Walden University
ScholarWorks

Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies

Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies
Collection

1-1-2009

Survey study of the relationship between parents' and teachers' perceptions of what constitutes effective school -to -home communications

Jill L. Murphy
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations

Part of the Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons, Elementary Education and Teaching Commons, Family, Life Course, and Society Commons, and the Pre-Elementary, Early Childhood, Kindergarten Teacher Education Commons

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Jill Murphy

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Casey Reason, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Lisa Reason, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Denise DeZolt, Ph.D.

Walden University
2009

ABSTRACT

Survey Study of the Relationship between Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of What
Constitutes Effective School-to-Home Communications

by

Jill L. Murphy

M.S., Georgia State University, 2000
B.S., Georgia State University, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
Teacher Leadership

Walden University
December 2008

ABSTRACT

Even though guidelines at a suburban elementary school in Georgia were in place for teachers regarding frequency and methods of parent communication, it was unclear if these methods were being used consistently and effectively. Research has shown that effective communication increases student achievement, but there is a lack of research examining communication preferences of teachers and parents. Therefore, this study evaluated current practices by comparing parents' and teachers' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications. The researcher administered questionnaires to a random sample of teachers and parents of 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students to compare their perceptions of the communication methods currently used between school and home, and to expose any need for modification to current practices. Data analysis using a *t*-test for independent measures was used to compare the teachers' and parents' mean scores computed from the Likert-scaled survey. Based on the results of the independent samples *t*-test, there was a significant difference between teachers and parents in communication scores for all parts of the survey instruments. Specifically, teachers rated themselves higher than the parents rated the teachers' practices. The results of this current study will be shared with the school's leadership team to determine the need for modifications to the current practices in order to communicate more effectively. A future qualitative study could examine the particular preferences of parents regarding communication. This study highlights the need to educate teachers about adapting their communication practices to meet parents' needs. The overall implications for social change include using this information to strengthen the partnership between school and home to increase overall student academic performance.

Survey Study of the Relationship between Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of What Constitutes Effective School-to-Home Communications

by

Jill L. Murphy

M.S., Georgia State University, 2000
B.S., Georgia State University, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
Teacher Leadership

Walden University
December 2008

UMI Number: 3344457

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI®

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Each year, teachers are faced with a task that is becoming increasingly difficult, meeting the educational needs of all students. "It seems unlikely that this can be accomplished single-handedly through traditional, teacher-centered instruction or through standardization as in the past. Class sizes are increasing, and the backgrounds of the students in those classes are becoming more diverse" (Rapp, 2005, p. 297). Therefore, it is important to have as many team members as possible involved in a child's education. Beghetto (2001) found that

> the schools with the most successful parent involvement programs are those which offer a variety of ways parents can participate. Recognizing that parents differ greatly in their willingness, ability, and available time for involvement in school activities, these schools provide a continuum of options for parent participation. (p. 23)

Longfellow (2004) agreed that improving communication between school and home increases parental involvement and student achievement.

Nevertheless, an analysis of the related literature revealed some limitations. Multiple studies on parental communication (Barges & Loges, 2003; Beghetto, 2001; Flannery, 2005; Freytag, 2001; Longfellow, 2004; Matzye 1995; Strom & Strom, 2002; West, 2000) focused on the benefits of strong school-to-home connections but failed to unveil the preferences of both parties in relation to what effective communication entails. Also, Spann, Kohler, and Soenksen's 2003 study revealed that it is likely that parents and school personnel hold different perspectives about the nature of their communication and

the researchers encourage future studies to examine and compare the perceptions of both

of these groups. The research literature will be discussed in greater detail in section 2.

Problem Statement

Results from the study by DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) suggested

that "teachers, parents, and students value the importance of parent involvement in

education, but communication between the two groups was not as open as expected" (p.

367). Teachers need more training and information pertaining to parental communication

(Longfellow, 2004). Barges and Loges's 2003 study explained what, why, and when

communication is needed and wanted by each subgroup; however, the study did not

deliver strategies or programs on how to fulfill these desires. According to Freytag

(2001), collaborative communication between schools and families is a topic of great

interest to all stakeholders in the educational process. A traditional two-way exchange is

no longer sufficient, so researchers need to explore ways to improve and expand

conventional methods of interaction.

Freytag (2001) conducted a Parent Communication Survey (PCS) that was

developed to assess parents' concerns relative to parent-teacher communication (what

parents wanted to hear, how they wished to be contacted, and how teachers might

improve the quality of their interactions with parents). Although Freytag's study

generated an abundance of beneficial information, the study was restricted to one specific

school and thus unique to the school in question; the study cannot be generalized to other

situations. Moreover, given the small sampling size (86 participants) the parents who

chose to respond to the survey were likely parents who are concerned about the status of

home-school interactions, and these parents' views may not be representative of all parents' views.

Bridgemohan, van Wyk, and Van Staden (2005) argued, "Since the most obvious reason for parents and educators to communicate is to nurture the growth and learning of individual children by sharing information, insights and concerns, parent communication must be viewed as a necessity and not an extra" (p. 60). Close contact and regular communication between the home and the school are necessary in order to improve the way parents and educators work to improve student achievement. However, in their qualitative study, Bridgemohen, et al. found that most communication "is school-directed and general in nature" (p. 60). Furthermore, there are few opportunities offered to parents to initiate communication.

According to Longfellow (2004), numerous barriers to involvement exist that limit the potential of increasing parental involvement. Lack of time for teachers and parents is one main cause of parental communication barriers. Lack of staff training and staff attitudes about parents also consistently show on lists of barriers to parent involvement. Many teachers complain that parents are not supportive of the school's efforts and that parents show too little interest and involvement in their children's academic progress, whereas parents claim that schools often do not recognize parents' points-of-view or potential for contribution. Longfellow found that teachers and administrators rate the amount of parental communication much higher than parents do. Somewhere in this process is a breakdown of communication.

"Involving parents as partners requires an understanding of parents' perceptions of schooling, their aspirations for their children, their approach to parenting, their expectations of teachers, and their concept of their role and responsibilities" (Moore & Lasky, 1999, p. 13). Thus, the teachers and parents must work together to plan for effective communication by clearly stating their expectations and limitations regarding the school/home connection. The researcher is employed at an elementary school in the southeast region of the United States, which currently has an enrollment of approximately 500 students in kindergarten through fifth grades. Even though the school's administration has put guidelines in place for teachers regarding frequency and methods of communication, it was unclear if these methods were being used consistently and effectively. Therefore, it was necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of current teacher communication practices by exploring the perceptions of teachers and parents of third, fourth, and fifth grade students at this particular elementary school with regards to methods used with school-to-home communications and how the perceptions, expectations, and needs of the teachers and the parents compare.

Nature of the Study

A quantitative approach using a questionnaire was used to examine the perceptions, preferences, and expectations of teachers and parents of upper elementary students with regard to the effectiveness of various methods of school-to-home communications. In order to facilitate the research, the survey was distributed to all teachers and parents of students in grades three through five at a suburban elementary school in the southeast region of the United States. Accordingly, the research question

studied was, "Is there a difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications?"

Hypotheses:

Null: There is no significant difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications.

Alternative: There is a significant difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications.

Specific details regarding the nature of the study will be discussed in greater detail in section 3 of this proposal.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this survey was to test the hypotheses about whether or not there is a difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications. The survey explored these perceptions to help find ways for teachers and parents to form a positive bond in order to maintain a cohesive and beneficial relationship. Results of this study were used to evaluate the effectiveness of current communication practices of the faculty at the participating elementary school.

Theoretical Base and Conceptual Framework

This quantitative study was based on the theory that parent communication aids student achievement (Barges & Loges, 2003; Beghetto, 2001; Flannery, 2005; Freytag, 2001; Longfellow 2004; Matzye 1995; Strom & Strom, 2002; West, 2000). Ferrara and Ferrara (2005) stated, "Parent involvement promotes better student attendance, increased graduation rates and less retention, high parent and student satisfaction with school, less

discipline reports, and high achievement scores in reading and math" (p. 77). Furthermore, 98% of educators said it is necessary to work well with parents in order to be effective (Flannery, p. 36). Parents and teachers who work together are less inclined to blame one another for lack of student motivation, poor performance, or misconduct. For that reason, teachers are advised to establish partnerships with parents and keep them informed of progress. Phone tag is tiring and time-consuming for teachers as well as parents (Strom & Strom, 2002). Strom and Strom argue that goals are more likely to be attained if methods of school communication are modernized and collaborative efforts become more common. Clark's 2002 study on the benefits of parental communication on minority student achievement showed that student reading scores on a standardized test were higher when "teachers reported more communication with parents and when those parents perceived themselves to be engaged in a healthy partnership with the teacher" (p. 17). A literature review of the content and research methodology reveals support for effective parent communication benefiting student achievement. However, preferences of each party need further exploration.

<center>Operational Definitions</center>

Parent: In addition to the natural parent, a legal guardian or other person (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom a child lives) or a person who is legally responsible for a child's welfare (No Child Left Behind Act, 2004).

School-to-home communication: Two way, meaningful, clear, and ongoing communication between school (teachers, administrators, counselors, district personnel)

and home (parents/guardians) including verbal and written communication (Longfellow, 2004 and Epstein, 1995).

Teacher: Classroom teachers who work with students as a whole class in a classroom, in small groups in a resource room, or one-on-one inside or outside a regular classroom. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, n.d.)

These terms are important when examining school-to-home communication. This study involved the exploration of both verbal and written communications between parents and teachers.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study included teachers and parents of upper elementary students who have volunteered to participate. The teachers and parents of students in third, fourth, and fifth grades at a suburban elementary middle school in the southeast region of the United States were used in this sample. The total group of interest was 291 demographically diverse students who were enrolled during the first quarter of the 2008-2009 school year. This researcher hoped to motivate most teachers to become more proactive in communicating with parents. The convenience and representation of the school were factors in choosing this sample.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Given that the researcher is both an employee and a parent in the participating district, certain reliability and bias issues were considered. These issues included the possibilities that teachers may have been reluctant to share sensitive information for fear of job retribution, and the parents may be hesitant to be truthful for fear of retaliation

against their child(ren) by school personnel. All participants were reassured that participation was voluntary and all data would remain anonymous to maintain confidentiality. This study was also bound by restrictions of proximity to the researcher and may not be generalized to other populations. Furthermore, because the research was conducted at only one school, the study is not representative of the larger population, and results may or may not be generalized to other populations.

A fact that was assumed to be true but not actually verified prior to the study was that parents and teachers were interested in improving parent-teacher communication. A potential weakness of this study was that the teachers and parents who participated in this survey were those who were already interested in improving parent-teacher communication and those who did not participate may be those who were not willing or interested in enhancing the relationship. This discrepancy may have influenced perceptions and may not truly reflect those of the overall population.

Significance of the Study

This study was intended to educate administrators, teachers, and parents about the effectiveness of current communication practices. The researcher and administrators will use the comparison of parents' and teachers' perceptions in relation to various methods of school-to-home communications to reveal any need for modifications to the school's guidelines on the frequency of and methods used for communication. The teachers will be able to review the results for any similarities and discrepancies so that they may alter their current practices in order to form or maintain positive and effective relationships with their students' parents. The parents, in turn, will benefit from the enhanced

communication practices in response to their feedback from the study. Ultimately, the students will achieve greater academic success as a result of more effective communication between school and home.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Both parents and teachers need to seek and form a partnership with each other that will enable the child to succeed. Clark (2002) claimed,

> When teachers take actions to cultivate instructional partnerships with parents, those parents are more likely to support their children's learning at home; also, the students of these parents are more likely to be perceived by the teachers as positively involved in classroom learning activities. (p. 17)

This study focused on the expectations and preferences of both teachers and parents in relation to school-to-home communications in order to build a more effective and beneficial partnership.

