects realistic needs and capabilities of parents, and (b) if knowledge of web site production is a skill school teachers can use. This study can answer both questions while simultaneously helping to expand a rather small body of research on using a web site as a means of parent communication. The study can also provide information to other education technology professors in higher education who work with teacher education candidates. The research will help them in evaluating, or at least pondering, the notion of instructing their students in the construction of classroom web sites and suggested content for those pages.

Statement of the Problem

This study examined two schools, one elementary school and one middle school, in a southwestern state and their use of classroom web sites in the educational process. This study was guided by three research questions. The research questions were:

In an elementary and middle school in a suburban school district that has a high emphasis on technology, and that encourages their teachers to create web sites to enhance parent communication.

1. what is the perception of parents who have access to the Internet of the usefulness of their child's classroom teacher's web site designed to enhance parent-teacher communication?
2. what are the perceptions of parents regarding parent-teacher communication who do not utilize classroom web sites created by their child's teacher to enhance parent-teacher communication?
3. what information do parents want to have included on classroom web sites created by their child's teacher to enhance parent-teacher communication?

If the old adage that says perception is reality has a certain tone of truth within it, then certainly the perception of the elementary and middle school parents being studied can be deemed as important.

The World Wide Web is used for a variety of purposes. Educators must realize the potential of using the web as a tool to aid in the learning process of students, whether through means of informing students of information, or enabling parents to become more involved in their child's education through

enhanced communication with the school. This study investigates the practicality and parental desire for such communication.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The focus of this study centered on the viability of using the World Wide Web as a tool for school-to-home communication. The use of a classroom web site as an additional source of parent contact was becoming more popular in schools. This study examined the perceptions of parents regarding a classroom web site and the usefulness of the web site's content.

This study examined two schools, an elementary school and a middle school, in a southwestern state and their use of classroom web sites in the educational process. Through a written survey (see Appendix A) and purposeful interviewing, both addressed to parents, this study was guided by three questions. The questions were:

In an elementary and middle school in a suburban school district that has a high emphasis on technology, and which encourages their teachers to create web sites to enhance parent communication,

1. what is the perception of parents who have access to the Internet of the usefulness of their child's classroom teacher's web site designed to enhance parent-teacher communication?
2. what are the perceptions of parents regarding parent-teacher communication who do not utilize classroom web sites created by their child's teacher to enhance parent-teacher communication?
3. what information do parents want to have included on classroom web sites created by their child's teacher to enhance parent-teacher communication?

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the literature pertaining to the study. The sections in the chapter will begin by describing the accessibility of the web by society, and then describe various ways society uses the Internet and the web. The next section will narrow the discussion to the literature that discusses the accessibility of schools to the web, and then the final section will focus on literature which discusses specific ways in which schools use the web for educating students.

Accessing the World Wide Web

The World Wide Web has provided millions of people with information, entertainment, and education on a daily basis. Web sites have been uploaded millions of times per day for the good (and in some cases, detriment!) of humanity. The web has been used by researchers needing information on a specific topic, teens looking for Brittany Spears concert tickets, or child molesters looking for child pornography. One thing that is sure about the web is that it is an "information super highway."

Accessibility to the web has become more common in recent years. AOL@SCHOOL's Executive Director, Mark Nixon, (2002) cited a recent report by the U.S. Department of Commerce stating that 90% of children between the ages of five and 17 use computers at home and at school. This meant that a wide majority of school-age children and their families had a great possibility of accessing the World Wide Web. With such high probability, schools can now become more involved than ever in maintaining a presence in cyberspace. Using the web, schools can proactively reach out to embrace students, parents,

prospective families, alumni, businesses, and voters who may never set foot in a school but still have a voice in the funding of school programs (McKenzie, 2000).

Internet usage in society

The premise behind the idea of using web sites as a tool for parent-teacher communication rests on the fact that society is using the Internet more and more for tasks that have always been done by other conventional means. For example, before the Internet revolution, people used to shop and make purchases either by traveling to a store and viewing the merchandize, or by mail order catalog. Of course, this is still a main system of purchasing internationally, but because the web has been made available to the public, purchasing practices have been somewhat altered. In a 1997 study, only 5 to 6% of the subjects shopped online, and spent an average of $20 (Venkatakrishna, 2000). In the year 2000, web sales in the United States were $27.3 billion, and were projected at that time to reach over $30 billion in 2001 (Korgaonkar & Wolin, 2002). This increase means that a growing number of the population has altered its spending methods due to the capabilities of the World Wide Web. This same tool can be used for altering the communication methods of school to home, or at least provide, as it has the world of retail, another viable means of accomplishing a conventional task with technological means.

A survey conducted by Sumner (2000) found that 13 of 29 classroom parents in a rural community school outside St. Louis had access to the Internet at home or at work. Every day more students would tell her about future computer purchases. Sumner, who maintains a classroom web site mentions not only the

fact that parents make many positive comments about the page, but also how many other teachers have started their own classroom site (Sumner, 2000). Sumner's site has a place for students to submit items, a guestbook for feedback and support, and a link to Schoolnotes.com, which was mentioned earlier.

Huseth (2001), a secondary science teacher previously mentioned in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, conducted a survey to find out what information parents would most desire to be included on her classroom web site. The survey was given to the parents of her students to help decide what content would be found on the site. Of the 186 surveys that were distributed, 172 responded, and 164 of the 172 indicated that they had access to a computer either at home or work. Huseth found the top three needs parents wanted to be included on the site were: (a) a science calendar of assignments and due dates, (b) a current listing of student's grades and missing assignments, and (c) research links to the World Wide Web. Of course, parent communication is aimed at improving student performance, and Huseth (2001) observed a drop in missing work percentage from 17% before initiating the web site to 11% after initiation.

The research conducted by Sumner and Huseth is important to re-state at this point because of the small amount of data found in this particular area. Their studies aid in showing the possibilities of such technology in the education setting. This study will attempt to veer away from the possibilities and examine the realities of educational web site usage as it relates to one southwestern elementary and middle school that utilizes the web for their constituents.

Schools Accessing The Web

Educators are starting to believe in the usefulness the web can provide for schools, but getting teachers to be fully convinced to use the web can be difficult. Many teachers are not comfortable using computers in any capacity, so the creation and maintenance of a web site can cause great distress. Most of these teachers have been teaching for many years, and completed their teacher training before any "how to use a computer in the classroom" course was taught. However computers, and more specifically the World Wide Web, can be very effective in tasks such as gathering and organizing information.

Besides using the web for information gathering, teachers can use the web as a communication piece between the school and home. Although schools across the United States are utilizing web sites to gain a more visible presence on the Internet, using the web as a communication tool may not be a very popular practice among educators. According to a published study by the National Center for Education Statistics, 86% of public schools with access to the Internet had a web site in 2002. Of these schools having the web site, 29% reported that a teacher or other staff member was primarily responsible for the school's web site support as part of his or her formal responsibilities (http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2004011). The United States Department of Education (2000) reported that in 1999, 7% of all public school teachers with computers or Internet access at school used the tool as a means for parent communication. More recently, according to the Milken Exchange on Education Technology, part of the Milken Family Foundation, only 12% of U.S.

elementary and middle school teachers report using the World Wide Web to communicate with parents (Nixon, 2002).

The addition of a teacher-created web site to the classroom appears to be a positive way to use Internet technology (Anonymous, http://cohort.educ.csus.edu/sanjuan1/lamarr/eportfolio/rol.pdf). The web allows parents, teachers, and students access to countless resources, including community, state, and world facts, reference materials, and information on almost any topic (Marshall & Rossett, 1997). Creating a classroom web site can be as easy, or as complicated, as one may desire (Anonymous, http://cohort.educ.csus.edu/sanjuan1/lamarr/eportfolio/rol.pdf).

Schools on the web

There are numerous web sites that provide teachers with the tools to create their own site. Some of these sites include Blackboard at www.blackboard.com, Bullwhip at www.fhs.net/FHSWeb.nsf/Home, SchoolCenter at www.schoolcenter.com, and Schoolnotes, at www.schoolnotes.com (McKenzie, 2000). These sites guide teachers through the process of setting up a web site that is designed for their parent and student clientele without extensive worry about acquiring web design knowledge. Some sites, like the Atlanta-based eHomeroom.com can be integrated with the school's web site, and provide parents with a communication tool connected to the teacher or administration. Parents, teachers, and administrators boast of knowing information such as school closings, cancellations, and fundraising opportunities through eHomeroom.com: "it's like having additional staff respond to questions from parents" (T.H.E. Journal, 2000). Educators who are more advanced in web site creation may use applications such as

Microsoft FrontPage or Netscape Communicator (Johnston, 2001). These software packages give the user a choice in creating the web site using a pattern or template, or starting with a blank slate. As mentioned, a number of teachers are making use of the web in creating classroom web sites, but the focus of the present study was driven by teachers who do use such sites.

The literature points to several suggestions for these sites in theory of use and creation. Marshall and Rossett (1997) discuss four different kinds of links that can enrich the school/home connection through a web site: (a) the information link provides general communication to parents and students about what is happening in the school and gives parents and caretakers ideas for contributing to students' educational and social growth, (b) the coaching link offers a message targeted to a particular family, group of students, or individual (ex. making specific suggestions for combining Maria's language development needs with the arrival of her baby sister), (c) the feedback link encourages educators and parents to share specific information about a child's performance, and (d) the instructional link extends the learning day by bridging the chasm between the home and the classroom. (p. 2) The four links combine to create an effective, integrated tool for communication using the technology of the web.

Johnston (2001) identifies eight helpful guidelines to follow when developing a classroom web site. Johnston advises teachers to:

1. Decide on the goal of the web site whether it is to provide parent communication, homework or assignments, class announcements, or an online learning environment, etc.

2. Develop a theme that is appropriate for your subject matter.
3. Choose a method of hosting your web site. Some schools will allow individual teachers to submit their sites to the school network. Don't forget about the free web hosting services available to educators.
4. Select the type of web design software you will be using (free web hosting, FrontPage, etc.)
5. Become familiar with and learn to use the web design software you have chosen.
6. Plan out your complete web site from start to finish. Begin with the welcome page and decide on the number of additional pages you will need. Starting out small (2-3 pages) is recommended.
7. Search for graphics and collect digital photographs of activities and events in the classroom. These add a personal touch and give ownership to the site. When posting digital images of students or students' work, it is imperative to follow your school district's information technology acceptable use guidelines.
8. When you have completed your web site, hold a "grand opening" with your classes. Send out notices to parents in student folders and publish a short article in the local newspaper with the site address. Encourage both parents and students to visit the site regularly.

Most educators know that traditional practices of sending notes home through a child's backpack or folder may not always accomplish the task of the message making the trip from school to home successfully (Johnson, 2000). Such

mysteries can be solved through use of a classroom web site. Information on students can be published (and, in extreme cases, password protected for individual family viewing only) on the site and always available for parent/student use. Doug Johnson (2000), Director of Media and Technology for Mankato Public Schools in Minnesota lists many pieces of home/school communication data that can be included in a teacher-created web site:

- Teacher name and contact information
- Class rules and expectations
- Link to school calendar
- Supply list
- Field trip information
- Class news with photos and descriptions of current class activities
- Requests and guidelines for parent volunteering
- Drop folders for student work
- Class electronic mailing list
- A counter that records the number of visits to the page
- List of units taught in each subject area (elementary) or in each class (secondary)
- State requirements met by class or units
- Projected dates of units beginning and ending
- Major goals for each unit
- Samples of final projects from previous years
- Learner outcomes for units

- Major activities
- Homework assignments and due dates
- Vocabulary words, spelling lists, number facts, formulas, etc.
- Assessments/evaluations for unit and projects
- Online practice tests
- Active links to online resources and Web pages
- Suggested enrichment activities with which parents can help
- Online grade book
- Final grades for quarter, semester and year (or equivalent marking period).
- GPA and class ranking
- Standardized test results
- Attendance records

Listing all of Johnson's suggestions emphasizes the potential versatility of the education-based web site. Although the listing seems to be too numerous for a teacher to maintain, Johnson points out that a large majority of the items are events needing updating on an annual basis or updated as necessary. Only three of the items, class news with photos and descriptions of current class activities, homework assignments and due dates, and the online grade book are items that potentially need weekly updating. None needed a daily update.