The following section contains a review of the literature concerning the historical role of teachers with regards to communicating and partnering with parents, an historical perspective of parents' perceptions of teachers and communication with them, contemporary trends in school communication, and advantages to effective communication between parents and teachers. Section 3 discusses the research methodology for this study, section 4 presents the results and findings of the analysis of the data, and section 5 provides a summary of conclusions and recommendations of the study.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature involved an examination of the historical role of teachers with regard to communicating and partnering with parents, as well as an historical perspective of parents' perceptions of teachers and communication with them. Furthermore, the contemporary trends in school communication and the advantages to effective communication between teachers and parents were explored. The following terms were used as key words in searching the literature: *parent communication, parent involvement, parent-teacher communication, school-to-home communication, effective communication, school communication, parent-teacher partnerships, parent-teacher relationships, communication in education, parent participation in education, parent expectations, teacher expectations,* and other related terms.

Historical Role of Teachers

The issue of parent-teacher communications is not a recent problem. Bittle's study in 1975 acknowledged that a communications gap between parents and teachers had existed for a long time. Because the methods of parent-teacher communication at the time appeared to be inadequate, Bittle urged that new methods needed to be considered. The most common method of basic communication used in the 1970s was the telephone. At the time, even though the telephone represented a technological development of tremendous importance and was used in many situations, it was usually used sparingly as an educational communication tool. Theories as to why phone use was minimal were that phones were expensive and too disruptive, teachers might not have used them for their intended purposes, and parents really did not care enough to call teachers.

In exploring alternative methods for communication, Bittle (1975) stated that concern should be given to the essential characteristics of an effective parent-teacher communication plan, which should allow for a continuous flow of meaningful and useful information between the two parties that was economically feasible in terms of both cost and time. Bittle conducted an experiment involving a daily recorded telephone message which reported each day's activities, homework assignments, and announcements of future events. Parents could obtain this information by dialing a special telephone number used only for this purpose any time, day or night. The results of his study demonstrated that parents will seek out information about their children's school activities when it is convenient for them to do so.

The answering service provided an impersonal method whereby parents could, at their convenience, find out what their children had been doing at school and whether or not they had homework for any particular day. Bittle (1975) showed that parents could also find out information of general interest such as the lunch menu for the following day and the details of future special activities in which their children would be participating. The communication procedure used in this experiment proved to be an effective parent-teacher communication system. It provided a continuous daily flow of information from the teacher to the parents, and the information provided was easy to understand and useful to the parents. The system was economical in terms of cost and time. Very little teacher time was required for message preparation, and no more than 3 minutes per day was required of parent time. The system resulted in improved academic performance for every student in a class. Nevertheless, this study only focused on the academic area of

spelling, and the system did not provide feedback to the parents in the form of grades or other personalized information about specific students. Alternatively, using this system avoided the negative aspects of most communication systems that evaluate performance and assign grades. Parents desiring to use this system could do so without the apprehension they were likely to have when receiving periodic report cards. This consideration is especially important for parents of children who have difficulty in school because their communication with the teacher using a system such as this is positive in nature, rather than one that contains negative reports of failure or inadequacy that parents may be accustomed to receiving.

Overall, Bittle (1975) concluded that teachers are more receptive of students when they know that the parents have been continuously aware of expectations and have been able to evaluate their children's performance relative to those expectations. One advantage of the communication system used in the study was the focus on future school activities rather than just a summary of past performance as is done with most reporting systems. Furthermore, the system provided an inexpensive, time-saving way of providing information to parents. Ultimately, the extensive use of the system served its purpose by improving academic performance and increasing communication regarding non-academic instructions.

Efforts to change parent-teacher communication continued with Powell in 1978. Powell conducted an exploratory study to identify parent- and teacher-related variables that are predictive of parent-teacher communication frequency and diversity. Powell concluded that the focus should be on altering the types of topics parents and teachers

believe are connected to parent-teacher discussion. Additionally, efforts could also include establishing or enhancing parent relationships with other parents to alter parent-teacher communication. Finally, attention needs to be given to ways to sustain healthy communication throughout the school year as is characterized early in the relationship.

Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1992) conducted a study for students in kindergarten through fourth grades in a metropolitan public school that assessed parent efficacy (their self-assessment of effectiveness as a parent) and parent involvement in five types of activities: help with homework, educational activities, classroom volunteering, conference participation, and telephone calls with teachers. Teacher efficacy (certainty that their instructional skills are effective) was significantly related to teacher reports of parents' involvement in conferences, volunteering, and home tutoring, as well as teacher perceptions of parent support. It was also discovered that parents most likely become involved when they believe that their involvement will benefit their children.

Kines (1997) confirmed that communication is the key to a successful working partnership. Recommendations for parents to help build good relationships with teachers were made. For example, teachers would like parents to mention a lesson or activity that was especially appealing and to express appreciation for teachers' efforts. Teachers would also like parents to contact them as soon as questions or concerns arise to help clear up misunderstandings or to plan a course of action. Furthermore, parents could send in a brief note asking for a time to get together or request an evening phone call to allow the teacher time to collect materials for the conversation or to investigate a situation that

the parent is inquiring about. Most importantly, teachers would like parents to check out all the facts before overreacting to episodes their child may relate to them at home regarding something that happened at school.

Swick and Broadway (1997) stated that teachers and parents need to make connections with each other to help children gain the best learning experiences. They explored important areas to help build communication and relationships between teachers and parents. These included parents sharing their perceptions of the child's growth and development issues and stressors, as well as the family's strengths and needs in forming parent involvement that can assist with the child's continued progress. Also, teachers need to state their desired goals for children and themselves as teachers and their strengths and needs involved in being an effective helper of the parents and the child. Both parents and teachers need to discuss educational, social, and related goals as caring people in the child's life and then pursue those goals together throughout the school year. Overall, communication that is guided and purposeful can aid parent and teacher growth as both attempt to be positive and helpful role models in children's lives.

Moore (2000) stressed that communication is more than just daily greetings or conferences twice a year. It means "creating the positive and welcoming tone that develops reciprocal relationships, encouraging family members as they work with and support their child, and thinking of new ways to involve, share, respect, and value families" (p. 10). Active listening and positive responses between teachers and parents are formed with trust and respect. Moore found that most parents feel their role is to be the child's strongest advocate with the teacher and the school; however, other parents

may be reluctant to express their concerns because they believe that the teacher is the respected authority. Other difficulties that parents have include uncertainty about how to express their concerns, memories of their own school years suppressing their ability to communicate with a teacher, or fears that questions or criticism would put their child at a disadvantage.

Regardless of these difficulties, according to Moore (2000), it is still important for teachers and families to recognize that the child may behave differently in various contexts. Techniques that help establish communication with parents need to demonstrate a tone of respect and encourage involvement. The recommended techniques consist of teachers taking a personal interest in the child and the family so that the child and family will respect and value the teachers in return. Also, teachers should observe each child as an individual without any preconceived notions of family background or experience and guard against allowing generalizations about children to influence the curriculum and activity choices. Teachers can demonstrate to families how the families' involvement can enrich the program, and the teachers can invite families to share their culture, customs, and traditions with the class. Moreover, teachers should convey respect for the family's input by inviting families to ask questions and express their own concerns. Most of all, teachers should encourage daily conversation to help families and teachers develop a warm, caring relationship and by investigating various learning styles and incorporating ways to use the different modalities to help children grow. Moore also promoted the use of email as an effective and easy method of communication because questions and concerns can be addressed early and in a nonthreatening format. Communicating via

email can encourage sharing and set the stage for open discussions. Overall, Moore reiterates that strong links between school and home are developed through a wide range of strategies and reminds teachers to consider the needs and interests of all involved.

A qualitative study by Miretzy (2004) involving interviews and focus groups with fourth through eighth grade teachers and parents recognized the importance of talk among parents and teachers in creating and sustaining communities that support school improvement. In this study, parents desired direct and honest communication from teachers. Also, teachers and parents both wanted to be recognized as people who have something to offer the school community. Miretzy documented imbalances in the parent-teacher relationship and assigned responsibility to the teacher to learn about and adapt to parental limitations and find a way to manage the parent successfully. The study found that teachers retain authority, and parents remain in the client position. Additionally, current forms of communication create more interaction between school and home but also continue to keep parents in the role of visitors and do not provide parents with a real voice. Parents' and teachers' different expectations of involvement are seen as a barrier to effective parent-teacher relationships. Parents and teachers, given the opportunity, might identify concerns and become mutual supporters by acting as "change agents in the educational system" (p. 822).

Miretzy's 2004 study also concluded that parents and teachers would like to see more opportunities for connections and closer working relationships. They want to talk to each other but find many obstacles to engaging and satisfying conversations. They want to be supportive of each other, but find it difficult to articulate this request in a

meaningful way. Most wanted to be able to talk about the child they have in common without feeling that they had to defend their professional or parental perspectives. Generally, both parents and teachers feel that they are treated as insignificant, so they want their contributions recognized and appreciated by each other.

Overall, Miretzy (2004) found that there is a considerable disparity between the communication ideals and the reality that exists in many schools. Teachers felt their jobs would be easier if parents were more supportive at home of the educational efforts of the school. Furthermore, even though teachers agreed that relationships with parents are important, they felt they were not perceived as a priority to their principals. Also, with the new accountability, it becomes harder to justify spending time and money on enhancing relationships with the home. Parents resented the lack-of-time excuse regarding communication over student difficulties. They wanted to be informed about what was going on with their child on a more regular basis and to hear good as well as bad reports.

Multiple teachers acknowledged that they often did not contact a parent unless a child was in trouble, which contributes to the strain on the parent-teacher relationship. "The prospect for establishing communities in which both teacher and parent perspectives are valued, and where there is honest and open discussion and healthy disagreement, is difficult if there is little direct communication" (Miretzy, 2004, p. 836). Both teachers and parents identified overcoming defensiveness as crucial to enhanced communication and collaboration. Teachers said that communication and collaboration would become more of a priority if school administration clearly supported such efforts. Teachers acknowledged that traditional methods such as report cards and open houses are

insufficient for building relationships. Miretzy found that teachers need basic support in the form of phones in the classrooms, more preparation periods, email, more aides, small class sizes, and other efforts on the part of principals to assist in helping parents and teachers.

Evans's 2004 research found that teacher concerns continue to grow as they report a decline in student and parent attendance, attention, courtesy, effort, motivation, and responsibility. Teachers added that more parents feel entitled and challenge the school about various issues while insisting that problems be immediately rectified. This shift in attitude increases teachers' anxieties regarding parent communication, especially when negative issues with a student need to be addressed. Evans concluded that teachers need to accept this reality and find the best way to manage the situation.

Keller (2004) reported that a survey regarding parent involvement found that teachers spend an average of 2 hours per week communicating with parents. In this study, teachers claimed that communicating with parents is difficult because of time constraints, language and cultural barriers, and a lack of response from the parents themselves. To alleviate these problems, Longfellow (2004) stressed that school efforts to promote parent involvement can be controlled via relatively inexpensive and easy-to-manage parent involvement strategies. Even though schools make an effort to communicate, there is room for improvement. Schools do communicate often, when it comes to the more traditional domains of school communication: grades, attendance, and behavior. Regardless of whether schools are not communicating enough or parents aren't hearing enough, Longfellow stressed that parents need more information on how they can help

their children at home to help reach their educational goals. Longfellow revealed that another communication problem involving both the time and staff attitude barriers is that for many teachers, the only communication outside of routine and scripted conferences and reports is crisis communication. This kind of communication could involve academic or discipline problems, usually of a negative nature, and often requires quick action. Usually time is not available to develop mutual, blame-free understanding between teachers, parent, and student.

Longfellow (2004) also suggested that teacher training in the area of parent involvement is not given the attention it deserves in teacher education programs or other teacher professional development. Few teacher preparation programs have courses on parent involvement, and fewer than 40% even devote one class period of one course to it. Educators, therefore, do not have adequate skills to effectively or confidently work with parents. According to Flannery (2005), new teachers believe parent communication is more difficult to handle than classroom discipline.