One of Johnson's items of inclusion on the web site is the online grade book. In the realm of parent communication, whether it is a note or parent-teacher conference, grades are a topic of parental concern. The online grade book provides parents with up-to-date information on their child's academic

performance, and parents seem to appreciate the convenience. According to an online grades poll, 91% of the parents said they think online grading is a "great tool to help track my child's performance" (Steele-Carlin, 2000). It should be noted, however, the importance of providing an extremely high level of Internet security when making the grade book available online. Student privacy can be maintained through implementing a password-protected system of checking grades online.

This study centered on the viability and effectiveness of using the web for school-to home communications with parents. If the web is indeed a viable tool, educators now have another avenue of involving parents in the education of their children.

Summary

This focus of this chapter was to review literature that describes the use of web sites in society and in education. The next chapter will discuss the methodology used in this study of using classroom web sites as a tool for school-to-home communication.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the use of classroom web sites in an elementary school and middle school in the southwestern United States. Both schools were in a suburban district situated just outside a metropolitan area of more than one million people. The elementary school was one of two elementary schools in the district. The students attending the elementary school typically fed into the middle school, which provided a good sense of continuity for the students and their parents. The principals at both schools encouraged teachers to develop and maintain a classroom web site for their parents and students.

Through a written parent survey and purposeful selection interviewing, this study initially attempted to answer three questions:

In an elementary and middle school in a suburban school district that has a high emphasis on technology, and which encourages their teachers to create web sites to enhance parent communication,

1. what is the perception of parents who have access to the Internet of the usefulness of their child's classroom teacher's web site designed to enhance parent-teacher communication?
2. what are the perceptions of parents regarding parent-teacher communication who do not utilize classroom web sites created by their child's teacher to enhance parent-teacher communication?

3. what information do parents want to have included on classroom web sites created by their child's teacher to enhance parent-teacher communication?

Qualitative research

According to Merriam (1998), the term basic qualitative study refers to studies that exemplify the five characteristics. The characteristics state that qualitative studies have a goal of eliciting and understanding meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis: the use of fieldwork; a inductive orientation to analysis; and findings that are richly descriptive. Each of these characteristics are woven into the present study.

Merriam states that basic qualitative studies collect data through interviews, observations, or document analysis. The findings are a mix of description and analysis. The analysis usually results in the identification of recurring patterns, and then reported in the form of categories, factors, variables, or themes. In these studies, the analysis is not extended to building a substantive theory as in grounded theory studies. There is no bounded system or functioning unit that circumscribes the investigation.

For this study, basic qualitative research methodology was used to conduct research on two public schools in a southwestern state. The study examined an elementary school and a middle school in the same district, both of which utilized classroom web sites developed by their teachers to facilitate more school-to-home contact.

According to Merriam (1988), qualitative research does not require any specific tool for data collection or data analysis. Two procedures, survey and face-to-face interviewing, were used for this study. The survey was sent home to the parents of the students, and was use to identify the 12 parents who were interviewed. The 12 parents were interviewed to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of the use of the web sites. Because the methodology used in the study was qualitative research with specific focus on two schools, no inferences from the results were made toward all elementary and middle schools, but the information gathered was highly informative to the school administrators and enlightening to other schools planning to implement similar programs.

School demographics

According to 2000 census data, the district population was 8,045 with a 4% poverty rate. The district's ethnic make up was 85% white students, 3% African-American, 2% Asian-American, 3% Hispanic, and 7% Native American students. The average household income was $92,778, Single-parent families totaled 12% of the district's families (http//www.schoolreportcard.org).

The reader should note that the $92,778 figure mentioned above is an average for the district. The average income for some households in the district was considerably lower than this figure, and, consequently, some were significantly higher. The survey and interview participants in this study came from households above and below the $92,778 figure.

The elementary school has an enrollment of 478 students. The ethnicity of the student body is made up of approximately 84% white, 2% African-American,

1% Asian-American, 3% Hispanic, and 7% Native American students. Approximately 8% of the student body received free or reduced lunch.

The middle school had an enrollment of 447 students. The ethnic background of the middle school student body consists of 87% white, 2% African-American, 2% Asian-American, 1% Hispanic 6%, and Native American students. Students eligible for free or reduced lunch included 4.4% of the student body.

Procedure

Contact with both school principals was initially made through email. Individual meetings were set up to give each principal the planned procedure for the study. Both principals were excited about the study. The main reason for their excitement was the vast amount of information and data to be collected from the study about their individual schools. Both principals realized the potential for improvement of their teachers' web presence due to the specific information to be collected. Both principals were fully supportive of the study.

The next step was to secure district administrative approval. The district superintendent was contacted, and after a detailed email and phone conversation, she was excited about the study and the potential for improvement in school-to-home communication. For documentation purposes, the superintendent wrote a letter of approval for the study, which stated that the district was in full support of the research project.

After securing permission from the district superintendent and both principals, the research study had to be converted from thought to reality. This

began with the creation of the survey. The survey was one of the main sources of data for the study, so the concept of testing the survey for clarity was important. Thus, the survey was given to a group of 20 people to test clarity. The group was asked to give feedback on how much they understood the survey's content, what items of the survey were not stated in a clear manner, and what suggestions they had to improve the overall format of the survey. Once the suggestions had been evaluated, the survey was given a second time to the same group for further input. Suggestions were considered, and the final version of the survey was produced.

Approximately 900 surveys were produced and sent home with students. Prior to the distribution, the principals of each school were asked to stress the importance of the survey to their teachers, thus the teachers encouraged their students to return their surveys. The students were asked to return the surveys within one week of receiving them. The elementary students were promised a candy sucker for bringing the survey back in hopes of providing motivation to return the survey. After one week, a reminder note was sent to those parents who had not returned the survey. The reminder simply encouraged the parent or guardian to return the completed survey regardless of whether they have Internet access or not, thereby informing them that a portion of the survey is directed toward households that do not have Internet access or do not access the classroom website.

The rate of return on the surveys was much less than expected (Appendix C). Out of the 900 surveys that were distributed, 175 were returned. After some questioning, it was discovered that the district had distributed another survey on

technology to the district patrons approximately one week prior to the distribution of this study's survey. This unexpected event was perceived to have caused the poor return on the survey mainly due to the assumption that most parents do not want to fill out a second survey within a week of the first one. Because both surveys were seeking information on very similar items (some of the questions being close to identical), one would assume that a majority of the first survey was completed and returned, and the second survey, the survey used for this study, was likely discarded.

After the survey portion of the study was completed, a purposeful selection of participants was made to take part in the interview phase of data collection. The selection consisted of 12 parents who had responded to the survey. The group was a sampling of parents who accessed the classroom website regularly, those who expressed satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the website. The purpose of the interviews was to probe deeper into the attitudes, feelings, and opinions of the interviewees. This aspect of the study was meant to get further feedback from the participants other than the limited responses of the survey. This information helped contribute to the body of research on what parents want to know and look for when viewing the classroom website. Both phases also served the school district and particularly the two schools studied in advantageous ways. The study provided the schools valuable data on the effectiveness of their websites, and gave them several "pats on the back" from those parents who were being served by an informative classroom website.

The researcher did not view any of the web sites referenced by the interviewees. The sites were not viewed because the researcher did not want any personal biases to affect his opinion of the interviewees' comments. The focus of the study was on the opinions of the interviewees and not the quality of the web sites.

Analysis of Data

Once the survey data were collected, the data were analyzed question-by-question, and the results were used to conduct the purposeful selection of the interview participants. The survey analysis mainly dealt with hard figures. The interview portion was different in analysis. The interviews provided the study with actual comments from the participants. These comments were seen as valuable to the researcher due to the fact that they not only provided more insight into the responses, but also gave a more personal touch to the information through comments and quotes from the participants.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter focuses on information gathered from the interviewing parents in regard to their use and satisfaction of teacher-created web sites as a method for communication between the parent and teacher. Twelve parents were purposefully selected from the 178 surveys that were completed and returned. The surveys were used primarily for identification and selection of the interviewees. Once the interviewees were selected. each was contacted and agreed to participate in an interview (see Appendix B). All interviews were conducted in a one-on-one format and recorded.

The process of one-on-one interviews was used to record an oral account of each interviewee's opinions and experiences. Other means of collecting data such as questionnaires and surveys can succeed in gaining some understanding, but face-to-face interviews add a level of conversational intimacy and personal flavor unmatched by paper/pencil processes. Participants had expressed through the survey process either a high or low degree of satisfaction with the web site their children's teachers maintained. The interview process provided detailed information about the parents' experiences and opinions regarding the web site as a tool for communicating with parents.

The parents interviewed for the study had at least one child attending either the elementary or middle school. Based on the information gained from the surveys, the parents were placed into one of two categories— one group was made up of parents who both accessed the web site posted by their child's teacher

and indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the communication accomplished by the site. A second group was made up of parents who were not satisfied with the web site posted by their child's teacher, or chose not to use the web site. There were seven parents interviewed who expressed satisfaction, and five parents who did not express satisfaction with the process for a total of twelve interviews. The original goal for the purposeful selection was to interview six parents who were satisfied, and six that were not satisfied. However, in the final stages of the interviews, one parent, who indicated on the survey that she was not satisfied, decided not to participate in the interview process. Upon selecting someone to replace that parent, the researcher mistakenly selected a parent who answered the survey as being satisfied with their teacher's classroom web site. The researcher did not recognize the unequal numbers until after the interviews had taken place and a new academic year had started. Because the children of the parents had started working with different teachers, the decision was made to not try to interview a new parent about the previous year's teacher's web site. Thus, the only person who indicated, "satisfied" has been placed in the group who indicated "very satisfied." For reference purposes, this group will be referred to as "satisfied parents" for the duration of this chapter. This mistake also affected the number of parents interviewed at the elementary and middle school levels. Rather than there being six elementary and six middle school parents interviewed, there were five elementary and seven middle school parents interviewed.

The methodology by which the data were analyzed included coding the data. Merriam (1998) defines coding as "assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data" (p.164). Merriam also points out that the purpose of the coding schemes can include finding themes within numerous pieces of qualitative data such as incidents and quotes. The coding process began after transcribing the interviews. The researcher transcribed the interviews in order to aid in the recollection of each interview session. The process of transcribing helped in remembering the interviewees, the actual interview experiences, and the settings of each interview. Transcription was done to produce a hard copy of each interview as well as a memory refresher. Once the hard copies were made, Merriam's coding process was used to analyze the data. The hard copy transcriptions were laid out on a flat surface. Then, one by one, each interview was read, and each main point spoken by the interviewee was written on a three by five index card, and then placed at the bottom of the interview in a "staggered" fashion, where the writing on each card could be seen. Once all interviews had been read and cards were in place, the main points were analyzed, and from the common responses, themes within the responses were identified. This process of coding is consistent with Merriam's technique of managing interview data.

The chapter will provide information about each interview, discussing information about the data collected in the interviews as well as information about the individuals who participated in the interviews. The first section will provide profiles of each interview completed in the study. The second section will provide

specific points made by the interviewees along with specific quotes from the interviews.

The interview sessions

This section will provide information about the individuals involved in the interviews as well as discussion of each interview session. This section is divided into two subsections. The first subsection will discuss the individuals who expressed satisfaction with the web site created by their children's teachers, and the second subsection will discuss the individuals who expressed dissatisfaction with, or chose not to access the web site created by their children's teachers. Both subsections will also provide specific information about each interview session.