Chappelow and Smith (2005) explored ways to decrease the amount of time that teachers spend on issues outside of instruction. They found that most teachers have not had the necessary training to be effective communicators. In their study, teachers wrote individual communication plans and took part in staff development sessions on teacher communication. Throughout the sessions, the teachers discovered that how they manage their communications is a critical first step in marketing themselves and the efforts in the classroom effectively. The overall consensus of the group was that "the classroom is still

where the action is, but effective communication has to be part of that action in our current educational climate" (p. 49).

Handmaker (2005) asserted that the problem with parent-teacher relationships lies in the power each holds over the other. Teachers often feel vulnerable, fearing that parents could descend on the administration and have them fired. While many teachers know how to be a successful student and can share their knowledge and enthusiasm for learning with students, they are uncertain how to handle criticism from parents. On the other hand, parents often feel vulnerable and apprehensive about their children's experiences in school given the power that teachers have in shaping the children's minds and hearts. Parents may also get defensive when teacher critique their children, who they feel are an extension and reflection of themselves.

Handmaker (2005) restated that parents and teachers need each other, and the best way to work together is through effective communication. Most conflicts between parents and teachers could be avoided if both sides communicated early and often; moreover, they must get to know each other on a personal level:

> Consequently, when parents criticize teachers, they must do so with respect, humility, and a full understanding of what is actually occurring in the classroom. When their children encounter difficulties, parents need to approach the teacher as a fellow collaborator in solving a problem. (p. 108)

Handmaker offered several strategies for helping to strengthen the teacher-parent relationship. For instance, teachers need to view parents as members of the same team and provide them with various opportunities to be involved. Teachers should also listen

to parents and collaborate with them to solve challenges. Foremost, teachers should admit when they make a mistake and strive to find a remedy.

Jensen (2006) acknowledged that the first step toward a successful partnership between teachers and parents is communication. Jensen suggested newsletters as a useful tool to initiate interactive communication because teachers can delineate information about the strategies being taught in the classroom while keeping parents informed about the classroom environment. The use of newsletters can encourage parents to share their knowledge or experience on certain topics which, in turn, acknowledges the parents as valuable contributors to the children's learning. Also, newsletters are an efficient form of communication in helping parents to feel a part of their children's learning and a source of support for academic success. Exchanges between teachers and parents establish trust and lead to the development of effective relationships that provide a context in which learning can occur. The newsletter is a catalyst for increased communication in which teachers can effectively and efficiently inform parents of academic life in the classroom.

Teachers generally do not enjoy spending evenings on the phone, and calling parents can seem intimidating at first. However, Reese (2007) found that teachers will usually find that parents are sympathetic and willing with to work with the teacher to help with behavior issues and to collaborate toward a more successful learning experience. Parents appreciate being informed of any issue with their child, especially when the teacher communicates concern for the student's progress. Teachers want relationships with parents that "include both concern for the child and support for their instructional program" (Duncan, 2007, p. 53-54). Korkmaz's 2007 survey study assessed comments

from teachers wherein they expressed that parents should have good communication with teachers and other staff in the school to share in their children's academic and personal development.

DeBroff (2007) suggested that parents establish a good relationship with their child's teacher early in the year to open the lines of communication and allow a solid relationship to build in order to provide insights into the child's learning style and interpersonal dynamics. Furthermore, DeBroff informed parents that teachers appreciate advance notice of specific needs in order to prepare for a discussion with thoughtful consideration and without distractions. Parents should not be confrontational but listen to the teacher's perspective and resist the temptation to complain to others in order to give the teacher a chance to try to work things out first. Responsibility can also reside on the parent to find out the teacher's preferred method of communication and then to exchange contact information.

A teacher participant in Bennett's 2007 study stated, "Parents need to communicate with me any relevant circumstances that might impact the student as a learner. It's my responsibility to communicate with the parents(s) if the student is doing extraordinarily well or extraordinarily poorly" (p. 12). But according to DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007),

> One reason why teachers do not send notes, have conferences, or call parents is because they believe that they do not have the time. Teachers think involving parents is extremely important, but time constraints limit their time to deal with parents. (p. 362)

"Barriers to the involvement of parents at parent-teacher conferences and other school functions include the educational levels of the parents, parents' work schedules, and transportation difficulties" (MCB, 2008, p. 5). However, as Ferriter (2008) explained:

> Parents are passionate about their children. They want to know what their strengths and weaknesses are. They want to hear what you are teaching in class, what the homework is, and how they as parents can extend and enrich learning at home. Communication with parents through emails, class website. Make phone calls – both to express concerns and to celebrate successes. (p. 31)

Ultimately, the goal of educators should be to improve the home-school relationship (Montgomery, 2005).

Historical Perspective of Parents' Perceptions

School-to-home communication has also been a long-standing issue for parents. In 1983, Wilson published recommendations for teachers that would help parents feel more comfortable when communicating with teachers. Wilson asserted, "School personnel have been viewed by parents as specialized experts who bully parents with their expertise" (p. 403). To alleviate these problems, Wisdom (1993) concluded that parents appreciate methods of communication (such as homework notebooks) that help to build warm, supportive relationships and that develop a sense of time well spent. Homework notebooks were shown to be successful with children and parents of all backgrounds and allowed them the feeling that the teacher was truly accessible and that they were not an imposition on the teacher at all.

Larson's 1993 study demonstrated that when parents initiate communication with a teacher, it is usually to solve problems and is plagued with a more negative than positive connotation. However, when teachers initiated the communication, the

interaction was perceived to be more positive and based on issues such as academic

ability, curriculum, homework, student behavior and attitude, teacher behavior, and

instruction at home. In this study, some parents were satisfied with the information that

they received from teachers while others wanted more feedback on the student's

individual progress. Both parents and students expressed the desire to receive information

from teachers about how to help the children with school work at home. However, in

another study, Moles (1996) agreed that jobs and family demands leave little free time for

many parents. Racial and ethnic minorities, as well as those with low incomes or little

English proficiency, tend to shy away from school involvement. Those with negative

school experiences may also avoid school contact. However,

> most parents, regardless of their background, want guidance from the schools on
> ways to help their children learn better. Thus, parents look to schools for help
> even if they do not or cannot make the first contact themselves. Making parents
> feel welcome in the school is the first step to helping them. (p. 1)

Moore and Lasky (1999) emphasized that the role of the parent has changed in

recent years as parents begin to question and critique issues of curriculum, instruction,

and evaluation.

> Home-school relationships are changing for a multitude of reasons including
> greater diversity of parent population, changes in family structures, increasing
> school choice, more parental involvement in the governance of schools, new
> methods of assessment and reporting, and special education legislation. (p. 13)

Freytag (2001) conducted a Parent Communication Survey (PCS) that was developed to

assess parents' concerns relative to parent-teacher communication (what parents wanted

to hear, how they wished to be contacted, and how teachers might improve the quality of

their interactions with parents). Data analysis indicated that, of the modes of

communication listed on the PCS, parents preferred (in descending order) telephone calls home, electronic mail, and notes in the planner. Parents typically did not wish to be contacted at their workplace regarding school issues. Although this study generated an abundance of beneficial information, it was also restricted to one specific school. Therefore, the results are unique to the school in question and cannot be generalized to other situations. Moreover, given the small sampling size (86 participants), the parents who chose to respond to the survey were likely parents who are concerned about the status of home-school interactions, so the results may not be representative of all parents' views.

Parents and teachers who work together are less inclined to blame one another for lack of student motivation, poor performance, or misconduct. For that reason, teachers are advised to establish partnerships with parents and keep them informed of progress. Phone tag is tiring and time-consuming for teachers as well as parents. Goals are more likely to be attained if methods of school communication are modernized and collaborative efforts become more common (Strom & Strom, 2002, p. 14). In fact, Clark's 2002 study on the benefits of parental communication on minority student achievement showed that student reading scores on a standardized test were higher when "teachers reported more communication with parents and when those parents perceived themselves to be engaged in a healthy partnership with the teacher" (p. 17).

The crucial role of parents as partners in their children's learning is universally recognized. Hallgarten and Reed (2002) agreed that positive engagement with parents has also emerged as a key factor in school quality, especially in schools in disadvantaged

areas, where such participation can act as a protective barrier against the multiple factors that cause underachievement. The benefit of the parent effect can have an impact on individual families as well as the community as a whole. If more parents are using their energy positively within the school setting, and children see their parents as achievers, this should also lead to greater parental involvement in the learning journey of their own children (p. 36). In addition to various methods of communication, Swick (2003) noted in another study eight communication processes that enrich teacher-parent relations. These involve trust, role flexibility, help-exchange, responsive listening, individuation, group functioning skills, nurturance, and problem solving. These processes involve respectful interactions, nurturing, the give-and-take of dialogue, and working together on common goals in order to sharpen and strengthen the parent-teacher partnership (p. 275).

Davern's 2004 study regarding communication with parents of students with disabilities found that communication between school and parents occurs in many ways, such as phone calls, emails, or quick exchanges while parents are visiting schools. Davern concurred that exploring parents' perspectives regarding various forms of communication is particularly important. Some families do not find written forms of communication helpful, whether because of a language barrier, reading difficulties, or the lack of time to deal with the paperwork. Also, the lack of strategies for effective communication contributes to the conflict between school and home. Parents want teachers to focus on building a positive relationship from the start to establish trust and positive emotions. Davern explained that this would help set the tone for how written communications are interpreted throughout the year. Parents want school personnel who

are personable, honest, excited, and optimistic about the child, along with being skilled in instructing and assessing the child while being sensitive to the child's needs. Parents also want teachers who listen carefully, convey respect, show interest in other perspectives, and maintain an open mind to input from others. Challenges that parents encountered with teachers were the use of educational lingo, lack of collaboration, and isolation within decision-making groups and being made to feel like outsiders.

Davern (2004) further concluded that teachers' ignorance of cultural differences can result in barriers to communication. Teachers need to explore different styles of communication to be respectful of other cultures within their schools and be sensitive to cultural issues that may affect parents' thoughts about their role in the educational process. Teachers should determine parents' preferences on how they wish to communicate, how often, and what about to signal a willingness to listen and to build a successful partnership. Most parents want communications that are ongoing, respectful, and lead to success with their children.

Brandes (2005) offered 21 recommendations to teachers for keeping parents involved through effective communication. They ranged from actively listening and sitting alongside the parent, to taking notes of what the parent chooses to discuss. Overall, they involve respectful and professional behavior that help to make a parent comfortable and a partner in the child's education. Along these lines, Halsey (2005) conducted a case study to explore teachers', parents', and students' perceptions of parent involvement. Parents indicated that information obtained personally from teachers was more helpful than information in the school's newsletter and that a "face-to-face meeting

allows parents to ask questions, volunteer their expertise, and solicit more detailed information" (p. 65). Halsey recommended school plans that have meaningful and frequent opportunities for individual interactions between teachers and parents. However, teachers need sufficient resources in order to maintain persistent and personal contact with parents.

According to Halsey (2005), teachers can balance negative contacts about academic or discipline problems with positive contacts and sharing students' successes in a variety of ways. In order to develop a strong relationship between school and home, teachers and parents need to get to know each other on a more personal level. In Halsey's study, both teachers and parents reported the benefits of even casual contacts to establish rapport. Technology is one tool for communication between parents and teachers by allowing newsletters to be produced in various formats in addition to the copies distributed to students such as email, list-serves, and as links on the school's website. This way, more detailed information can be shared without the page limitations that copied newsletters have; moreover, these alternative forms of communication can be delivered more efficiently.

Furthermore, Halsey (2005) explained that another advantage to technology is that emails can be sent simultaneously to students in an entire class or program, saving the time and money it takes for teachers to address individual letters while allowing teachers to relay specific guidance for parents to become involved. Email can be sent to parents of the entire school or specific groups of students. Likewise, parents and students may communicate with teachers through email. Teachers have access to email in their

classrooms, and parents would not have to wait for a scheduled conference to express

their concerns.

Halsey (2005) claimed that

email communications support the idea that communication between parents and teachers should be an ongoing dialogue rather than a single conference period. Of course, teachers need to be aware that not all parents have access to email, and traditional communication methods should continue to be used to avoid excluding parents. (p. 68)

Nevertheless, this study revealed that parents and teachers may perceive communicative

efforts differently, so this disparity of communication preferences may discourage both

parties.