Satisfied parents

Janelle

Janelle is a working mother. She has a daughter in second grade. Although divorced from her daughter's father, she had joint custody of her daughter with her former husband. Her daughter attended a magnet school in an urban section of the city before Janelle's present marriage moved them to the suburban district of this study.

The interview with Janelle took place in the kitchen area of her home. Janelle's previous experience with her daughter's former school has given her more perspective of education through comparing the past experience with the present school situation. Janelle's sister was a high school teacher in the same state but a different city. These factors contributed to the depth and length of the

interview, because Janelle had definite opinions of what she wanted out of the communication process with her daughter's teacher.

As the interview began, I sat at the kitchenette table while Janelle was a few feet away in the kitchen. She stood at the sink for our conversation peeling peaches for baking that was to take place later. I was fine with her doing this during our conversation because I could tell the task of peeling peaches provided a sense of relaxation. She seemed to communicate very well while working, thus the interview was over a half hour in length.

Janelle's answers were very informative and lengthy, and I found myself feeling very relaxed and void of any tenseness one would have when meeting someone for the first time. Her daughter's previous experiences in a different school district helped give her answers more substance, mainly because several of her answers would use the previous school in a comparing capacity, pointing out the good things and the things that needed improvement. I felt that Janelle was giving me her honest opinion of the school-to-home communication process.

Lisa

Lisa was a mother of two, a second grader and a fifth grader. She was in her 30s, and she and her husband lived in an attractive house. Lisa was a certified public accountant, and judging by the information gathered in the interview, seemed to value the ability to maintain some sort of communication with her children's teachers.

Our interview took place at her house. The home setting usually provides an environment conducive to effective interviewing; however, some factors can

result in the setting may not being as conducive as one might expect. Thus was the setting with Lisa's interview. The children were curious and active, the television was on, and the climate of the interview was one of frequent distraction. Consequently, the interview was short in length.

I was pleased at Lisa's willingness to participate in the interview. She was very kind and expressed her opinions very openly. I believe our conversation would have been lengthier and contained more depth if the setting was not as distracting. She had a cooperative attitude, but the children, the television, and other distractions seemed to add a "hurry along" feeling to the interview. My questioning was brief and to-the-point, and her responses reflected the same. Although the setting of the interview was such, we were still able to talk about her fifth grader's teacher and the web site that teacher maintained.

Dawn

My first hint that the interview with Dawn could be interesting was when, on the phone, she said we could conduct the interview at her place of work, which she described as in a not-so-good part of the city. While describing the location, she mentioned that the building in which she worked is located across the street from an apartment complex. The apartment complex was often frequented by prostitutes at "work." Adding to the potential of the interview was the fact that Dawn is a licensed dog show superintendent, and I was going to her office for the interview. The building could obviously house a large number of dogs; however, I did not encounter any dogs during my visit.

I had to wait a few minutes in the lobby of the building before meeting Dawn. I wasn't sure if this wait was due to her being busy, or if she had some fear or reluctance to do the interview. Once she entered the lobby, she kindly invited me into her office to conduct the interview. Her office was at the front of the building very close to the main entrance. Although the office did not have a home setting as most of the interviews in the study, our conversation was still very informative. Dawn was very relaxed and answered each question with no hesitation.

For confidentiality reasons, the age and grade level of Dawn's child will not be revealed. During the early stages of the interview, Dawn shared some surprising information about her child's teacher, which could possibly compromise the true identity of the teacher, the child, and Dawn. By Dawn sharing this information with me, I was able to make comparisons between the accomplishments of the teacher, the satisfaction of the school with that teacher, and the level of communication her web site provided parents like Dawn. The teacher had achieved a status of teaching recognized nationally as a milestone achievement of teaching excellence. Yet in the interview, Dawn expressed great dissatisfaction with the teacher, and was under the impression that other parents and school personnel mirrored her discontent. Dawn had been told that the teacher would not be invited back to teach at the school the following year.

Although the presence of conflicting information, the national recognition of the teacher, and an assumption by Dawn that the teacher would not be returning to the school to teach due to unsatisfactory performance, Dawn was

very complimentary of the informative nature of the teacher's web site, thus Dawn's interview is listed in this study as a parent who felt the web site accomplished a high level of communication and satisfaction.

Amanda

The layout of the school district included residential homes as well as homes located in a rural area of the county. Amanda was a resident of that rural population. The interview with Amanda was very awkward because of the setting and the circumstances. Amanda's daughter had become ill, and she had taken her to the doctor on the day of the interview. Given the location of their home, a trip to the doctor is a lengthy task. When Amanda returned to the house to meet for the interview, her daughter was in the truck with her, and she needed to take her daughter to another location for more treatment. Thus, the interview was very brief, and was conducted in front of their house.

The rural countryside was the backdrop of the conversation. Upon driving up the driveway, I was greeted by a rather large dog, which didn't seem to be overly thrilled with my visit. There was no ferocious barking, just a positioning by my driver side door. I stayed in the car until Amanda arrived. We then stood outside of her house on a very warm August day, and discussed the concept of teachers using web sites as a communication tool.

Amanda answered each question regarding the web site created by her sixth grader's literature teacher, but was a bit distracted by the circumstances with her daughter. However, she wanted to continue with the interview. She did not offer the option of conducting the interview inside the house, which made the

interview rather brief. Although the setting and circumstances were not very favorable, Amanda still seemed to respond thoughtfully and carefully to each question. I was sympathetic to her situation, and impressed with her effort to follow through with the interview.

Eddie

In a district with an average household income of over $90.000, Eddie, a father in his 30s, appeared to be from the hard-working, non-executive version of the community. Eddie is a pilot in the Air Force, and had two children attending the school, one in kindergarten and one in second grade. Because of his occupation, Eddie had a lot of interaction with computers, which gave him an added advantage in being user friendly with computer technology.

Our conversation took place in Eddie's dining room. Eddie had a large, friendly dog, which liked to meet people. This was made obvious by the dog's frequent visits during our interview. Eddie had a beautiful home, in a well-wooded neighborhood.

Eddie's responses to the interview questions seemed to be well thought out, and he had definite opinions about the manner in which his child's teacher communicated with the home, as well as several ideas of how he felt the use of computers could enhance that communication. Again, Eddie's computer expertise provided a solid base for his comments about using web sites to enhance the school-to-home communication process.

Lori

Upon contacting Lori to make arrangements for the interview, it became obvious to me why her name sounded so familiar. Lori told me how she used to teach in the same building that I once taught at in a split-between-two-schools situation. Once I arrived at her home for the interview, I was reminded of who she was, and my memory was jogged. Lori no longer taught at that same school, but was still teaching. We exchanged old memories of the school we taught at, which provided an immediate relaxation for the interview.

The climate of the interview was pleasant. Once we completed the process of becoming reacquainted, we began the interview. Lori was in her 40's, and had a son at the elementary school and a daughter at the middle school. The interview was regarding the middle school child's classroom web site posted by her science teacher. The interview was among the most relaxed and informative of all the interviews in the study. I attributed this to our former professional relationship and the fact that Lori, like several other individuals in the study, had a view of teacher-parent communication from both sides of the issue- as teacher and as parent. Our interview was one of the longer sessions in the study, and full of information sharing.

Lance

I met with Lance on a beautiful spring afternoon. The house was located in a rural area of the district, and Lance owned a beautiful piece of land on which he had several animals. As I drove up the drive, I was greeted by one of his rather large dogs, which stood at my car door until Lance called the dog away. The

greeting I received from Lance was warm, and not as playful as the greeting from the dog. We then sat down outside on a picnic table, surrounded by a beautiful scenery and comfortable temperature to talk about his middle school child's teachers and their use of web sites to communicate.

Lance was in his 40's. He was retired from the military, and had lived in many places around the world. He mentioned that his 14 year-old son had attended school in six different countries, and the present school was his seventh school to attend. Lance and his family had moved to the district two years prior to the interview. Now retired from the military, Lance said that his present occupation was business executive. Our conversation did not probe deeper into specific details of his job.

The interview with Lance was informative. His responses were a culmination of his present experience as a parent with a child in the school district and past experiences with other school situations. He would often qualify his answers regarding the current school with prior experiences his son had with previous teachers and schools. This helped the interview by not only providing good information, but it made the overall conversation richer, mainly because he seemed to talk more, speak more freely, and be more open because his previous experiences had definitely helped him form an opinion about parent-teacher communication. The interview was in reference to the web site created by his middle school son's history teacher.

Not satisfied/did not access participants

Colleen

Colleen's interview took place in her house. Colleen was in her 30s and mother to three children. The oldest child, a boy, was in middle school, the middle child was a fifth grade girl, and the youngest child was an energetic, pre-school boy.

She took time from her daily summer routine to talk about web sites used by her middle school child's math teacher for communication purposes. I arrived at her home and sat down in her family room for the interview. The house was nice and cool, which on the rather warm day was a welcomed feeling.

Her youngest child had a lot of energy, and would make his presence known at times during the course of the interview. Although Colleen was a professor at a local university, she had several years of public school teaching experience, so I felt her opinions and comments had the potential of being valuable to this study due to her experience and background. Although the presence of her youngest child had possibilities of making the interview rather difficult, the interview proved to be very informative.

Kathy

Driving up to Kathy's home for the first time, one quickly realizes the substantial wealth of not only the neighborhood, but specifically of Kathy and her family. The large house was well maintained on the outside, and upon entering the house, the same could be said for the inside. The house was beautifully decorated and furnished, and was impressive to the eye. The warmth of the day

would have made for a great opportunity to take a plunge in the swimming pool in the backyard, but the purpose of the visit was to interview Kathy.

Kathy was a working mother of a fourth grade boy. Kathy worked for a major communications company as a technology solutions salesperson, so the technology arena was a familiar playing ground for her. Her husband quit working for a business and started his own retail business using the concept of Internet marketing and sales to show and distribute products, and 13 months into this endeavor was seeing enough success to warrant the need to hire an additional person. The combined income of Kathy and her husband helped explain the beautiful environment of the interview.

Kathy was very kind from the beginning of the visit. After making an offer of cold beverage, she sat down and engaged in the conversation. I had a sense of ease during the interview due to the fact that Kathy seemed at ease with the questioning. Her technology background helped to provide not only logical answers to questions pertaining to web site usage, but also helped in making possible suggestions for such use.

Rebecca

Rebecca was a mother who lived in a remote part of the district. She was in her 40s, and worked locally as an actuary. Her neighborhood was not rural, but was in an area where some of the children attend school in another school district. Her home was beautifully located, with a small lake off the back of the property. Rebecca warmly welcomed me into the house.

We sat down in her living room to conduct the interview. I quickly recognized that the neighboring district was one in which I had taught several years ago. I had also completed half of my student teaching during college at a school very close to her house. My familiarity with the district, and informing her of this familiarity, provided a good basis for us to enter into conversation. Our commonality with the area seemed to help her relax in talking about the communication process between her and her child's teacher(s). Because she was in such a remote part of the district, where trips to the school are very time consuming, I believed that communication between her and the school would be an interesting topic to her, especially since the focus was the use of web sites as a tool for communication, and this fact also helped in the information sharing process. Her child attended the middle school, and was in the eighth grade.

Brock

Brock worked on an air base as an aircraft maintenance worker. He had three children attending school in the district, with children in the first, third, and sixth grades. Brock had a desire to use computer technology, specifically the Internet, to communicate with his children's teachers, but was an interviewee who expressed dissatisfaction with the process. The web site in which the interview centered was the web site of his third grader's teacher.

I first tried to contact Brock by scheduling a meeting with him on a Sunday morning after church service. The plan was to meet him at the church and conduct the interview. However, contact was never made due to the inability to locate one another, thus the plan did not work. After further discussion, another

time and place to conduct the interview was agreed upon. The meeting place was a local fast food restaurant located on the air base in which Brock was employed.