<div align="center">Contemporary Trends in School Communication</div>

Strom and Strom (2002) recommended that school practices for contacting

parents should be modernized because they "lack reliability and are often ineffective" (p.

14). Changing demographics and increasing economic demands of parents limit the

amount of time that parents are available to come to school. In light of these changing

times, it is important to search out new and effective means of communicating with

parents and the community. Many teachers admit to very little training regarding parental

communication and involvement in the classroom. This task calls for using technology in

creative ways to enhance student success (Strom & Strom, p. 14).

Moles's 1996 booklet published by the United States Department of Education

gave many suggestions for year-round parent communication. Among these are welcome

letters, information packets, calendars highlighting special events, home-school

handbooks, parent-teacher conferences, home visits, and parent liaisons. Some on-going

communication approaches mentioned are newsletters, positive phone calls, homework, and home learning. Additionally, some special practices and programs that can be initiated include parent resource centers, informal school-family gatherings (such as breakfast with the teacher or neighborhood coffees), parent workshops, and school-based literacy and family nights.

Morningstar (1999) stated that parents need to feel empowered by becoming active participants in the development of their child's literacy. To aid in this empowerment, Morningstar invited parents of her kindergarten students to exchange journal entries with her about the child's literacy activities. The journals provided parents with opportunities to look more broadly at all literacy activities and provided a forum for parents to note activities, ask questions, provide insights, and inform the teacher of their beliefs about literacy development and growth. Throughout the school year, Morningstar communicated with the parents about literacy development and strategies employed with the children. The examples that parents contributed helped the teacher form a better understanding of each child's literacy experiences. Parent comments reflected their appreciation for the chance to share their observations and for the reader-friendly continuum. Overall, the positive response and increased interaction with parents fostered the progress toward home response journals and increased collaboration. Morningstar did note some possible problems with the home journals. The journals may be considered an invasion of privacy to some families, while others may feel that journal writing is an unnecessary addition to their already busy schedules. It was also assumed that all parents are proficient or comfortable with their own written communication.

Ramirez (2001) offered general suggestions and guidelines on how to use technology to develop stronger communication with parents. He also emphasized the need to educate the parents on the use of technology through open house forums and publicly-accessible computer labs. Because some parents do not have computer access or lack technological knowledge, Ramirez stated that paper-based communication should still have a place in the overall communication strategy of the school. Although his suggestions assist in the administrative aspects of integrating technology for communication purposes, specific methods and examples for using technology with these intentions are still neglected.

Beghetto's 2001 article discussed the importance of parental involvement at the middle level and presented an alternative avenue for parental involvement through the use of virtual communities (a Web-based communication forum). Beghetto outlined how virtual communities can promote parental involvement along with the benefits and limitations of implementing such technologies. A virtual community provides an avenue for parents to be involved and informed about their child's school at their convenience because the communities can be accessed from virtually anywhere and at any time. This type of forum would complement and enhance more traditional forms of correspondence (newsletters, brochures, phone calls) by keeping a permanent record of all correspondence and announcements online. In addition, because the forum is interactive (allowing parents to respond, question, and discuss), the virtual community goes a step further than traditional forms of correspondence. Parents can get involved in a dialogue with the schools rather than be passive recipients of one-way school communication.

Topics that parents might discuss in their virtual community include school activities, learning needs, their own unique concerns about their children, questions about testing, test result interpretation, and so forth. Parents might also use the forum to organize their own activities or meetings.

Strom and Strom (2002) stressed the need to modernize school practices for contacting parents because of the lack of reliability and frequent ineffectiveness of current practices. There are increasing numbers of parents who refuse to return phone messages, appear unwilling to reinforce school codes of conduct, and ignore requests to attend conferences. Strom and Strom conducted a field test to assess the potential of new systems of communication from Motorola. Personal digital assistants were used to record the behaviors of students and send pager messages to parents. Parents of 108 students (out of 1,800) participated at a cost of $50 per family. This price included a pager and 1year of airtime service available through a group rate for school use. Communication codes were entered on a hand-held wireless organizer when teachers observed any of the behavior criteria from a student. Positive behavior statements such as "prepared for class," "showed self-control," and "asked questions" were available along with negative behavior statements such as "bothers others," "tardy," and "inappropriate language." Other codes were used to distinguish the action taken or consequence given for the particular misbehavior. Achievement levels of students could also be noted along with parent/teacher information requests.

While the evaluation of Strom and Strom's 2002 study confirmed that the use of PDAs and pagers can improve communication between the school and home, better

methods of contact are also needed within schools so the technical and logistical

difficulties can be dealt with more effectively. Moreover, this form of communication

lacks the personal touch and elaboration that is needed for creating effective

teacher/parent relationships. Another technological method that was created to increase

and improve communication between school and home is a web-based application called

MightyBrain.com. Through the use of this program, "students and parents can view

grades, homework assignments, course descriptions, a school's calendar of events, as well

as a student calendar and planner" (MightyBrain, 2003, p. 14). Parents can send messages

to teachers, and teachers can respond at their convenience. Schools must have access to

the Internet, an electronic grading package and an upload of their student databases to

MightyBrain.com. This program functions "as a real-time report card that is easy to use,

as well as opens the channels of communication between teachers and families" (p. 14).

Teachers should not just rely on one mode of communication. There must be a

multi-pronged approach to parent involvement that includes phone calls, e-mails, written

notices, surveys, and any other forms available. All parents are different; their resources

are varied, they interact in different places, and they receive information in many

different ways. Electronic communications technology holds the promise of increasing

and enhancing communication between home and school. Like all other forms of

communication, their effectiveness depends on the "conscientiousness, skill, and attitudes

of the people using them" (Longfellow, 2004, p. 39).

According to Longfellow (2004), there are at least four ways that "technology can

serve the family-school connection: (a) communication and information, (b) learning and

instruction, (c) interest and motivation, and (d) resources and costs" (p. 36). In the area of communication and information, technology helps establish two-way communication. Technology helps schools involve families who are presently difficult to reach, and technology can help families involve schools that are difficult to reach. Technology can make communication easier, and people must communicate in order to cooperate. Technology is a tool that can be used to overcome shortcomings of more traditional channels of communication. It can be synchronous (telephone chat) or asynchronous (e-mail, voice mail, web pages). It can do things schools wish they had enough staff or volunteers to do, such as having autodialers calling 400 parents in an afternoon to remind them of open house. It can speak different languages and reach parents even when children do not want it to (p. 37).

Carr (2005) pointed out that parents and other key stakeholders are using e-mail in record numbers to communicate with teachers. It should be kept in mind that the real power of e-mail is the ability to personalize communications (p. 79). However, Longfellow (2004) learned that one issue often brought up by parents who use the Internet is that many teachers do not read their e-mails on a daily basis. This can be very disconcerting, especially if there is an issue deemed important by the parent (p. 25). Chappelow and Smith (2005) found a variety of uses of technology to communicate with parents. Among these are interactive voice mail systems, email, websites, classroom telephones, and online grading and attendance systems. Although these methods are helpful, they can impinge on a teacher's available time, which could be better spent on instruction.

Students in the Ferrera and Ferrara (2005) study found that the use of the Internet by parents from all walks of life is increasing each day. "As the cost of technology, cable, and DSL access becomes less expensive, parents are making technology an integral part of the family budget" (p. 81). Teachers find this type of communication as beneficial as it is direct and instantaneous. Teachers and parents often use chat forums to discuss school-based issues ranging from school events to student grades and discipline issues. As the cost of computers and Internet access decreases, web sites are becoming increasingly available to all homes. These web sites include invaluable tools for teachers to communicate with parents regarding what is happening in their classrooms. Teachers can share with parents numerous resources that enhance the curriculum to help them better understand what their child is learning.

Villano (2007) discussed the rise of computer-based notification systems, which allow teachers to log into a database and select information to broadcast to parents on an as-needed basis. This technology "is as easy as selecting e-mail recipients from an address book and clicking send. In many cases, the systems tackle in two minutes the tasks that once tool schools anywhere from two hours or two days to complete" (p. 49). Along these lines, Givens (2007) described a Texas Technology Immersion Pilot program package that includes a wireless mobile computing device for each student to use at home and school. The program promoted better communication between parents and teachers, as teachers shared homework assignments, class projects, and samples of student work. The websites also provide parents access to grades and information about student

progress. The teachers agreed that the programs provided great collaboration and communication opportunities among staff and parents.

Jehlen (2008) also focused on the use of technology as a method of communication, especially a school website to communicate about schoolwork. Teachers could post the assignments, and the parents could check the site to see what is due and sign off on each completed task. Then the teacher could follow up with the parents when something is not handed in. On the Web (2008) discussed another method of communication that uses technology and is available to parents and teachers called SchoolNotes. This free service allows teachers to post information on-line, such as assignments and resource links. Parents and students can be notified automatically when the teacher updates the web page, and it allows access to school information from anywhere the Internet is available. According to Keller (2008), teachers welcome the accessibility of email, classroom phones, and cell phones as a way of communicating with parents. However, teachers can feel overwhelmed by the speed and abundance of interactions that these methods generate.

Finally, Ediger (2008) focused on parent/teacher conferences and how both teachers and parents can benefit from the teachers in a quality conference. The teacher may learn what about the student's interests and use them as learning opportunities. Parents may offer ideas on what the child may deem important or what the child needs more help in: "Parent/teacher conferences offer opportunities to get to know each other as human beings as well as develop rapport. Good rapport is needed in order for the

educational process to move forward. Mistrust is a negative concept when conducting parent/teacher conference" (p. 47).

Advantages of Effective Communication

Many educators are unaware that how the school communicates with parents has a large impact level of satisfaction of the parents. Yet open communications between school and home are key to building positive school cultures (Carr, 2007). According to Morningstar (1999), "when parents are welcomed as partners in their child's educational team, a bridge connecting the child's home and school environments is created, which empowers parents as active participants in their child's literacy development" (p. 690). Morningstar also stressed that effective parent communication methods can help empower parents as "informed partners in the collaborative understanding" (p. 697) of their child's development.

Ferrara and Ferrara (2005) stated, "Parent involvement promotes better student attendance, increased graduation rates and less retention, high parent and student satisfaction with school, less discipline reports, and high achievement scores in reading and math" (p. 77). Barges and Loges (2003) agreed that parental involvement is a key predictor of a student's academic success. To elaborate upon this theory, they conducted a qualitative study to examine parent, student, and teacher perceptions of parental involvement and communication. The purpose of the study was to determine what constitutes parental involvement and the varying degrees to which teachers and parents can communicate. They emphasized that similarities and differences in these opinions can influence the success of implementing parental involvement programs (p. 142). This

study is beneficial in that it observes the what, why, and when communication is needed and wanted by each sub-group; however, the study does not deliver strategies or programs on how to fulfill these desires.

Chappelow and Smith (2005) wrote, "The first contact between a teacher and parents sets the tone for all future interactions. Having a thoughtful, well-prepared communication plan in place establishes a sense of openness and partnership, both key to successful relationships" (p. 49). Also, Davern (2004) stated that creating a positive connection with parents is critical to providing a high-quality education for children. Furthermore, West's 2000 research focused on the extent to which increased parent involvement through increased parent-teacher communication acts as a motivating factor for students in the classroom and how it relates positively to student success in a seventh grade reading class. West's study involved parents reading to their child each night and discussing the selection to check for reading comprehension. While this study was admirable, it did not focus on specific methods of communication for general purposes. However, the information would be useful to a middle school reading teacher.

Gustafson (1998) found that teacher-to-parent contact through monthly phone calls strengthens the ties between school and home by helping teachers keep up-to-date on students' lives outside of school, as well. Some solid academic progress was evident through regular communication between the teacher and parents. Along these lines, Jenson (2006) said, "Students are more successful and happier when communication is established (p. 188). Shirvani (2007) also said that communications between school and home are effective in students' learning and that "more frequent teacher communication

with parents results in higher school performance in comparison with those students whose teacher had either little or no communication" (p. 35). Teacher communication can also increase parent engagement, which has positive effects on students' learning at all ages: "When parents participate in school activities and monitor their children's schoolwork, there is an increase in achievement among these students" (Shirvani, 2007, p. 36). Communication with schools helped parents to develop positive attitudes towards schools and a better understanding of school curriculum.