The interview was conducted at a busy time of day, so the restaurant was very crowded. Once contact was made, and an empty table was found, the interview began. The setting of a fast-food restaurant was not my preferred location to conduct an interview. The distractions of so many people, the noise, and the children caused a loss of conversation depth as well as amount of information exchange. I found myself feeling rushed by the busy environment, but Brock did not appear to be affected by the environment. The rather informal setting of the interview may have caused a lack of conversational intimacy, but did not cause Brock to hesitate in being frank with his comments about using web sites as a tool for teacher-parent communication.

Janice

Janice had a close relationship with public education. She worked as a school psychologist. Janice was in her 40' s and the mother of three boys, a sixth grader, an eighth grader, and a high school sophomore. Janice and I conducted the interview at her house. Although two of her sons were at the house during the interview, the setting was rather peaceful, and dialogue was easy.

Janice's house was in a scenic part of the district, and although her house was not the most elaborate of this study's interviewees, it was still very attractive. Upon arriving at her home, I was welcomed, offered a cold drink, and we began the interview comfortably seated on her living room couch.

Because Janice deals with students on a regular basis, she had plenty of knowledge about schools, teachers, and the relationships between the school and parents. By her own admission, she had children who were "good students," and they had a structure at home that helped enhance their academic performance. Janice was eager to talk issues of parent-school communication in light of using web sites as a tool.

Once engaged in the conversation, I found that Janice knew one of the other interviewees in the study. Janice's middle school son and Colleen's middle school son were friends, and had apparently talked about my interviewing their parents. Janice was already familiar with the reason for my interviewing, and I believe this contributed to the smoothness of the interview, but another factor contributed to the ease of dialogue; Janice expressed a desire to do as much as possible to help the process of teacher-parent communication, and she felt that if this study could help bring about progress, then she was willing to be as helpful as possible. She realized that her children are successful in school, both socially and academically, but her main concern seemed to be for those parents who do not enjoy such benefit with their children. Both reasons contributed to the success of our time together. Her information was based on the her sixth grade son's math teacher.

Summary

This section provided a description of the participants interviewed in the study. The information in this section provided insight that should be helpful in reading the next section, which will discuss responses given in each interview.

Because this section revealed in detail information about each interviewee, as well as information about the interview sessions, the reader should understand more clearly the nature of the responses, and how the parents' backgrounds, experiences, and occupations help shape their responses.

The next section will focus on similarities within the responses of the interviewees, contradiction of some responses, and will conclude with responses given by some of the interviewees that were revealed exclusively by single interviewees, but is viewed as being relevant and enriching to the study.

The interview data

This study examined two schools, an elementary school and a middle school, in a southwestern state and their use of classroom web sites in the communication process. Initially, three questions were developed to guide the study. The questions were:

In an elementary and middle school in a suburban school district that has a high emphasis on technology, and which encourages their teachers to create web sites to enhance parent communication,

1. what is the perception of parents who have access to the Internet of the usefulness of their child's classroom teacher's web site designed to enhance parent-teacher communication?
2. what are the perceptions of parents regarding parent-teacher communication who do not utilize classroom web sites created by their child's teacher to enhance parent-teacher communication?

3. what information do parents want to have included on classroom web sites created by their child's teacher to enhance parent-teacher communication?

Although the study began by focusing on these three questions, after analyzing the data and identifying emerging themes, questions one and two no longer appeared to be relevant. This decision was made because none of the themes exclusively related to the satisfied parents or the dissatisfied parents. What emerged were ten common themes between the two groups. These ten themes will be the major focus for the remainder of this document.

This section will report the data gathered from the interviews with the parents profiled in the previous section. These data will be divided into ten themes, and an additional category. The themes are: email; student behavior; saving money; improved communication; information gets home; assignments and projects; the web site needs to contain updated information; personal contact with teacher; teachers need time to keep the web site current and links to other web sites. Following the ten themes, relevant information from single interviews will be presented. Because the interviews have a definite division of participants into two groups, those who were satisfied with the web site created by their child's teacher, and those who were not satisfied or did not view the web site, one may think this section would have the same division in discussing the responses of the interviewees. However, upon reviewing and coding the responses of the interviewees, it was determined that the best organization for this section was to focus on responses supported by individuals from both divisions of satisfaction, then identifying themes in which the responses refer, which are the themes

mentioned above (the division of satisfaction in which each parent belongs can be known by looking at the previous section, but the organization of this section will not hinge upon those two divisions).

The comments cited in this chapter do not reflect the entire number of individuals who respond within that theme. For example, one theme may state that five parents responded within the theme, but only two parents' comments are quoted under the theme heading. The comments included are based on their contribution of depth to the theme, and are not based on what level of satisfaction in the web site they expressed.

In reference to the parents and their comments, the reader may desire to know what level of satisfaction that parent expressed in the classroom web site. To relieve the reader from the task of looking back at the previous section to determine whether or not the individual expressed satisfaction or not, a "+" will follow the individuals' names who expressed satisfaction, and a "-" will follow the names of individuals who were not satisfied.

Email

One use of the web sites mentioned by parents was the preferred use of the teacher having a link on the page that would allow the parent to contact the teacher through email. Every parent mentioned the ease and comfort of using email to communicate with the teacher.

Amanda (+), the parent who lives in the rural portion of the district, liked the short amount of time it took to communicate using email. "I think email, because they all have a computer in the classroom and they can check it regularly,

where on the phone, they may only check at lunch time or after school hours. So it's quicker communication." Lance (+), the retired military soldier whose middle school son has attended six schools prior to the present school, compared his satisfaction with the present option of emailing to a previous schooling experience.

> The last school system I was with in Minnesota, you'd be substitute teaching, which I did in the winter time because there wasn't a whole hella'va lot else to do up there, being semi-retired at the time, you get calls from parents in the middle of the day of kids in your classroom, and you have to stop the class to take a phone call. And it's totally disruptive, even if it's the wrong number and so forth, so it allows me to write a teacher, and to sit down and think about what I want to tell them, because phone calls are spontaneous, written communication is more thoughtful. So I am able to compose what I want to communicate to the teacher, and I can't think of any time that I did not have a response the following business day. I can't think of any time.

Dawn (+), the mother who worked as a dog show superintendent, said through the use of email, she was able to get more clarity on school work. "I had no problem with communication. Any time I had a question, or had to check something. If she wasn't clear on something with the kids, a project or something, I would just email her and get an answer right back."

Student behavior

Among the parents' responses regarding preferences of the web site, only two parents indicated that the web site could have good use in the area of communicating to the parent information on the child's behavior in class. This password- protected option could give the parent information on the child's behavioral status in class, both positive and negative.

Janelle (+), the parent who had joint custody of her second-grade child from a previous marriage, expressed her belief that using the web site in this way could possibly reduce some of the tension associated with negative child behavior reports by providing a constant report in which the parent could see behavioral decline early, rather than when it is at an extreme level.

> The other thing was I noticed that some of the kids whose parents I talked to, they had a very negative attitude towards the school or towards the teacher, because their child was getting notes home every week, and it's sort of like, in our culture, when you get notes home from the teacher, it's a naughty note, it's negative feedback, and here it comes again more negative feedback. And instead of that, they could just log on and see what are the issues with the child, and it's less personal. And if it was talking too much in class or something else, and they could see exactly where their child is. It's less- it makes the parent not quite as angry at the teacher.

Janelle went on to say:

> The parent needs to know that the child is having difficulty sitting still, or focusing, or they need to know that this child is struggling and because of

these behaviors not able to focus and learn, and if there was another method to give that information besides the teacher telling them in that note, because those kinds of relationships, when they get established that way, when the parent goes up there, they're ready to ram the teacher. And the teacher is just totally overloaded and already stressed out to the max with everything else, they all of a sudden it's like they almost quit. It's like they know, 'here comes another angry parent because their child is not performing well, and it's not their problem their child is not performing well.' It creates a total hostile environment instead of everybody being in support of the child. And if they could just see every week this is what's going on, pull it up, it's at your leisure, well it's just a lot easier.

Janelle cited a situation in which the teacher was unknowingly sending mixed messages home to the parents about their child's behavior, much to some parents' dislike:

Mrs. _____ used teddy bears to write on, that was her little notepad, and that's real cute when you get little notes home that says, '(child) was so sweet today. She did' blah, blah, blah. But when you're another parent and you get a teddy bear home that says, 'your child is having difficulty sitting still in class,' then all of a sudden they can take that and say, 'look what she did. She sent this home on a little teddy bear.' Just like that teddy bear notepad- I had a parent say something to me- 'she sends this little teddy bear,' And I thought, gosh, my teddy bear notepads say nice things! But

she thought it was not in good taste, and I thought, good Lord, I wouldn't want to be a teacher today and put up with that bunch of huey.

Dawn (+) felt that a web site could have helped her older child succeed in the classroom behaviorally and academically.

> I had a 21 year-old that if this would have been available back then where I could check and see- he was a nightmare child, and there was no way, no form of communication. The teachers wouldn't get with me. There was nothing posted, or where it was posted on their web site, where you could check and see what kind of homework, or check and make sure it was getting done. I think it could really help problem students.

Saving money

The time period between the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the days in which the interviews were conducted, many companies and businesses felt a financial "crunch" that caused some businesses to shut their doors. Schools across the country felt the same financial burden. The state in which this study was conducted terminated many teaching and support staff positions. This climate of financial chaos in schools led four parents in the study to say that the effective use of a web site in education could save the school money by decreasing the use of paper to send information home.

Brock (-), the military airplane maintenance worker, likes the idea of less paperwork with his three children. "But email for updates and stuff like that [non-emergency information], and, like I said, permission slips [on the web site]- for

me I've got three kids. I don't want to be filling that thing out three different times for three. I type that thing in and send it. Less paper work on all parts. They want to save money."

Colleen (-), the university professor and mother of three, pointed out that the budget issue in the state caused the middle school to focus more on saving school funds and solicit the parents for support.

> And with budget cuts and everything, I know in the spring especially, they were asking for paper. And of course, around Christmas, they have a tree, their own little Christmas tree, of pull an ornament off and that will be what you can get your teacher. Instead of just buying some gift, pretty much you're buying them something that they can use in the classroom also, but all of that was on there [the web site], which was good.

Eddie (+), the military pilot, believed a lot of money could be saved through the web site causing lower paper usage. Eddie stated, "in fact, with today's fiscal crisis in the state, anything you don't have to send out a mimeograph piece of paper, that's two hundred sheets of paper you save. That's a ream, that's ten bucks. Every time you do that once, that's a ten dollar savings every time and it adds up quick."

Improved communication

Six parents said that they experienced better or improved communication by using the web site than they had in previous years without it. These parents are also working parents and do not have the convenience of visiting the school on a regular basis to speak with the teacher. Janelle (+) said, "Well, I think it improves

it because you can get on there at your convenience. I work night shift, so my hours are very different from everybody else's hours. So you can get on there and find out what they're doing..."

Lance (+), the retired military soldier, took advantage of the two-way communication process of the web site's email link, and felt the communication level gained through the site was essential.

> It gives us the opportunity in this busy world to discuss issues with the teachers confidentially, and I do, everything from changes in behavior to comments about friends, or perhaps things they are going through at that age to the curriculum and the textbooks, and not complaining- just participating. And besides, in a school district like [district name], when the bell rings, the kids get on the bus and go home, and the teachers follow closely. So by the time I get off work, I don't have any chance for communication, and if they live in this community, I don't know where they live- they're not my neighbors.

Lisa (+), the certified public accountant, valued the fact that the web site allowed her to find information about her child's class without constantly contacting the teacher.

> Well, I just felt like it was easy to get on [the web site] as many times as I wanted and not bug her, and find out, well if she had put it on there, exactly what homework was due, what specific project they were working on, and a due date, and maybe even, you know when they sent projects

home and they have instruction sheets with them, even having those on the web site.

Information gets home

Schools have the task of getting information from school to home, and lots of times, this information is in the form of hard copy documents. Sometimes, these hard copies do not successfully make the trip home with the child. Three of the parents interviewed in the study recognized this as a problem, but expressed how the presence of a classroom web site could remedy this problem. Janelle (+) commented:

> Second graders, they tend to take their little notes out and use them for who knows what on the bus, drawing pictures, writing whatever, then the parents never get the note…especially when so many of those kids ride the bus, and the bus ride- you know they sit next to each other, they trade their stuff. I very seldom had notes that weren't damaged in some way, not by malice, but they play on the bus and of course draw pictures, and if they draw pictures they trade them then there you go.

As mentioned earlier in this section, Janelle had joint custody of her second grade daughter with her former husband. The daughter was with the father an equal amount of time, which posed a situation many joint custody situations face when the children are attending school- how to receive information from the school during the time when the child is with the other parent. Janelle explained the difficulty of the situation, and pointed out a specific incident in which she was victim to this problem:

> I'm divorced from my daughter's dad, so every other Wednesday she would take notes home there, and I would lose them, and it would be things [that were] important, and who knows what it was, but sure enough I would end up having to make an extra trip up to the school to take this thing because it went home in a note. So she would be like, "you forgot my ____, it's just so important." The oatmeal container, or she didn't have her t-shirt there that day, so she didn't get blah, blah, blah, and if they sent the note home that day, then you just lose it…this last year, I missed the Mommy-Muffin breakfast, and [my daughter said] "you didn't come." I said, "you didn't tell me." When both parents can access a web site that has important dates, announcements, and other information on it, there is a better chance that both parents will be informed about an event such as the Mommy-Muffin breakfast.

Research shows a reduction in communication between the school and the home as the child enters the middle school and high school years. Parents whose children leave the elementary school and enter middle school are sometimes taken by surprise by the reduction of notes put in their children's backpack, or the constant stream of information sent home in elementary school. Several parents interviewed expressed how communication changed when their child entered middle school; however, they also commented on how the web site helped bridge that communication gap. Amanda (+) mentioned how the web site aided her in this process of communicating with the middle school teachers:

Well, it helps me, because once they hit middle school, there's not as much communication coming home, and notes. And so I can get on there, and for the teachers who do use it and put their assignments in there I can keep up with what she's suppose to be doing.

Rebecca (-), the actuary, realized how valuable the web site could be to communicate with teachers at the middle school.

I think my complaint was, in middle school they're [the school] trying to break the ties with the communication between the [teacher and parent], it needs to go through the kids- it's their grades I understand, but we as parents, especially if they're getting older, I think need to keep in touch of what is going on and make sure.

Lori (+), the teacher whom I had at one time taught with at the same school, told her opinion of how hard the transition was to the middle school in light of how vital the web site is to parents.

I don't think they introduced it well enough at the beginning of the year. It took me until probably October to have a clue what was going on. I kept looking, I was still in that little elementary mindset thinking little notes would come home in the backpack and they'd say, "oh yeah, the web site da da da." But they didn't say, "The web site is everything. If you want to know something, check the web site." I wish they would have force fed me a little bit and that way so I could realize the importance of it…you know like in elementary you get those weekly folders, you get the agendas, and all that. And they have agendas in middle school, [but] they

don't utilize them well enough, I don't think. But once I realized how important it [the web site] was, and how to use [the web site], well it wasn't hard to navigate- that was easy, but once I realized that was the way they communicate, there are no letters, then I was fine, but it was culture shock. I think they should, in orientation maybe, say that more, or something, or maybe I just didn't get it.

Lori continued to talk about other parents of sixth graders dealing with the transition:

> Some of the parents would say, "oh, if you just check the web site, that's where you can get the study guide," or "follow this link to da da da," because I might not have known. But I know a lot of times, and it was sixth grade parents, they were like, "I wish they'd send a note. I didn't even know about yada yada yada." But also that is the middle school mentality. They're [middle school students] scatterbrained, and so even though I'm sure it was announced at school, I didn't get it at home, so that's also that age, so for the most part, most of my people that I worked with and talked with [at the school] and stuff liked it, for the most part.

Assignments and projects

All parents interviewed for this study had specific items in mind that for some were helpful, and for others would have been helpful if they had an effective web site to use. The responses of the three interviewees cited in this category represent the most common preferences of all the interviewees who expressed what they would like to see by way of posting various assignments and

projects on the web site. Some of the suggestions that were exclusive to only one interviewee, but determined to have relevance to the study, will be covered later in this section of the chapter.

Janice (-) was the school psychologist mentioned earlier in the previous section. Janice wanted to see assignments posted on the web site along with helpful resource information for completing the assignments.

> I would like information on what they're studying and if there could be any additional assignments or information that would be beneficial. For example if they were studying the civil war and they had some suggestions, maybe a display in the city that they wanted us to go see, or some additional reading information. Probably more supplemental information would be helpful.

Kathy (-) was the mother who worked for a major communications corporation. She works with computers every day as a person selling technology solutions to other companies, so her daily contact with communication technology is extensive. Her son's teacher did not maintain a web site in which Kathy visited, but Kathy did have the desire to use a web site if there was one available. She felt that an effective web site containing assignments and information on what was happening at school would have been valuable to her.

> We had some problems last year with due dates on projects. Last year in fourth grade was the first time we've had so many things that were due at so many times, and we missed a project, we actually missed a book report that was due, because we were juggling baseball and basketball and school

and I don't know how people with five kids do it, or two or three kids. Missed a report, and my son was just devastated because he's a straight A student, and talked to the teacher about it. she had sent home one paper, and somewhere I had missed it in the ten pages we get a night. Had there been a web site where I could go check for the month, everything that's due this month, it would be on my Outlook calendar at work, and I would have it posted on there so that I would know every day the things that are due for him.

Kathy continued:

The teacher also had a weekly newsletter that she would send home, and the problem I had with that is if I'm traveling, and I miss one night at home and the spouse is taking care of things, that either gets thrown away and that's how we missed the book report. I was traveling and spent one night away from home. When I got home, the papers had been put away out of the backpack. I had no idea it was due, nobody remembered, we missed it.

Kathy was the parent whose experience with computers was advanced compared to most parents. She relied on technology to stay organized. Her system of organization would fit right in with information placed on web sites. Kathy said,

Well, anything on the Internet is going to work for me because that's how I organize my life. I'm a businessperson. I have Outlook at work that I download into PDA [personal data assistant], and if I lost it, I would be in

big trouble. Every ballgame I log in to there. Everything we do is in my Outlook at work and then I download it, so for a working parent, it is real important to me. I can take it, and transfer it to a paper calendar, which is what I do now, from what comes at the beginning of the month. I probably still would do that just so my son can look at it and know what's due when, but for my own personal use, when I'm traveling out of town, if I can call and say, "hey, don't forget your book report is due in the morning," or "you have a test tomorrow," and I don't have that access right now.

Lori mirrored the satisfaction of the web site in regard to assignments:

So, for the most part I felt like I knew a little bit more about what was going on and what would be expected, because she was sick one time for a week, and it was wonderful. We could go on there, get the assignments, download test review, things like that. So if you're willing to put forth a little effort, you can get a lot out of it.

The web site needs to contain updated information

Parents of students in school like to be kept up to date with events going on at school, whether it is school-wide events or specific events going on in their child's classroom. Whatever the mode of communication, parents want the information to be clear and up-to-date. Web sites can provide very updated information for parents regarding school or classroom happenings, but the freshness of the information is up to the teacher. A web site that is not kept

updated can be a source of frustration for the person regularly viewing the site, and can eventually cause the person to stop visiting the site altogether.

Seven parents interviewed in the study expressed the importance of the teacher keeping the site updated with relevant, up to date information. Lisa (+) expressed how frustrated she became when visiting the web site for information that was usually on the site, but one particular time she was surprised by what she found on the site. "I'd get on it [the web site], in fact I got on it at the end of the year looking for some help with a homework assignment on it and it was two weeks previous when it had been updated." Lisa had been accustomed to visiting the site to receive help with her son's homework assignment, but was disappointed to find a site that had not been updated in two weeks. Once a parent is in the habit of accessing a certain place to get information, and, without warning, that source ceases to supply any information, that parent can become frustrated and disappointed with the school and the teacher.

Rebecca (-) reflected the sentiment of frustration with information that is out dated on the web site.

> The only gripe I have about it [the web site], and I know we are still in this transition phase of getting use to using web sites, so a lot of times, like we went out there last week to find out what day exactly does my daughter need to pick up her schedule, and nothing was out there. The latest calendar was from May. Now they have changed that since then, but I think that because it is still relatively a new tool. They don't keep it updated, and so that is a little bit of a frustration. I think it's a great way

and I think as people get use to using computers and having them available, that's going to be the first place they look before calling the school about "OK, when's the dance next Tuesday?" They're going to go out there and look. I just think, if they could even put homework assignments out there, and again, granted I happen to have a child who's on top of it, and does her homework diligently, but for those parents who have kids that don't, and they're trying to help them along and guide them, you know if a kid says I left my homework at school and I don't remember what I'm suppose to do, you pop out there and say this is what you're suppose to do. And those times when you just simply forget your homework, and that happens. This is kind of a safety net somewhat. I think it does a lot of those things.

Rebecca's comment supports the idea that there are a lot of things that can be placed on the web site such as the next dance and when students can pick up their schedules, but if the site is not updated, the dates will not help anyone's plans for upcoming events because the events posted on the site are already past.

Colleen (-) expressed how she and other parents complain about the teachers' need to be more diligent with updating their sites, and how expectations of other parents in the district toward teachers can affect perceptions of the parents regarding communication:

Well, I think we all complain about how its not being updated. How if you go in and find whatever it is, especially early on, then as people get busy and time goes on, you can go back in weeks later and you're still looking

at stuff that hasn't been updated. And, I think that in [school district] that parents expect a lot of technology in general whether they know what that means or not. And so, I think they get a little frustrated when they realize that some teachers have a web site and some don't, or the ones that do, I don't know what information they want, but they don't have enough information.

Colleen went on to mention that when updating the site, the need to proofread the information is very important.

It [the web site] needs to be proofread. A few errors here and there, I think people assume maybe that's going to be taken care of, but I think people connect the idea of proofreading final drafts of a letter or paper or something. I don't think, just an opinion, I don't think people translate that into using a computer. It's still the same problem, its still the same embarrassment. If you have something out there, and its read and its got your name on it, and in some cases your face, and you know, there's an error, a grammatical or spelling error is what I'm talking about.

Personal contact with teacher

Three of the parents interviewed in the study made comments regarding how personal contact with the teacher was affected by the presence of a classroom web site. Lori (+), when asked if the teacher's web site helped her become more involved in her daughter's education, responded:

Maybe more involved with her assignments, but I think it kept me from going up and getting a more personal relationship with the teachers. And I

would have liked to, but I could do it all by email and things like that, so I don't know maybe if some of those teachers even knew who I was. It was real good. You could jot off an email and most of them were real good about writing you back. They were very good about that, and I only had to do that about two or three times. But it took the personal part out. But for working parents, and since I'm going back to full time this year, I wouldn't have that opportunity anyway.

Colleen (-) said,

I do think it makes you feel more comfortable when you see them face-to-face, and having talked to them on the phone, to be able to just kinda pick up from where ever the conversation was, either on the phone or through email, to be able to feel a little more connected. I did feel that way with that teacher.

She continued by commenting on the convenience of teachers including personal information on the sites. "I think its great when teachers want to put a little bio, and that's nice cause you can find out maybe where they went to school and their education, if they have children and pets."