A parent survey conducted by Shirvani (2007) examining the level of parent involvement in student school work found that "by communicating more with schools, parents are more motivated to be involved in helping the school eliminate some of the inappropriate conduct that students exhibit in schools" (p. 42). Also, by using more effective contact with parents, schools are able to create a more trusting and positive relationship with parents. On the contrary, a lack of communication between parents and schools may lie at the root of any problems between the home and the school. Another study by Sirvani (2007) analyzed the effect of parental involvement on student mathematics achievement. The results of this study show that parental involvement of children significantly contributes to high school student achievement. The results supported previous research which showed that parental involvement is effective for all students from primary to secondary schools.

Another recent study conducted by Mestry and Grobler (2007) showed "that parents who play an active role in the homework and study program[s] of their children, contribute to their good performance in schools" (p. 176). The findings also revealed that

collaboration and communication between school and home determined the parents'

commitment to the education of their children. Furthermore, Epstein (2008) noted,

"When educators communicated clearly with families about attendance policies and how

attendance affected report card grades, schools' average daily attendance improved and

chronic absenteeism declined…When teachers and administrators communicated with

parents about student behavior, the number of disciplinary actions in school decreased

over time" (p. 10).

Contrary to the findings noted above, Sui-Chu and Willms's 1996 study indicated

that schools with effective communication practices are uncommon, and "levels of

communication and levels of parental involvement in the home were about the same

across all schools, so it was impossible to identify reliably schools that were particularly

effective or ineffective in inducing higher levels of parental involvement" (p. 138). In

conclusion, Brandon (2007) stated:

> Educators must take a proactive role in establishing an open communication
> system between parents and the school setting to establish a strong connection.
> This system should solicit parent participation in a manner that facilitates parental
> ownership of the school and increases parents' understanding of how they can
> involved. (p. 118)

Summary

Educators need to understand and address the needs of parent communications.

Also, a consistent and predictable communication system for parents should be

established school-wide while the educators should be aware of the different methods

through which people communicate, including the use of technology. After all,

"relationships take time to build and are dependent on trust and effective communication"

(Sanders, 2008, p. 294). The following section contains a discussion of the research

methodology for this study. Section 4 presents the results and findings of the analysis of

the data, and section 5 provides a summary of conclusions and recommendations of the

study.

SECTION 3: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study was to determine whether there was a difference between the perceptions of teachers and parents in regards to what constitutes effective school-to-home communications. This was accomplished by implementing a nonexperimental quantitative research design that was used to compare the differences between the teachers' and parents' perceptions. For the purpose of this study, the dependent variable was the perceptions of teachers and parents in regards to what constitutes effective school-to-home communications as measured by the Parent Communication Survey and the Teacher Communication Survey. The independent variable for this study was whether the subject was a teacher of the students or a parent of one of the students. In order to determine whether there was a difference between the teachers' and parents' perceptions, an independent samples t-test was used. The remaining sections of this chapter include a description and justification of the research design and approach, along with the population and sampling information for this survey study. The data collection tools and the processes for assessment of reliability and validity of the survey instrument are described. An explanation of the data collection and analysis is also included, and a summary of the measures taken to protect participants' rights is detailed.

Research Design and Approach

This study involved a nonexperimental quantitative research design through the use of survey data. The survey data were collected using self-administered questionnaires with the intent of generalizing from a sample to a population. Through this quantitative

approach, closed-ended questions related the variables within the hypotheses. The information collected was analyzed using statistical procedures and hypothesis testing. The statistical procedures that were used in this study included the independent samples *t*-test. By using an independent samples *t*-test, the researcher was able to determine whether there was a significant difference in the mean scores on the perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications between teachers and parents (Moore & McCabe, 2006). The independent samples *t*-test was appropriate for this study because the purpose of the test was to determine whether there was a difference between two independent variables. In the case of this study, the two independent variables were parents and teachers. Further, this procedure illustrated that the use of a quantitative research study design was appropriate for this study because the researcher was able to determine if an independent variable (teachers and parents) had an impact on a dependent variable (perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications between teachers and parents) (Cozby, 2001).

A survey design was appropriate for this study because the researcher could generalize the sample of teachers and parents of Barksdale Elementary students and be able to make inferences about the expectations and perceptions of both groups of participants regarding school-to-home communication (Cozby, 2001). A survey was cost-effective and could be conducted efficiently with a rapid turnaround in data collection. Furthermore, the self-administered questionnaires could be completed at the convenience of the participants within the given timeframe. The data could then be available to educate both groups of the results during the same school year as it was administered.

Also, data collected from this small group of participants could be used to identify attributes of the larger population of the entire school district as well as other schools with similar demographics.

The quantitative non-experimental design was appropriate for this study because the objective was to determine whether there were differences between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications. The quantitative research approach was more appropriate for the proposed study than a qualitative design because the researcher would not be able to assess a direct relationship between two variables with a qualitative design because of its open-ended questions (Moore & McCabe, 2006). The responses received, based on the questions asked, have to be interpreted and coded to identify trends or relationships in the responses. Because the information has to be coded by the researcher conducting the analysis, the findings may be biased. To reduce the amount of subjective bias in the results, the researcher could have received assistance from another individual. However, the researcher would still not be able to determine if there were differences between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications because independent and dependent variables would not be used in a qualitative study. Similarly, an observational or descriptive study design could also have been implemented for this study; however, the researcher would not be able to determine the direct impact the independent variable of being a teacher or parent has on the perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications, which makes the non-experimental research design more appropriate (Moore & McCabe, 2006).

Research Questions

This survey evaluated the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding effective school-to-home communication. Accordingly, the research question studied was:

R1: Is there a difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications?

Hypotheses

Corresponding to the research question, null and alternative hypotheses need to be presented because in order to assess the objectives of the study using a quantitative approach, the researcher needs to pose a set of hypotheses. The hypotheses for this study were as follows:

H_0: There is no significant difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications.

H_A: There is a significant difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications.

Population and Setting

The population included upper elementary (third, fourth, and fifth grade) parents and teachers at Barksdale Elementary in Rockdale County, Georgia, a school of approximately 300 students. This population was chosen because the researcher was an employee of the school during the time frame of the study and worked specifically with these grade levels, and exploration into the teachers' and parents' expectations and preferences regarding school-to-home communication was needed to determine the effectiveness of the communication. For this reason, the sampling plan that was used for

this study was that of a convenience sampling method. The advantage of using this method is that the researcher would be able to obtain a large number of respondents in a short period of time (Cozby, 2001).

The sample for this population was collected from five 3rd grade classrooms, four 4th grade classrooms, and five 5th grade classrooms of numbers of upper elementary classrooms at Barksdale Elementary at the time of the study. This resulted in approximately 300 students and 14 teachers. From these classrooms, all parents and teachers of students were asked to participate, and all surveys that were completed and returned were considered. Barksdale Elementary has a racially, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse population similar to the average population of the whole school system.

Sample Size

In calculating the sample size required for this study, there were several factors that were taken into consideration. These included the effect size, the power of the study, and the level of significance. The effect size of the study measures the relationship and how strong this relationship is between the independent and dependent variables (Cohen, 1988). The power of the test then assesses the model's ability to correctly reject a false null hypothesis (Keuhl, 2000). The level of significance is just the critical value in which the researcher assesses the null hypothesis (.05). Because an independent samples *t*-test was being conducted, the minimum sample size for the study would be 152 (14 teachers and 138 parents). This number is based on a significance level of .05, a power of .80, an effect size of .80, and a two-sided *t*-test.

Eligibility Criteria

In order for the subjects to be eligible for the study, they had to have met the

following criteria: (a) be a teacher of one of the third, fourth, or fifth grade classes

included in the study, or (b) be a parent of one of the students who is enrolled in one of

the third, fourth, or fifth grade classes included in the study.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used in this study, a parent communication survey and a

teacher communication survey. The details of these instruments are described below.

Parent Communication Survey (PCS)

The PCS was developed by Stuck (2004) to explore the relationships among

teacher to parent communication, parent, trust, and teacher trust. This survey can be

found in Appendix A. The original PCS was part of a two-part survey used to measure

the level of trust between parents and teachers, as well as parents' "perceptions of teacher

provided communication, specifically, the frequency with which they are communicated

with, and the level of satisfaction they have with that communication" (p. i). The first

section of the PCS ("Methods of Communication") contained four parts which listed six

methods of communication (planned meetings, written, phone calls from the teacher,

phone calls to the teacher, informal interactions, and technology). The criteria were rated

on a 4-point scale with descriptions varying depending on the part of the survey. The

reliability for the piloted PCS was sound, with an overall alpha coefficient of .93.

Furthermore, several pilot studies were conducted to determine the validity of each

section. First, an expert content validation pilot, second a parent content validation pilot,

and third, a school pilot study were conducted. Finally, an item analysis was conducted for each part as well as for the survey as a whole.

Revisions to the survey made for this study included adding definitions of the 4-point scale to Section 1 for clarification of the degrees of measure. Furthermore, the use of the phrase "a good job" was removed in each section in order to eliminate the assumption and to avoid misleading the participant. Additionally, the Parent Trust Scale was removed due to the irrelevance of the survey items. This revised four-section PCS was used for the purposes of this study; other than those changes stated previously, no changes were made to the specific questions. Parents required between 10-15 minutes to complete the PCS and demographics portion. On the PCS, parents could get a score ranging from 0 to 3 for each item, with a higher rating indicating higher levels of use or effectiveness. In order to compute a total score for each parent, a parent's responses to the items were averaged, so that Total Parent Communication scores for any part could range from 0-3.

Parent Demographic Information

Section 2 of the PCS was used to include nine demographic variables (Appendix A). Family socioeconomic status was measured by asking the parent to indicate yes or no to whether or not their child is eligible for a free or reduced lunch price. Parent education was assessed by asking parents to indicate the highest level of school attended with high school, college, and graduate school as options. Parents were also asked if they attended the school district at any point in time, and if so, for how long. Surveys for the different grade levels (third, fourth, and fifth) were color-coded for analysis, but the survey also

asked parents to indicate the grade level their child attended in order to assure accuracy. Parents were also asked to indicate their specific relationship to the student and the parents' gender and ethnicity. This information was used for reporting purposes and was not analyzed.

Qualitative Information

Section 3 of the PCS included one qualitative item asking parents to share any information related to the topic of communication that parents felt was important to share. This item was meant to collect information about school-to-home communication or other information parents felt was pertinent to the topic under study.

Teacher Communication Survey (TCS)

The Teacher Communication Survey included three sections. This survey was taken from the Parent Communication Survey as a parallel measure and the items were identical. However, modifications were made to the PCS to change the perspective of the document to match the teacher's perspective. No changes to the specific items were made. Statements were also rated on a 4-point scale, with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived use and effectiveness. In Section 2, teachers answered seven demographic items which were used for reporting purposes only. Teachers were asked to indicate the grade level they teach, their gender, ethnicity, number of years teaching, whether they attended school within the school district, whether they live within the district limits, and their certification level. The TCS is in Appendix B.

Validity

The validity of the PCS has been shown by two content validation processes, which include an expert panel content analysis and a pilot study content analysis (Stuck, 2004). The initial PCS was first assessed by a panel of experts consisting of school administrators, parents and teachers of the students. The panel of experts reviewed the constructed PCS and then provided feedback as to where the instrument required improvement in order to clarify and add emphasis to certain questions on the survey. The panel of experts also reviewed the design and scaling of the instrument in order to make sure that everything on the survey was clear and understandable for the parents (Stuck). With the suggestions and comments from the panel of experts, the survey was then modified to account for the suggested changes. After the modifications, a pilot study was implemented in order to assess the instrument's ability to measure the components of the survey.