Although Lori and Colleen thought the level of personal contact with the teacher suffered due to extensive web site usage, Lance (+) did not view the situation in the same way. Lance felt that the web site and email use enhanced the personal relationship with the teachers. Lance commented:

And they have certainly encouraged through participation with the website up here at [school]. It further builds on the fact that when you walk in the

school at [school], a teacher smiles at you and says "hey, what's going on Mr. Jones. What can I do for you?"

Whether personal contact with the teacher is enhanced or reduced through web site usage in schools seems to depend on how often teachers and parents have person-to-person encounters. The matching web sites and emails with faces can provide a sense of personal contact for teachers and parents. The use of web sites provides another tool for the teacher-parent communication process, but does not promise a close, personal relationship between the two. But, no tool of communication makes that promise.

Teachers need time to keep the web site current

Most teachers' days are filled with instruction, meetings, and other tasks that are their contractual duties. Five parents in the study mentioned the realization that keeping a web site current with pertinent information takes time. Lisa (+) said, "Well, I guess I'd like for it to be more [content on the web site]. And I know that takes a lot of time from the teacher, for them to set up... plus I don't know how much time it takes. And they're already pretty busy."

Amanda (+), when asked about what she prefers in the web site, said:

> I think just the consistency, and all of them using it. I know it takes a lot of time probably for them to do, and they have enough out of school time they have to spend on grading and all that, but I think that would be the biggest help, just everybody using it, so I know what's going on in each class.

Links to other web sites

Five parents in the study stated a desire to see additional links on the web site, some whose teachers did have links on their site expressed their satisfaction with the inclusion. Dawn (+) mentioned, "And it was neat to have links to other math related web sites, and links to places where they could always get help on homework. The homework was always up there [on the site]."

Dawn continued:

> And the links were really helpful, especially not just for the kids but for the parents. If you have to explain anything and we just don't remember it, we can go somewhere [on the web] where you can get some help. It's a lot of times easier for you if they've already got a block in their mind it's easier for you to figure it out and then explain it. So the links were great.

Rebecca (-) told a story about a middle school teacher that placed a useful link to the textbook publisher's web site on their classroom web site. Rebecca explained,

> We did have a teacher in sixth or seventh grade that gave us the textbook web site, and before her tests, I used to go out there and pull the pre-test of the web site, not her pre-test but a pre-test from the book, and try to give a little extra study guidance to our children that way. "Take this test, are you ready or not- nope, you're not ready!"

Additional Input

All of the parents mentioned their own ideas of how a classroom web site could be more helpful in the process of school to home communication, but the

following suggestions were specific items the researcher felt relevant to the study, and chose to include them in this section.

Eddie (+) shared his notion of how the school could develop an electronic identification system, accessible through using the classroom web site that would allow parents to grant their permission for their children to attend school-sponsored events, and to access confidential information.

> They should have electronic ID so you could do permission slips. Instead of sending home, you could just sign them electronically and it's good to go...in fact, a whole school record could actually be kept there with password firewall protected and all that kind of stuff.

Eddie believed his idea would save the school on paper use and provide convenience for 1) parents to give permission to the school for field trips and similar activities in which parental permission is required; and 2) give parents easier access to view students' records other than making a trip to the school building.

Janelle's (+) second grade daughter was in a reading program in which she had to accumulate points by reading books. Janelle explained the process and how convenient it would have been for her if the teacher used the web site in accordance with the reading program. Janelle said:

> In reading, they give them the book, and it's up to the child to read the book, go to the computer lab, take the test to get credit for the book. Then they get one or two points depending on the level of difficulty of the book. And they have to get 20 points. They set that goal. And if they don't make

their 20 points, then they don't get that highest academic score that they should have earned. So, you can get to like Halloween, and you go, "where are you in your points?" "Oh, I'm doing OK." And I'll go see Mrs. _____ and I'll go and pick her up and say, "how's she doing?" And Mrs. _____ says, "well, she lacks 18 points." And you know it's October 31, and I'm going, "(whistle). OK, we'd better get serious." But when you give that accountability to the child, and I understand they're trying to give that responsibility level, but really, it takes a parent, with my kid, now there maybe kids out there that just do it like clock work, but (my child) could spend a week reading a book, or she can spend an hour reading a book. And so, if they had all of that on there, you could just say, "you know what? You set that goal for 20 points, and this is the third week and you haven't earned any points." You know I can do that at night instead of having to take Mrs. ____'s time, and go up there waiting and interrupting, cause she always has some hanger on-ers at the end of the day, and I have to go in there where the other kids are at and ask how (my child) is doing. I'd rather just pull it up, and then if I can see by the fourth week, if I see she's not getting any points, I can say, "(my child), what is going on, what is the problem? Is it too difficult, is it?"

Summary

This chapter focused on revealing information pertaining to the interviews conducted for the study as well as the data collected from those interviews. The interviews were conducted with 12 parents, five parents whose children attended

the elementary and seven parents whose children attended the middle school. Although the intention of the study was to include six parents from each school, the numbers were skewed due to one potential participant deciding not to participate in the study followed by an oversight by the researcher when selecting an additional participant. However, the oversight of subjects did not adversely affect the process of collecting valuable data from those parents who did participate in the interview process.

The next chapter will describe findings based on the data collected from the interviews. The chapter will also provide recommendations based on those findings.

Chapter 5

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of this study centered on the viability of using teacher-created classroom web sites as a tool for school-to-home communication. This study examined the perceptions of parents regarding a classroom web site and the usefulness of the information placed on the site.

This study examined two schools, an elementary school and a middle school, in a southwestern state and their use of classroom web sites for school-to-home communication. Through a written survey and purposeful interviewing of parents, this study was originally initiated through the investigation of three study questions. However, as stated in the previous chapter, the data collected from the interview process revealed ten themes in the data. Due to the relevance of these themes to the study, the researcher determined that the data would be better analyzed through discussion of the data in relation to the themes rather than in relation to the research questions. Thus, the remainder of this chapter will follow the pattern of focusing on those ten themes rather than the questions.

The survey data were used to select 12 parents to further participate in the study through interviews. The participants were purposefully selected according to the grade level of their child, and whether or not they expressed satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the web sites posted by their child's teacher. There were five parents from the elementary, and seven parents from the middle school. Of the 12 parents, seven expressed satisfaction in the web site communication process, and five did not express satisfaction. Data collected from the surveys determined

which parents were satisfied and which were not satisfied. As stated in the previous chapter, the original intent was to select six elementary and six middle school parents with six responding as "satisfied," and six "dissatisfied." However, a parent's decision not to participate in the interview process prompted an additional parent to be selected. An oversight by the researcher in selecting that parent caused the uneven numbers. This was not realized until after the interviews were completed and a new school year had started. However, upon analyzing the data from the interviews, the researcher concluded that the themes revealed in the interviews were best viewed from a thematic point of view rather than a comparison or contrasting of satisfaction levels.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss the findings from the interviews, relate the findings to the literature, and then suggest recommendations to teachers, administrators, and districts based on those findings. The chapter will then present suggestions for further study of classroom web sites. The reader should take into account that the district in which the interviewees lived had an annual household income of over $92,000, and these responses are based on a district which most parents likely have Internet access at home, at work, or both. This was evident in the fact that of the surveys returned in the study, 97% indicated they have Internet access at home, at work, or both.

Findings of the study

Because the data collected from the interviews were analyzed in terms of major themes, the findings will be expressed by discussing each individual theme

one at a time. These themes were the main areas communicated by the parents and seen by the researcher as highly relevant to the study.

All of the parents interviewed expressed a desire to use the Internet as another tool to communicate with their child's teachers. Ten themes emerged from the interviews that reflected sentiments of parents from both categories of satisfaction levels. These themes represented opinions, ideas, and concerns of the parents relating to their image of using the Internet as an effective tool for communicating information from school-to-home. The ten themes were in the areas of email usage, student behavior, saving money, improved communication, information getting home, assignments and projects, keeping the web site updated, personal contact with the teacher, teachers needing time to keep the web site current, and links to other helpful web sites. Although several other themes emerged from the interviews, these represent the themes that were supported by the largest number of interviewees and were deemed relevant to the study by the researcher. Another category of responses was also included, which indicated responses that were exclusive to single interviewees, but were deemed as being significant to the study by the researcher due to their relevance to the study.

Email

A major theme stemming from the interviews was the preference of using email to communicate with the teachers. Use of email was rooted in the teacher having an email link on her web site for parents to use. Once that link was used, the parents could use the email option with or without accessing the web site. Whether the parents used the web site first in sending email or not, the email link

being available on the web site was a good tool. Parents also expressed their satisfaction when a reply to their emails was received in a prompt manner.

Student behavior

Student behavior was another item mentioned by parents as information to include on classroom web sites. This sort of information could give parents another source to check on their child's behavior, and if something was posted on the report that was either positive or negative, the parent would be informed without having to contact the teacher by phone or school visit. Once the report is seen, the parent could then contact the teacher if he felt the need, or the teacher could indicate on the report whether she would like to have a face-to-face meeting. This information would need to be password protected on the web site so that only the parent of the particular student, and not everyone else, could view the behavioral reports.

Saving money

Because finances are so vital to schools, school officials usually address any areas in which schools can save money. Three parents interviewed in the study indicated the advantage the web sites can give schools in the saving of funds, which could be used in other areas in need. Using the web site as opposed to paper could prove to be a positive budgetary move by the school. The households that do not have access to the web site could still receive the paper copy of the information, but those who have access could retrieve the information from the web site. Saving money is usually a welcomed idea in education.

Improved communication

The parents who identified the theme of improved education felt that for parents who have jobs that prevent them from easily contacting their child's teacher by phone or face-to-face visit, they could still find out what was happening at school through logging on to the teacher's web site. The idea of using a classroom web site was favorable to all of the parents, and particularly to the parents who worked during the day and had difficulty visiting the school while their children's teachers were still in the building. The site enabled parents to see what assignments were made, homework assigned, events happening at school, and other information pertaining to their child's education. These pieces of information were only available if the teacher had placed them on the web site. As one parent pointed out, one could find out information going on at school, or email the teacher "in your pajamas."

Information gets home

Teachers have created multiple avenues to send information home to parents. Some teachers at the elementary level put information into a folder and send it home in the child's backpack once a week. Some teachers send information home with children on a daily basis. The problem with both methods mentioned is that there is no way the teacher can be positively sure the information will make it home with the student once the student leaves the building. Parents from the elementary and middle school who were interviewed looked favorably upon how the web site removed the burden of responsibility off of the student, and ensured that the parents would have the opportunity to see the

information. Parents from the elementary school mentioned how the smaller children seem to lose things so easily on the way home.

Janelle, the mother mentioned in the previous chapter who had joint custody of the second grade girl, cited an important advantage regarding parents in her situation. Because of the dynamics of a joint custody situation, information getting into the right hands is more of a challenge, and a classroom web site is one answer to the problem.

Parents from the middle school also stated how advantageous a web site would be for communication with the teacher. Because middle school students typically have a view of parents visiting the school as "not cool," a web site would allow communication to still take place and spare the student any embarrassment or concern. Research shows that parental involvement and communication with the school tends to diminish during the middle school and high school years. Interviewees felt that this lack of communication could be or was reduced due to teachers maintaining a web site. A classroom web site is another tool to combat this problem.

Assignments and projects

In chapter two of this dissertation, a list of web site content possibilities shows 28 items that can be included on a classroom web site. Although this list is not exhaustive, it does include enough items to choose from in order to create a very informative web site. The parents interviewed for this study had specific items in mind that for some were helpful, and for others would have been helpful if they had an effective web site to use.

The parents who talked about assignments, instructions for class projects, and homework being posted on the classroom web site emphasized several factors that affect their child's academic performance on assignments that require some work at home. These factors include their child missing school because of illness or other reasons, their child not understanding the assignment's directions, or the parent themselves being gone from home and not able to see what their child at home needs to be doing. When these items are posted on a web site, they can be retrieved by the sick child, the parent who can explain to the child what the directions mean, or the parent who is out of town, but checks the web site, then calls home to remind their child of what they need to do for school. The web site can give parents a way to help their child with their schoolwork in situations where their child is lacking information on school assignments at home.

The web site needs to contain updated information

When classroom web sites are not updated on a regular basis, parents can become frustrated, and soon cease to visit the site altogether. One parent talked about visiting the web site and finding information from two weeks prior. When a web site is created to provide information and attracts regular visitors, those visitors will become reliant upon that site for that information, and those visitors expect the information to be fresh and up to date. When that web site is not kept up in that way, the visitors will eventually look for another way to receive the information. If another site is found with the same information, they will use that site, but in the case of a classroom web site that is not kept updated, the visitor, in this case the parent, is left to find other ways to find out information. If a teacher

creates a web site, she must be committed to keeping the web site as current as possible.

Personal contact with teacher

In chapter one of this dissertation, the concept of immediacy was discussed. Chapter one of this dissertation mentioned the concept of immediacy in the teacher-student relationship as well as in the teacher-parent relationship. As chapter one mentions, immediacy has been defined as the use of communication behaviors (e.g., movement, enthusiasm, use of gestures, humor, vocal variety) that reduce both the psychological and physical distance between two individuals (Myers, Zhong, & Guan, 1998). Two parents, Lori and Colleen, believed that a deep, personal relationship with their children's teachers suffered because of the heavy reliance on the web site to communicate information to the parents. Lance, however, believed the web site enhanced his personal, face-to-face communication with his child's teachers. The use of the web site combine with email gave Lance the feeling that his son's teachers were able to communicate better with him when he did visit the school.

Lance's theory of enhanced personal communication with his son's teachers is a phenomenon that could be studied in greater detail. However, it is not the focus of this study. But his idea does lend itself to the notion mentioned in chapter one regarding immediacy in the teacher-parent relationship through use of the web site. When the teacher and parent have a face-to-face encounter, immediacy can be strengthened by quality communication gained through use of email and the web site. Both email and a web site can provide the teacher and

parent opportunities to build a relationship full of information sharing from a distance that can help the level of immediacy when the two parties meet face-to-face. This concept should be preferable to other methods of communication that accomplish a limited amount of contact between teacher and parent. When used properly, the web site is an additional, and effective, tool for communicating with parents.

Teachers need time to keep the web site current

Five parents in the study recognized the fact that if teachers are going to create and maintain an effective web site, they must have time to do so. As different programs are implemented in schools, administrators must allow time and materials for their teachers to accomplish their goals. For classroom web sites, teachers need computers, web space, and proper training for utilization, but teachers also need the time to keep the web site current. The theme mentioned earlier stated that parents wanted the web site to stay updated. This can be a reality more frequently if teachers are allotted time, preferably during the school day, to update the site.

Links to other web sites

When a classroom web site is linked to other web sites, the classroom web site expands to become a larger web. For example, the teacher places a link on the classroom web site to The Discovery Channel's web site. Through the webbing concept, the teacher's web site is not only linked to The Discovery Channel's web site, but also to all the sites that are linked off of The Discovery Channel's web site. This expands the teacher's web site to include a host of other sites. The sites

that are links on the teacher's web site should have a purpose for being on the site, whether the sites are for parents to reference for information, the students to reference for assistance, or for educational subject matter entertainment.

Rebecca's example of the teacher placing a link on the web site to the textbook publisher's web site, which contained practice exams for each chapter, was a good example of links that can be of assistance to both parent and student. Parents can utilize sites like this, provided by the teacher, to help their child prepare for tests, projects, or reports assigned by the teacher. Links to other sites can help enrich the child's learning in every subject area.

Link to the literature

Five of the themes which emerged in the study were reflected in the literature reviewed for the study. These themes focused on specific information that could be included on classroom web sites.

Huseth's (2001) study indicated that her students' parents desired to have class assignments and links to other helpful sites included on her web site. this study supported Huseth's findings.

Johnson (2000) developed a list of classroom web site content possibilities, and these items are also included in chapter 2. Johnson's list includes themes which emerged in this study. Themes such as email, personal contact with the teacher, assignments and projects, and links to other sites were included in Johnson's listing.

Marshall and Rossett (1997) discuss possible information that could enrich the school/home relationship through a classroom web site. Their suggestions

include the possibility of using specific links on the web site to inform parents of various student behavior issues, which is an emerging theme of this study.

Although the remaining five themes are not specifically mentioned in the literature review, these themes help enhance the other themes by supporting their relevance to the parents. These five themes are: the site needs to contain updated information, teachers need time to keep the site current, important information gets home to the parents, school-to-home communication is improved, and personal communication with the teacher is affected.

Recommendations

The researcher recognizes that findings from qualitative research studies cannot be generalized to other populations. However, based on the literature and findings of the study, the following recommendations are presented to teachers, school administrators, and teacher education programs.

Recommendations will be made for schools before they decide to use web sites to communicate with parents, teachers who implement a classroom web site, principals who encourage their teachers to maintain classroom web sites, and teacher education programs that have a technology education course or program for their teacher candidates. The recommendations listed below are made in consideration of schools and districts similar to the socio-economic status of the schools and district in this study.

Schools

Teachers and school administrators should take a survey of their students' parents and guardians to find out how many parents have access to the Internet at

home, work, or both. If a low percentage of parents have access, then a classroom web site is not a viable tool for communication. The researcher suggests that a majority of parents have Internet access before a classroom web site is created and posted to the Internet. The preferable percentage of the researcher is 70%, based on a seven out of every 10 parents ratio. If the percentage is lower than half, the teacher needs to consider using the time spent on creating and maintaining a web site on other communication techniques more appropriate for the parents of the students.

Teachers

Based on the data collected from the interviews, the recommendations for teachers are directly correlated with the themes that directly affect their role with the web site. According to the parents interviewed for this study, a web site provided, or could have provided, helpful school-to-home communication if themes such as the following were utilized.

Email usage

First, the teacher needs to put an email link on the web site. When "clicked," this would enable the parent to contact the teacher through email messaging. Once email contact is encouraged, the teacher must check for incoming messages on a regular basis. A good method is to inform parents at what time(s) during the day that the teacher will be checking for new email messages. For example, a teacher may check for new messages at 11:30 in the morning and again at 3:30 in the afternoon. When parents know these times, they

can be aware of when the teacher is reading email messages and send their emails to the teacher accordingly.

Reporting student behavior

Teachers can use a classroom web site to inform parents of the behavior of their children. This should be the reporting of positive as well as negative behavior. The teacher can use this as a less confrontational initial approach to reporting student behavior to the parent. This type of confidential information needs to be password protected so that the only individuals to view the information are the parents of the respective student.

Improved amount of communication

A frustrating aspect of teacher-parent communication is when the parents' jobs prevent him from being able to contact the teacher during the school day. Working parents rarely find time to contact their child's teacher. An informative web site, containing information discussed in this dissertation, along with timely use of email, can alleviate a major portion of this frustration. Parents interviewed in the study had a desire to maintain a good amount of contact with their children's teachers, but all were working parents. The web site can improve the amount of communication with working parents.

Information gets home

Parents have a concern about information reaching home just like teachers. If teachers want to feel that the information they send home has a high probability of reaching parents, they need to use the tool or tools that are best suited for the process. Teachers have been known to adopt a single system for the

information to be sent home, usually a folder or phone call for the elementary level, and a phone call for the secondary level. Continuing to use these tools maybe sufficient, however, when addressing schools that exist in districts similar in socio-economic levels to the schools in this study, technology use through a web site can provide an additional tool for communication.

As teachers use a classroom web site as another means of communication, they must realize the importance of placing information on the site that needs to be seen by their students' parents. Information about school happenings such as lunch menus and birthdays are great to have placed on the site. but are not high priority information. Any information the teacher deems imperative needs to be posted on the web site in a timely fashion. In doing so, the teacher ensures that the highly important information is accessible to a large portion of their parents. Although there is no way to know that parents will access that information, the teacher has made it available in a place that most of the parents know where to find and retrieve it.

Assignments and projects

Among the items listed as possible content information for the web site, teachers need to include daily assignments, homework assignments, and directions for any projects or term papers on the web site. If students misplace these items, the parent or student can retrieve the missing document from the web site at any time of the day or night. This enables the parent to find the information, download it from the site, and provide it for the child without having to disturb the teacher. If a student is absent from school, the parent can still have

the daily work and assignments that are missed due to the absence. Directions for any projects or term papers need to be placed on the site. Parents can then access the directions to clear up any confusion the child may have about the project or paper.

Keeping the information on the site updated

Earlier in this chapter, a recommendation was made in reference to email communication. The recommendation was for the teacher to tell parents when email messages will be checked by the teacher so that the parents will have an idea of the times during the day when the teacher will likely read any emails they have sent to her. In the same way, the teacher needs to inform parents of the scheduled days and times in which the classroom web site will be updated.

The teacher should not feel that the scheduled times are the only times that updating can occur, but these times should be set as a minimum. Parents need to be informed that if special occasions warrant, the site may need an occasional update sooner than the scheduled time. Scheduled updating in which the parents are aware of the scheduled days and times of updating also provides a level of accountability on the teacher, and helps the teacher feel obligated to the parents to keep the site fresh and updated with current information.

Personal contact with the teacher

Teachers need to use the classroom web site to develop and maintain a consistent tool of communication. In addition to the other information on the site, the email link on the web site can help in developing a communication link with the parents. The web site may not be the tool for parents to feel a personal level of

communication with the teacher, but it can help foster that relationship through information sharing via the site, and information exchange via the email link on the site. The web site can enhance the relationship, but on its own, will not satisfy most parents looking for a more personal level of contact.

Links to other helpful sites

Teachers need to place links on the classroom web site to other web sites. These sites can be related to the subjects being studied in class, or sites that are fun, yet educational, for students. Parents will especially appreciate these links when they contain helpful information pertaining to the topics being studied in the classroom. Parents may see topics on their child's homework that is unfamiliar or forgotten by them and their child. Added links specifically associated with providing further insight into the topic would be valuable to both parent and child.

The site should also have links to sites that provide information for students in a fun, enjoyable way. The parents will appreciate links to sites that contain learning games or activities as well, due to the fact that their child will become highly involved in a learning activity that their child enjoys.

School principals

The recommendations for school principals are based on the two themes in the study that directly affect the role and decision-making of school principals. They are two themes that principals should consider when contemplating a classroom web site initiative at their schools.

Saving money

Principals must consider the money-saving possibilities of their teachers implementing classroom web sites. Principals need to encourage teachers to place on the site, among other information, documents that would normally be sent home in a hard copy format. This could include newsletters, calendars, permission slips, and other documents typically seen in a hard copy format. This would save the school in costs of paper and printing ink. The copy machine in the school would also have a longer lifespan due to the reduced amount of copies needing to be made. When hard copy communication can be accomplished by web-based format, the school should have a noticeable cost savings.

Teachers needing time to keep the site current

Principals need to collaborate with their teachers to determine the best way to provide teachers with adequate time to create and update their web sites. This does not need to be an every day occurrence. The information on the web site does not have to be updated every day. Teachers should be able to update the site on a weekly basis, which would allow the teachers a once-a-week time period to work on updating the site.

Principals could also allow teachers to access and update their sites from Internet locations away from the school. If the teacher has a computer and Internet access at home, the teacher could make some of those special occasion updates mentioned earlier in this chapter from their home, but principals must make sure to provide this sort of technical ability to their Internet systems.

Teacher education programs

Based on the interviews in the study, a helpful skill for teachers to possess is the knowledge of how to create web sites. Once that knowledge is obtained, teachers need to know what content needs to be included in a classroom web site. Rather than force teachers to learn these skills while in the profession, teacher education programs should consider teaching these skills during the undergraduate years of teacher education. Schools and colleges of teacher education have courses that teach the use of technology in the education setting. Because their topic is technology, these courses are great sources for instructing teacher education candidates in classroom web site development. Once the teacher education candidate attains these skills, the individual is equipped with another tool to use in the school-to-home process of communication.