Initially, a cognitive interview was conducted with two parents in order to refine further the questions on the survey. The feedback that was obtained from the cognitive interviews was then added to the final version of the PCS that was used in the pilot study. This revised survey was then provided to a sample of 23 parents who were parents of students who attend a school that was demographically similar to that of the school used in the actual study (Stuck, 2004). The parents in the pilot study were asked to complete the survey in the same fashion as it would be completed by participants in the actual study. This pilot involved the parents providing answers to each one of the questions by circling the response that best represents their perceptions and how the question relates to

them. This procedure was done for each one of the sections on the PCS including the qualitative component of the survey. After the parents had completed the surveys, they were analyzed to determine the internal consistency for each one of the components on the survey.

<div align="center">Reliability</div>

The reliability of the PCS was determined by calculating internal consistency measures using Cronbach alpha scores. This calcuation was done for each one of the components that make up the first component on the PCS survey. For the first component, which was a measure of the frequency of communication, an alpha score of .87 was observed. Based on the critical cut-off for the reliability statistic, which was .80, it was determined that this component was a reliable measure (Stuck, 2004). The second component of section one, which was the parent's satisfaction with school-wide communication, was found to have an internal consistency measure of .82, once again illustrating that this component was a reliable measure. For the remaining two components of the study that included parent satisfaction with child-specific information and parent satisfaction overall, it was found that these components had internal consistency measures of .89 and .93, respectively. Overall, the four combined components that comprised the first section of the survey were found to have an overall internal consistency of .93 (Stuck, 2004).

<div align="center">Data Collection Procedures</div>

This study used a survey design to assess parent and teacher perceptions of school-to-home communication. All information was collected through self-reporting

measures. The parent questionnaire and demographic survey were taken from a previous study, and the teacher survey was modified from the parent survey to match the teacher's perspective.

Measures

Two measures were used for this study. One was used to assess parents' perceptions of school-to-home communication and parent demographics. The other was used to assess teachers' perceptions of their school-to-home communication practices. The parent communication and demographics survey were used in a previous study and were modified for format and clarity purposes. The teacher survey was taken from the parent survey and modified to match the teacher's perspective. Prior reliability estimates are available for these measures of communication. Parents and teachers both received informational letters about the study, which they were asked to read before completing the survey. The parent informational letter and the teacher informational letter can be found in Appendixes A and B.

The survey was conducted at the end of the first quarter following the scheduled parent/teacher conference day, which allowed the opportunity for parents to learn the habits of the teachers and their frequency of communication. This scheduled date also gave teachers the chance to reflect upon their own practices of the current school year. The informational letters for the parents and teachers were modified from Stuck's 2004 study. Participants were assured that there were no risks associated with their participation and that there was no compensation for their participation. However, an incentive for participation was offered: a donation of $1 to the school's Relay for Life

Fund which benefits the American Cancer Society for each completed and returned survey. Furthermore, participants were assured that the data they provided were strictly confidential because results of the research were reported as aggregate summary data only and no individually identifiable information would be presented. Also, all raw data were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. Participants were also informed of their rights to review a copy of the research results by contacting the researcher.

Parent Communication Survey

Parents were sent a coded Parent Communication Survey which contained an informational letter with assurance of confidentiality (Appendix A). The letter asked them to return their completed survey results in a sealed envelope, which was also provided with return information. These envelopes could be returned via their child's communication folder, after which the classroom teacher placed the sealed envelopes in a box in the school's mailroom. The parent also had the options to mail the letter to the researcher or bring the letter to the school's front office for placement in the return box. Participants were reassured that responses would remain anonymous, and no individual's responses would be able to be traced back to the parent.

Teacher Permission

The teacher survey was copied on colored paper, according to grade level, and distributed to each participant personally by the researcher, at which time they received the Teacher Communication Survey with an informational letter (Appendix B). Each teacher was asked to complete the survey and return it in a sealed envelope to the return

box in the school's mailroom. Participants were reassured that responses would remain

anonymous and no individual's responses would be able to be traced back to the teacher.

The teacher participants had 1 week to return the survey to the researcher's return box.

After 1 week, a follow-up email was sent to teachers to remind them to return the

surveys.

Data Analysis Plan

Parent and teacher communication preferences were assessed by a survey. The

statistical test that was used was the t-statistic for independent samples. The rationale for

the t-statistic was that the relationship of the study was to make a comparison between

two groups. All but one of the test items collected data on a Likert-type scale and were

analyzed as interval/ordinal data. The last test item was used to separate the samples into

specific groups. Because the population variation was unknown and there were two

distinguishable samples, the t-test was appropriate, for the independent samples t-test

allows the researcher to compare the mean scores from each population in order to

determine whether there are differences between the scores that are obtained. For the

purpose of this study, the dependent variables or the scores that were compared between

the teachers and parents were operationalized as continuous variables based on the scores

received from the Likert-type scaled questions on the survey instruments. In order to

operationalize the dependent variables as continuous, the scores from each item that

make up the constructs were averaged, which then resulted in a continuous variable that

ranged between 0 and 3. This result allowed the researcher to assess whether there is a

statistically significant difference in the scores for the teachers and parents in the study. The equation that was used would be defined as:

$$t - stat = \frac{\overline{X_1} - \overline{X_2}}{s_{\overline{X_1} - \overline{X_2}}}$$

where $\overline{X_1}$ and $\overline{X_2}$ are the mean scores received for the teachers and parents. The denominator in the above equation is then the standard error of the difference between mean scores from both populations (Moore & McCabe, 2006). The test statistic that is obtained from the above equation follows that of a t-distribution. In order to determine whether there is a significant difference between the two samples, the test statistic was compared to that of a critical value that comes from the t-distribution. This critical value was based on the number of degrees of freedom there were and the level of significance (Moore & McCabe, 2006). The level of significance for this study was set at .05 and the degrees of freedom for the study would be equal to $n_1 + n_2 - 2$ where n1 and n2 are the number of observations in each population, meaning that the critical value for this study was based on a t-value with $n_1 + n_2 - 2$ degrees of freedom and a level of significance of .05.

To address the hypothesis of this study, the before mentioned equation was used where $\overline{X_1}$ and $\overline{X_2}$ are the mean scores received for the teachers and parents. If the test statistic ended up being positive and significant, it would indicate that the teachers have a higher perception of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications than the parents of the students have. Conversely, if a negative test statistic was obtained and it was significant, then it would indicate that teachers have a lower perception of what

constitutes effective school-to-home communications when compared to the parents of the students. If there was not a significant result, then it could be concluded that there was no difference in the perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications between the teachers and the parents of the students.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This chapter has presented the methodology that was implemented in this study in order to determine whether there is a significant difference between the perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications for the teachers and the parents of the students. Also discussed were the research design and approach, the population and sampling plan that is implemented, the instruments used to collect the data, the data collection procedures, and the statistical analysis used to address the objectives of this study. The following section, section 4, presents the results and findings of this research. The final section, section 5, will provide a summary of the analysis and recommendations for further research.

SECTION 4: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results and findings for the analysis that was conducted to determine if there was a difference between teachers and parents in their perceptions of communication. To do this, the chapter was divided into three different sections. The first section presents the descriptive statistics for the participants in the study. The second section provides a reliability analysis for the communication scores of both the parents and teachers. The final section presents the results and findings for the analysis conducted to determine whether there was a difference between parents' and teachers' perceptions of school-to-home communication. To compare the parents' and teachers' scores, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted because this allowed for a comparison between two independent variables with respect to an average score for each group.

Descriptive Statistics

Presented in this section are the descriptive characteristics of the teachers and parents included in the study, which include the frequency and percentage of occurrence for each of the categories of the demographic questions that were asked of the participants. Fourteen Teacher Communication Surveys were distributed to the teachers in the upper elementary grades, and all 14 surveys were completed and returned. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of occurrences of the teachers' demographic characteristics. The teachers in the study were observed to teach the third grade (35.7%) or the fifth grade (35.7%) most frequently, while every one of the teachers was female (100%). The majority of the teachers in the sample were White (92.9%), with over half

having over 13 years of experience teaching (57.1%). Most of the teachers did not attend

Rockdale District (71.4%), but 71.4% of the participants lived in the district. Finally, the

majority of the teachers were observed to be certified with a T-5 certification (64.3%).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Teachers

Variable	Frequency (N = 14)	Percent
Grade Level		
3	5	35.7
4	4	28.6
5	5	35.7
Gender		
Female	14	100.0
Ethnicity		
Black	1	7.1
White	13	92.9
Experience		
1-4	4	28.6
5-8	2	14.3
13+	8	57.1
Attend Rockdale District		
No	10	71.4
Yes	4	28.6
Live within District		
No	4	28.6
Yes	10	71.4
Certification		
T-4	4	28.6
T-5	9	64.3
T-6	1	7.1

There were 291 Parent Communication Surveys distributed to parents of students

in the upper elementary grades, and 161 were completed and returned. This resulted in a

response rate of 55% and exceeded the minimum sample size of 138 parents. The

descriptive statistics for the parents in the study are presented in Table 2. The majority of

the parents in the study were the children's mothers (84.5%). Over half of the parents

were White (52.2%), and over 34% of the parents were Black. With regard to the

relationship to the child, it was observed that the majority were the child's parent

(90.7%), with 35.4% of the parents having children in the fifth grade. Over half of the

parents' children have attended school in the district from 4 to 5 years (52.2%), while the

majority of the parents did not actually attend school within the district (71.4%). The

most frequent level of education for the parent was college (59.0%). Furthermore, 39.1%

of the participants' children qualified for the free/reduced lunch program within their

school. It was observed for several of the variables that there were missing values present

in the data. There was a high rate of parents who signified that their highest level of

education was graduate school (18%), however, it is possible that parents may have

misinterpreted the choices.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Parents

Variable	Frequency (N = 161)	Percent
Gender		
Female	136	84.5
Male	24	14.9
Ethnicity		
Asian	4	2.5
Black	55	34.2
Ethnicity (continued)		
Latino	7	4.3
Multi	2	1.2
Native Am/White	1	.6

Variable	Frequency (N = 161)	Percent
Other	3	1.9
Pacific Islander	1	.6
White	84	52.2
Relationship to Child		
Aunt	1	.6
Foster	1	.6
Grand	8	5.0
Parent	146	90.7
Step	5	3.1
Grade		
3	51	31.7
4	53	32.9
5	57	35.4
Child Attend District		
<1	11	6.8
2-3	42	26.1
4-5	84	52.2
6+	24	14.9
Attend School within District		
No	115	71.4
Yes	45	28.0
Highest Level of School		
College	95	59.0
Grad	29	18.0
HS	28	17.4
N/A	1	.6
Some College	2	1.2
Free/Reduced Lunch		
No	96	59.6
Yes	63	39.1

Reliability Analysis

To make sure that the questions that were asked of the parents and teachers were reliable measures for this sample, a reliability analysis was conducted. This included

calculating internal consistency/reliability coefficients for each section of the survey

instrument (Part A, Part B, Part C, and Part D) for both parents and teachers. The internal

consistency/reliability of the communication variables was assessed by using Cronbach's

alpha coefficients. The communication reliability results for the teachers in this study are

provided in Table 3. It was observed that the internal consistency/reliability coefficients

had a minimum value of α = .612 for Part A and a maximum value of α = .902 for Part C.

Based on these analyses, there is evidence that the items included on the teachers' survey

instrument provided adequate measurements for the communication perceptions of the

teachers in the study.

Table 3
 Reliability Coefficients for Teachers

Section	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Part A	.612	7
Part B	.871	7
Part C	.902	7
Part D	.880	7

For the purpose of this study, the item scores for each of the questions were

averaged together to give an overall measurement of the teachers' communication scores.

For example, there were seven questions that corresponded to each part of the survey

instrument. If a teacher provided responses of 2, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3 and 3 for the seven questions

that comprise Part A, then their overall communication score would be 2.3. The same

was then done for the remaining parts of the survey to end up with a total of four

communication scores for the teachers. In the context of this study, a higher score would indicate that the teacher communicates more than a teacher with a lower score.

The reliability results for the parents in the study are presented in Table 4. It was observed that the internal consistency/reliability coefficients had a minimum value of $\alpha =$ .694 for Part A and a maximum value of $\alpha = .822$ for Part D. Based on these analyses, there is evidence that the items included on the parents' survey instrument provided adequate measurements for the perceptions of communication for the parents in the study. The communication scores were subsequently computer-generated using the same procedure as discussed previously (i.e., averaging the responses to the survey questions).

Table 4
Reliability Coefficients for Parents

Section	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Part A	.694	7
Part B	.791	7
Part C	.812	7
Part D	.822	7

Results and Findings

H_0: There is no significant difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications.

H_A: There is a significant difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications.

In order to address the above hypotheses, an independent samples t-test was conducted between the different communication scores of the parents and teachers because the purpose of the independent samples t-test was to compare two independent variables with respect to some continuous dependent variable. For this study, the dependent variable was the communication scores for the parents and teachers, while the independent variables for this study were the parents and teachers of the students. The independent samples t-test was used to compare the results from Part A, Part B, Part C, and Part D of the survey instruments provided to the parents and teachers. Because the t-test is a parametric test, the assumption of normality had to be obtained. Therefore, in order to determine whether the distribution of the communication scores was normally distributed, Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) tests for normality were conducted.

Based on the results of the K-S tests (provided in Appendix C), the distribution for Part A of the teachers' was not significantly different from normality ($Z = .654$, $p = .785$). Similarly, the distribution for Part B for the teachers was not significantly different from normality ($Z = .535$, $p = .938$), nor were the distributions for Part C ($Z = .615$, $p = .844$) and Part D ($Z = .661$, $p = .774$) for the teachers. As for the parents, the results of the K-S tests (provided in Appendix X), the distribution for Part A for the parents was not

significantly different from normality (Z = 1.13, p = .155). Similarly, the distribution for

Part B for the parents was not significantly different from normality (Z = .978, p = .295),

nor were the distributions for Part C (Z = 1.10, p = .177) and Part D (Z = 1.29, p = .073)

for the parents.

The mean comparison between the parents and teachers is presented in Table 5

for all four parts of the survey instrument. From the average scores presented in Table 5,

the teachers in the sample had higher average communication scores than the parents for

each of the parts on the survey. In order to determine whether these differences were

significant, the independent samples t-test was conducted. Based on the results of the

independent samples t-test, there was a significant difference between teachers and

parents on the communication scores for Part A of the survey instrument, $t(173)$ = 5.23, p

< .001. The teachers also had significantly higher communication scores on Part B of the

survey instrument, $t(173)$ = 3.05, p = .003 as well as Part C for the survey instrument,

$t(173)$ = 3.21, p = .002. Teachers also had significantly higher communication scores than

parents on Part D of the survey instrument, $t(173)$ = 2.50, p = .013.

Table 5

Mean Comparison between Parents' and Teachers' Communication Score**s**

Communication	Teacher		Parent	
	M	SD	M	SD
PART A	2.17	0.38	1.42	0.53
PART B	2.43	0.45	1.90	0.64
PART C	2.45	0.47	1.85	0.68
PART D	2.41	0.49	1.94	0.68

Summary

Based on the results of the independent samples t-test, it was found that for each part of the survey instrument, teachers had significantly higher communication scores than parents of the students. Therefore, it was suggested that teachers rated the school-to-home communication higher than parents rated the school-to-home communication, indicating that there is a significant difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications. The next section, Section 5, will provide a summary of the analyses and recommendations for action and further research.

SECTION 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

A survey study was implemented by the researcher to parents and teachers of students in grades three, four, and five in a suburban elementary school in northeast Georgia. The purpose of the study was to test the hypotheses about whether or not there is a difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications. The null hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications. The corresponding alternative hypothesis states that there is a significant difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications. The research question for this study was, "Is there a difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications?"

This study involved a non-experimental quantitative research design using survey data, which were collected using self-administered questionnaires with the intent of generalizing from a sample to a population. The population included upper elementary (third, fourth, and fifth grade) parents and teachers at an elementary school in Georgia. The random sample for this population was collected from five classrooms of 3rd graders, four classrooms of 4th graders, and five classrooms of 5th graders which resulted in 281 students and 14 teachers. In the end, 161 parents and all 14classroom teachers participated, and all surveys that were completed and returned were considered. No consideration was given to the participants with regard to socioeconomic status, ethnicity,

background, or gender, thereby ensuring a good representation of total population and the local community. Furthermore, all subgroups of the population were represented in the sample, including the parents of students who receive free/reduced lunches. Currently, the school's free/reduced lunch percentage is 45%, which is relatively close to the sample's free/reduced rate of 39.6%. In order to address the hypotheses, an independent samples t-test was conducted between the different communication scores of the parents and teachers. Based on the results of the test, there was a significant difference between teachers and parents in communication scores for all parts of the survey instruments.

<div align="center">Interpretation of Findings</div>

Conclusions based on the analyses and connections between the findings and the literature are discussed below.

Conclusions

The alternate hypothesis was accepted, indicating that there is a significant difference in teachers' and parents' perceptions of what constitutes effective school-to-home communications. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected because it has been learned that there is no significant difference in perceptions. Even though the qualitative data from the surveys are not aggregate data related to the study analysis, they do reveal some insight into how the parent responses can be interpreted. Some parents who rated the teacher low on the use of technology explained that they do not have access to the Internet and, therefore, do not have email. Therefore, it could be concluded that this discrepancy could be related to the availability of appropriate technology to the parent rather than the use of technology by the teacher. However, another parent's qualitative

comment stated, "Emails need to be utilized." These differences in data support Devern's 2004 position that teachers should determine parents' preferences on how they wish to communicate.

Other parents commented about the use of phone calls as a method of communication, and some felt that phone calls were not always necessary. One parent stated, "My child teacher [doesn't] need to call, or I call her, because her communication with me about my child is very good. We do a lot of meeting and she write[s] a lot." Another parent stated, "The only information I felt I could not answer was about my phone calls 'TO' the teacher. I have never communicated in this manner because I don't want to interrupt their teaching. Notes and emails have always worked to my satisfaction. Communication on the elementary level is great!" Again, these comments reveal that determining the preferred methods of communication for parents is important.

In relation to conferences and written communication, one parent explained, "In terms of scheduled meetings, these are only planned per the school's parent teacher conference; however, I am certain [teacher] would be willing to meet with me without hesitation. The weekly newsletters are informative and she is attentive to email. The latter is very helpful with full-time work schedules and other parent/child extra-curricular activities." This comment revealed that even though the parent may have rated the scheduled parent conferences category low, he/she still felt that the teacher was effective in using the other methods of communication and the parent was happy with the overall communication practices of the teacher.

Another factor that may have altered the results is the timing of the survey. The

survey was conducted 6 weeks into the school year but towards the end of the first quarter and after the first scheduled parent/teacher conference day. However, some parents were concerned that the survey was administered too early in the year to rate some of the categories adequately. One parent wrote, "Too new to answer question on this first month in Barksdale Elementary. Teacher has been very helpful within open communication." So even though the parent may have rated the teacher low in some categories; again, the parent was satisfied overall.

One of the limitations to this study was the fact that the researcher is both a teacher and a parent at the school at which the study was conducted. This could possibly have skewed the results if the parents were uncomfortable sharing criticisms of their child's teachers, or teachers were uncomfortable sharing criticisms about themselves for fear that the specific results would be discussed or shared inappropriately. Furthermore, the quick and high response rates could have been attributed to the familial climate of the school and are not indicative of typical response rates.

In summary, some of the categories on the questionnaires may have been limited due to early administration of the survey into the school year or the preferred methods by the teacher or parent. According to the qualitative data not considered in the data analysis portion, the parents are satisfied with the current practices of teachers in regards to school-to-home communications. However, this satisfaction is not represented in the quantitative data which could possibly be due to the limitations of the questionnaire.

Connections to the Literature

This quantitative study is based on the theory that parent communication aids student achievement (Barges & Loges, 2003; Beghetto, 2001; Flannery, 2005; Freytag, 2001; Longfellow 2004; Matzye 1995; Strom & Strom, 2002; West, 2000). As a result, this study was designed to assess the effectiveness of the current communication practices by examining the perceptions of both teachers and parents in regards to school-to-home communication. An analysis of the data revealed significant differences between teachers' and parents' perceptions. Consequently, this study supported the results of DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007), which suggested that even though teachers and parents valued the importance of parent involvement in education, the "communication between the two groups was not as open as expected" (p. 367).

Another study conducted by Bridgemohen, van Wyk, and Van Staden (2005) found that most communication "is school-directed and general in nature," and few opportunities are offered to parents to initiate communication (p. 60). On the other hand, this study revealed that parent perceptions within the different parts of the study regarding the nature and the initiation of communications were similar and were not significantly disparate. Furthermore, this study confirmed Longfellow's 2004 findings that teachers rate the amount of parental communication much higher than parents do. What neither study exposes is a reason for this disparity. Therefore, there is a gap in the research which needs to be filled with the causes of why parents do not rate teachers as high as teachers rate themselves in connection with communication.

Furthermore, Moore (2000) stated that strong links between school and home are developed through a wide range of strategies and reminds teachers to consider the needs and interests of all involved. This study of the perceptions of parents and teachers suggests that teachers do need to consider the needs and preferences of parents in relation to school-to-home communication, for a discrepancy between their perceptions was evident. Teachers need to differentiate their communication methods in response to parents' needs just as they need to differentiate their instructional strategies in response to students' needs. Correspondingly, in Larson's 1993 study, some parents were satisfied with the information that they received from teachers while others wanted more feedback on the student's individual progress. This was also evident in the current study, for there was a significant difference between teachers' and parents' perceptions in Part C of the study which related to communicating specific information about the child. Teachers rated themselves significantly higher than the parents, which would suggest that parents are not completely satisfied with the level of communication in regards to specific information about their child.

Moreover, Halsey's 2005 study revealed that parents and teachers may perceive communicative efforts differently, which discourages both parties involved by this disparity of communication preferences. However, given the aggregate qualitative data in the current study, there was no evidence that either party is discouraged by the disparities found in the qualitative study. In fact, most of the qualitative data were overwhelmingly positive in connection to current communication practices. The fact still remains, though, that teachers think they are more effective at communication than the parents perceive

them to be. Overall, this current study supported Sanders's 2008 findings that educators need to understand and address the needs of parents' communications. A consistent and predictable communication system for parents should be established school-wide while being aware of the different methods through which people communicate, including the use of technology.

Recommendations for Action

Research has shown that effective parent communication methods can help empower parents as "informed partners in the collaborative understanding" (Morningstar, 1999, p. 697) of their child's development. Strom and Strom (2002) stress the need to modernize school practices for contacting parents due to lack of reliability and frequent ineffectiveness of current practices. Because the results of this study indicated a significant difference in the perceptions of teachers and parents in connection with school-to-home communication, it is imperative that teachers be informed of the discrepancies in order to reflect on the factors that would affect the parents' perceptions. Therefore, the results of the current study will be shared with the school's administrative team and other members of the school's leadership team. The teachers would then be able to review the results for discrepancies so that they may alter their current practices in order to form as well as maintain positive and effective relationships with their students' parents.

Social Implications

Once the teachers review the results of the study and modify their current practices to meet the needs of the parents, the parents will benefit from the enhanced

communication practices in response to their feedback from the study. Ultimately, the students will achieve greater academic success as a result of more effective communication between school and home (Barges & Loges, 2003; Beghetto, 2001; Flannery, 2005; Freytag, 2001; Longfellow 2004; Matzye 1995; Strom & Strom, 2002; West, 2000).

<div align="center">Recommendations for Further Study</div>

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are made for further research:

1. After the current communication practices have been reviewed and possible modifications to those practices have been put into place, a follow-up survey towards the end of the year would allow the school to determine if the modifications are effective or if further review of the communication practices is needed. However, clarification is needed regarding the highest level of school attended in the parent demographics portion of the PCS to eliminate the possible misinterpretation of the answer choices.