Suggestions for further study

This study used two schools from a district with an average household income of over $92,000 annually. These schools were used for the study due to the high probability of computer and Internet use in schools that have such wealth, but also due to the fact that the administrators of each school encouraged their teachers to use classroom web sites as a tool for communication. These factors helped the researcher by providing a large number of parents to select from as subjects for the study.

Studies in lower socio-economic districts

This suggestion for further study centers on conducting similar studies in other school districts that do not have as high of an average household income as

the district in which this study took place. An assumption is made that lower socio-economic districts contain a majority of parents who do not have access to the Internet; therefore, the assumption is made that such a study would be a waste of time. However, this assumption needs to be researched before conclusions are drawn.

Same study conducted at the high school

Another suggestion for further study would be to conduct this study in the same district in which it took place, but to focus on the high school instead of the elementary or middle schools. This district had one high school, and to study the amount of communication between the high school teachers and their parents via the classroom web sites would be a benefit to researchers who study trends in secondary school-to-home communication.

Research study on the students and parents

A needed study in the area of classroom web site usage is to focus on the students whose parents frequently use the web sites. The focus would be to look at whether they are improving in their academic scores in comparison to their previous grades before the web site was used, and whether their scores are higher than those students whose parents do not have access to classroom web sites. A study such as this could discuss whether the parents benefit through improved communication, the students benefit academically, or if both occur.

Research study on the teachers

A final suggestion for further study would be to conduct research focused on the teachers who create and use classroom web sites for communication. Such

a study could concentrate on areas such as, among other things, what content those teachers felt was needed on the site, whether they believed the web site improved communication with parents, and any other perceptions they might provide through the study.

Summary

This chapter focused on the implications of the data collected from the interviews, provided recommendations for teachers, principals, and teacher education programs pertaining to classroom web sites, and offered some suggestions for further study. Research studies like this one, which examine the use and effectiveness of classroom web sites should be conducted regularly by schools that utilize web sites. Technology is constantly changing. An individual could purchase a computer today, then frown upon the fact that a better, lower costing computer will be available a few months after his purchase.

Because of the rapid change in technology, studies on its effectiveness in schools must be conducted frequently so that schools do not find themselves drifting aimlessly behind the technological times. Of course, keeping up with the changes can be expensive, and money is a valued treasure in education, but schools need to study what they are doing with communication and how much it is benefiting their parents and students. If this study were conducted five years from now, the responses from parents may change, and that should not surprise the researcher. Technology changes, so researchers must expect the data to change, and upon revealing that change in data, schools must make an effort to stay as close as fiscally possible to the level of technology. Parents benefit from

good communication with the teacher, and the bi-product of that parental benefit is the benefit of the students.

The World Wide Web contains a multitude of web sites geared toward entertainment, information exchange, and many other areas of use. Educators must capitalize on opportunities to adopt tools that will help in the education of students. As this study has shown, classroom web sites that contain current, pertinent information for parents to use will be appreciated by those parents who utilize the sites, and can add another tool to the educator's communication toolbox.

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Appendix A
A Parent Survey Of Your Child's Classroom Web Site

This survey is to measure the effectiveness of classroom web sites. For survey purposes, a classroom web site is defined as an accessible web site usually developed and maintained by a classroom teacher to establish and maintain contact with students and their parents. Please answer each question and return to your child's teacher promptly. Thank you!

1. What is your name(s)? _____Phone #_____

2. Who is the person(s) responding to this survey?
____Mother ____Father ____Mother and Father ____Guardian

3. Your Age(s) *indicate with "M" for Mother, "F" for Father, or "G" for Guardian*: ____20-30 ____31-40 ____41-50 ____51+

4. Occupation(s): _____

5. In what grade is your child currently? _____ ***Note: This survey is being conducted at more than one school. If you receive this survey for more than one child, please fill out separate surveys for all of your children attending those schools.***

6. Does your child's teacher have a classroom website?
_____Yes _____No _____Do not know
(Note: If you answered, "No" or "Do not know," then answer question 7, then go to question 14.)

7. Do you have Internet access at home or work? (Please check one)
_____Home _____Work _____Both _____No Internet access
(If you answered, "No Internet access," go to Question 14.)

8. Are you familiar with your child's classroom web site?

_____Very Familiar
_____Familiar
_____Somewhat Familiar
_____Not Familiar

9. How often do you access the web site?

_____Never
_____Once a semester

_____Monthly
_____Weekly
_____Daily
_____Other (please specify)

10. What information on the web site do you pay the closest attention?

11. What information not currently included on the web site would you like to see?

12. Overall, what level of communication with your child's teacher do you feel the web site accomplishes?

_____Very high level of communication
_____High level of communication
_____Low level of communication
_____Very low level of communication
_____No communication (I never access the web site)

13. Overall, how satisfied are you with the classroom web site?

_____Very satisfied
_____Satisfied
_____Not satisfied
_____Very dissatisfied

14. What other ways of communicating with your child's teacher would be helpful or meaningful to you?

15. Are there other means of accessing the Internet in your community that are you aware of? What are they?

Appendix B
Interview Guide- Study of Classroom Web Sites

General questions:

You submitted a completed survey on classroom web sites at your ___ grade child's school. I have several questions to ask:

Do you have other children attending school in the district?

If yes, is there a classroom web site associated with their class?

If no, how do you communicate with your child's teacher?

Questions for parents who use the website:

Has the classroom website changed the amount of communication you have had with your child's teacher? How?

If there has been no change, why do you think that is the case?

What type of feedback have you heard from other parents regarding the web site?

Has the web site aided you in being more involved or informed about your child's education then before?

If so, How?

Questions for parents who have access to the Internet, but have low to no usage:

Are you aware that your child's teacher has a website?

If your child's teacher did have a website, would it be something that you would use?

What information would you want to see on the site?

You mentioned on your survey that your child's teacher does have a website. Why do you not utilize the site?

How do you keep informed about what is going on at school?

Questions for parents who do not have access to the Internet:

How do you keep informed about what is going on at school?

Do you have any knowledge of your ___ grade child's teacher's web site? If yes, what do you know about it?

Do you foresee Internet accessibility for you in the near future?

Closing:

Do you still communicate with your ___ grade child's teacher in other ways? What are they?

Do you have a preference of communication with the teacher, whether they be existing or not? What are those preferences and why?

Are there any other comments you would like to make in regard to the web site?

If appropriate, there maybe some follow-up questions. Would that be alright with you?

Appendix C
Percentages of returned surveys

	Elementary School	Middle School	Total
Surveys Distributed	478	447	925
Surveys Returned	81	94	175
Percentage %	17%	21%	19%

Appendix D: The Survey Data

This appendix contains summary data from the survey. The survey was used to select the 12 parents to be interviewed. The data are reported in two sections. The first section contains tables of data collected from the multiple choice items. The second section is a summary of the open-ended questions.

WHICH PARENT RESPONDED

	Middle School Frequency and Percentage	Elementary Frequency and Percentage
Father	18 (19.1%)	9 (11.1%)
Mother/ Father	8 (8.5%)	8 (9.9%)
mother	68(72.3%)	64 (79%)
TOTAL	94(100%)	81 (100%)

AGE OF RESPONDING PARENT

	Middle School Frequency and Percentage	Elementary Frequency and Percentage
20-30		4 (4.9%)
31-40	30 (31.9%)	44 (54.3%)
41-50	60 (63.8%)	31 (38.3%)
51+	4 (4.3%)	2 (2.5%)
TOTAL	94 (100%)	81 (100%)

CHILDRENS' GRADE LEVEL

	Middle School Frequency and Percentage	Elementary Frequency and Percentage
Pre-K		2 (2.5%)
Kinder-garten		3 (3.7%)
1st		14 (17.3%)
2nd		11 (13.6%)
3rd		14 (17.3%)
4th		14 (17.3%)
5th		21 (25.9%)
6th	46 (48.9%)	
7th	17 (18.1%)	
8th	30 (31.9%)	
DNR	1 (1.1%)	2 (2.5%)
TOTAL	94 (100%)	81 (100%)

AWARENESS OF TEACHERS' WEB SITE

	Middle School Frequency and Percentage	Elementary Frequency and Percentage
Don't know	5 (5.3%)	27 (33.3%)
No	2 (2.1%)	19 (23.5%)
Yes	87 (92.6%)	34 (42%)
DNR	0	1 (1.2%)
TOTAL	94 (100%)	81 (100%)

ACCESS TO THE INTERNET

	Middle School Frequency and Percentage	Elementary Frequency and Percentage
Both	59 (62.8%)	47 (58%)
Home	34 (36.2%)	28 (34.6%)
Work	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.2%)
DNR	0	2 (2.5%)
No Access	0	2 (2.5%)
TOTAL	94 (100%)	81 (100%)

FAMILIARITY WITH THE WEB SITE

	Middle School Frequency and Percentage	Elementary Frequency and Percentage
DNR	6 (6.4%)	38 (46.9%)
Familiar	37 (39.4%)	7 (8.6%)
Not Familiar	13 (13.8%)	15 (18.5%)
Somewhat Familiar	18 (19.1%)	13 (16%)
Very Familiar	20 (21.3%)	8 (9.9%)
TOTAL	94 (100%)	81 (100%)

HOW OFTEN DID PARENT ACCESS THE WEB SITE

	Middle School Frequency and Percentage	Elementary Frequency and Percentage
Daily	4 (4.3%)	2 (2.5%)
DNR	6 (6.4%)	42 (51.9%)
Monthly	30 (31.9%)	14 (17.3%)
Never	11 (11.7%)	10 (12.3%)
Once a semester	11 (11.7%)	9 (11.1%)
Other	6 (6.4%)	1 (1.2%)
Weekly	26 (27.7%)	3 (3.7%)
TOTAL	94 (100%)	81 (100%)

LEVEL OF PRECEIVED COMMUNICATION (WEB SITE)

	Middle School Frequency and Percentage	Elementary Frequency and Percentage
DNR	8 (8.5%)	50 (61.7%)
High	42 (44.7%)	13 (16%)
Low	13 (13.8%)	7 (8.6%)
No Communi-cation	9 (9.6%)	4 (4.9%)
Very high	18 (19.1%)	2 (2.5%)
Very low	4 (4.3%)	5 (6.2%)
TOTAL	94 (100%)	81 (100%)

LEVEL OF PARENTAL SATISFACTION (IN THE WEB SITE)

	Middle School Frequency and Percentage	Elementary Frequency and Percentage
DNR	16 (17.0%)	53 (65.4%)
Not satisfied	5 (5.3%)	4 (4.9%)
Satisfied	46 (48.9%)	18 22.2%)
Very satisfied	27 (28.7%)	6 (7.4%)
TOTAL	94 (100%)	81 (100%)

Survey responses on open-ended questions (responses are included if mentioned on a minimum of 5 surveys)

Question 10—What information on the web site do you pay the closest attention?

Elementary
- Spelling Words
- School/classroom events and activities

Middle School
- Homework
- School/classroom events and activities

Question 11—What information not currently included on the web site would you like to see?

Elementary
- None

Middle School
- School/classroom events and activities
- Notes sent home

Question 14—What other ways of communicating with your child's teacher would be helpful or meaningful to you?

Elementary
- Email
- Notes sent home
- Telephone calls
- Face-to-face contact
- Newsletters

Middle School
- Email
- Notes sent home
- Face-to-face contact
- Telephone calls

Question 15—Are there other means of accessing the Internet in your community that are you aware of? What are they?

Elementary

No. I am not aware of any other means of access to the Internet Library

Middle School

No. I am not aware of any other means of access to the Internet Library