2. Because this survey was limited to one school and only the upper elementary grades, the study could be expanded to include the primary grades (kindergarten through second grade) or to include other schools with either similar or different demographics.

3. Given the high response rate and the proximity of the researcher to the school and its participants, the study could be conducted at schools with similar demographics but with a different climate in relation to familial attitude to

compare the results and response rates.

4. A qualitative study could be conducted to include more detailed feedback that would examine the particular preferences of parents in regards to school-to-home communication in order to tailor practices to meet the needs of every parent.

5. Because of the high level of female parent participants, a study could be conducted to compare the preferences of mothers and fathers regarding school-to-home communication and the amount of involvement represented by each gender.

Closing Statement

This study examined the perceptions of teachers' and parents in regards to school-to-home communications. The results indicated a significant difference in these perceptions and showed that the teachers rated themselves higher than the parents rated the teachers' practices. Overall, though, the parents were pleased with the current communication practices of the upper elementary teachers and no negative comments were noted from parents. Teachers should not just rely on one mode of communication. There must be a multi-pronged approach to parent involvement that includes phone calls, e-mails, written notices, surveys, and any other forms available. All parents are different; their resources are varied, they interact in different places, and they receive information in all different ways. With all forms of communication, their effectiveness depends on the, "conscientiousness, skill, and attitudes of the people using them" (Longfellow, 2004, p. 39).

REFERENCES

Barge, J., & Loges, W. E. (2003). Parent, student, and teacher perception of parental involvement. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 31*, 24.

Beghetto, R. A. (2001). Virtually in the middle. *Clearing House*, *75*, 5.

Bennett, S. (2007). A parent's perspective on homework. *Encounter*, *20*, 11-13.

Bittle, R. (1975). Improving parent-teacher communication through recorded telephone messages. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 87-95.

Brandes, J. (2005). 20 ways to partner with parents. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *41,* 52-54.

Brandon, R. P. (2007). African American parents: Improving connections with their child's educational environment. *Intervention in School & Clinic*, *43*, 116-120.

Bridgemohan, R., van Wyk, N., & van Staden, C. (2005). Home-school communication in the early childhood development phase. *Education*, *126,* 60-77.

Carr, N. (2005). Parents today require new forms of outreach. *eSchool News*, *8*, 25.

Carr, N. (2007). The customer service approach. *American School Board Journal*, *194*, 62-63.

Chappelow, M. & Smith, S. (2005). It starts in the classroom. *American School Board Journal*, *192*, 48-49.

Clark, R. (2002). *Building student achievement: In-school and out-of-school factors*. Naperville, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

Cohen, J. (1988). Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Cozby, P.C. (2001). Methods in Behavioral Resarch (8th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Davern, L. (2004). School-to-home notebooks: What parents have to say. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *36*, 22-27.

DeBroff, S. (2007). Team up! *Scholastic Parent and Child*, 68-69.

DePlanty, J., Coulter-Kern, R., & Duchane, K. A. (2007). Perceptions of parent involvement in academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Research*, *100*, 361-368.

Duncan, P. (2007). Pet peeves about parents: Turning problems into partnership. *The Education Digest*, 53-57.

Ediger, M. (2008). Psychology of parental involvement in reading. *Reading Improvement*, *45*, 46-52.

Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 701-712.

Epstein, J. L. (2008). Improving family and community involvement in secondary schools. *Education Digest*, *73*, 9-12.

Evans, R. (2004). Talking with parents today. *Independent School*, *63*, 96-102.

Ferrera, M. M., & Ferrera, P. (2005). Parents as partners. *Clearing House*, *79*, 77-81.

Ferriter, B. (2008). An ounce of prevention. *NEA Today*, *26*, 31.

Flannery, M. E. (2005). A field guide to parents. *NEA Today*, *24*, 36-37.

Freytag, C. E. (2001). *Teacher-parent communication: Starting the year off right* (Report No. SP040426). Orlando, FL: Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Kappa Delta Pi International Honor Society in Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED460087)

Givens, A. (2007). Immersed in learning. *T H E Journal*, *34*, 20-21.

Gustafson, C. (1998). Phone home. *Educational Leadership*, 31-32.

Hallgarten, J., & Reed, J. (2002). SchooLets/Time banks for schools. *Management in Education*, *16*, 35.

Halsey, P. A. (2005). Parent involvement in junior high schools: A failure to communicate. *American Secondary Education*, *34*, 57-69.

Handmaker, W.B. (2005). The web of support: A lesson from Spider-Man. *Independent School*, *64*, 108.

Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Bassler, O. C., & Brissie, J. S. (1992). Explorations in parent-school relations. *Journal of Educational Research*, *85*, 287-294.

Jehlen, A. (2008). How can you deal with angry parents? *NEA Today*, *26*, 30-31.

Jensen, D. A. (2006). Using newsletters to create home-school connections. *International Reading Association*, 186-193.

Keller, B. (2004). Parent communication. *Education Week*, 23.

Keller, B. (2008). Schools seek to channel parent involvement. *Education Week*, *27*, 1-17.

Keuhl, R.O. (2000). *Design of experiements: Statistical principles of research design and analysis* (2nd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Duxbury Press.

Kines, B. (1997). The parent connection. *Teaching K-8*, *5*, 73-74.

Korkmaz, I. (2007). Teachers' opinions about the responsibilities of parents, schools, and teachers in enhancing student learning. *Education*, *127*, 389-399.

Larson, C. E. (1993). Communication between teachers and parents as perceived by parents. M.A. dissertation, Simon Fraser University (Canada), Canada. Retrieved May 4, 2008, from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text database. (Publication No. AAT MM91160).

Longfellow, C. A. (2004). Enhancing school-home communication through technology in Christina School District. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 65*(05), 1748. (UMI No. 3133814)

Matzye, C. (1995). *Parental involvement in middle schools* (Report No. PS023434). Ohio: Youngstown State University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED385365)

Mestry, R., & Grobler, B. (2007). Collaboration and communication as effective strategies for parent involvement in public schools. *Educational Research and Review*, *2*, 176-185.

MightyBrain.com increases, improves, communication between school and home. *THE Journal*, *31*, 14.

Miretzky, D. (2004). The communication requirements of democratic schools: Parent-teacher perspectives on their relationships. *Teachers College Record*, *106*, 814-851.

Moles, O. C. (1996). *Reaching all families: Creating family-friendly schools* (Report No. PS024690). Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Development. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED400117).

Montgomery, D. (2005). Communicating without harm: Strategies to enhance parent-teacher communication. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *37*, 50-55.

Moore, D. S., & McCabe, G. P. (2006). Introduction to the practice of statistics (5th ed.). New York, NY: W.H. Freeman and Company.

Moore, K. B. (2000). Developing communication between teachers and families. *Early Childhood Today*, *15*, 10.

Moore, S., & Lasky, S. (1999). Parent involvement in education: Models, strategies and contexts. *Building bridges between home and school*, 13-18.

Morningstar, J. W. (1999). Home response journals: Parents as informed contributors in the understanding of their child's literacy development. *The Reading Teacher*, 52, 690-697.

On the web. (2008). *NEA Today*, *26*, 61.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Parent Involvement: Title 1, Part A (2004). *Who is a parent for the purposes of Title I, Part A?* Retrieved March 2, 2008, from http://www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/parentinvguid.doc

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Glossary of Statistical Terms (n.d.). *Definition of Classroom Teacher*. Retrieved March 2, 2008, from http://stats.oecd.orga/glossary

Pang, I., & Watkins, D. (2000). Towards a psychological model of teacher-parent communication in Hong Kong primary schools. *Educational Studies*, *26*, 141-163.

Powell, D. R. (1978). Correlates of parent-teacher communication frequency and diversity. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 333-341.

Ramirez, F. (2001). Technology and parental involvement. *Clearing House*, *75*, 30-31.

Rapp, W. H. (2005). Inquiry-based environments for the inclusion of students with exceptional learning needs. *Remedial & Special Education*, *25*, 297-310.

Reese, J. (2007). The four Cs of successful classroom management. *Music Educators Journal*, *94*, 24-29.

Sanders, M. G. (2008). How parent liaisons can help bridge the home-school gap. *Journal of Educational Research*, *101*, 287-298.

Shirvani, H. (2007). Effects of teacher communication on parents' attitudes and their children's behaviors at schools. *Education*, *128*, 34-47.

Sirvani, H. (2007). The effect of teacher communication with parents on students' mathematics achievement. *American Secondary Education*, *36*, 31-46.

Spann, S. J., Kohler, F.W., & Soenksen, D. (2003). Examining parents' involvement in and perceptions of special education services: An interview with families in a parent support group. *Focus on Autism & Other Developmental Disabilities*, *18*, 228-237.

Sui-Chu, E.H. & Willms, J.D. (1996). Effects of parental involvement on eighth-grade achievement. *Sociology of Education*, *69*, 126-141.

Strom, P. S., & Strom, R. D. (2002). Teacher-parent communication reforms. *High School Journal*, *86*, 8.

Stuck, L. C. (2004). An exploratory study of the relationship between teacher to parent communication, parent trust, and teacher trust (Doctoral dissertation, University of Denver, 2004). *ProQuest Information and Learning Company.* (UMI No. 3134406)

Swick, K. J. (2003). Communication concepts for strengthening family-school-community partnerships. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *4,* 275-280.

Swick, K. J. & Broadway, F. (1997). Parent-teacher relationships. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, *24*, 69-76.

Villano, M. (2008). Meet the parents. *THE Journal*, *35*, 48-52.

West, J. M. (2000). *Increasing parental involvement for student motivation.* University of New England. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED448411).

Wilson, J. (1983). The effects of age, occupation, race and education on parent communication with the school. *Education*, *103*, 402-404.

Wisdom, C. (1993). Growing together: Sharing through homework journals. *Teaching K-8*, 93-95.

Zehr, M. A. (2008). English-language learners. *Education Week*, *27*(28), 5.

APPENDIX A: PARENT COMMUNICATION SURVEY

September 15, 2008

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Jill Murphy, and I am the Academic Coach and EIP teacher for grades 3-5 at Barksdale Elementary School. I am currently enrolled as a doctoral student at Walden University in the School of Education. I am conducting a survey to learn about teachers' and parents' perceptions of school-to-home communications. You are receiving this survey because you are the parent/guardian of a current third, fourth, or fifth grade student at Barksdale Elementary School and play a very important part in helping your child succeed in school.

You are invited to participate in a study that will look at the many different ways your child's teacher communicates with you. Participation in this study involves completing the attached survey, which should take about 15 minutes of your time. The survey is intended to be completed by the adult within the family who has the most contact with your child's teacher. ***Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary and you may decide not to participate or choose to stop your involvement at any time during this research without fear of penalty or negative consequences of any kind.*** You may complete the questionnaire at your leisure and return it in the enclosed envelope to your child's teacher or the school's front office by September 19th.

There are no risks associated with your participation and there is no compensation for your participation. *However, for every survey that is returned, I will donate $1 to Barksdale's Relay for Life Fund which benefits the American Cancer Society in honor of your participation.*

The information/data you provide will be strictly confidential. Results of the research will be reported as aggregate summary data only and no individually identifiable information will be presented. Furthermore, all raw data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home. You also have the right to review a copy of the research results by contacting me via email at jdmmurphy1@bellsouth.net.

By completing and returning this survey, it is assumed that you have read and understand the foregoing information explaining the purpose of this research and your rights and responsibilities as a subject, and you consent to participate in this research according to the terms and conditions outlined above.

If you have any questions regarding the survey process or your participation in this survey, feel free to contact me or my supervising faculty member at Walden University, Dr. Casey Reason, at casey.reason@waldenu.edu. Also, you may contact the Research Participant Advocate, Dr. Leilani Endicott, at 1-800-925-3368, ext. 1210, in case you would like to talk privately about your rights as a participant.

Sincerely,

Jill Murphy

PARENT COMMUNICATION SURVEY

Although you may have more than one child in elementary school, please answer the following questions about the teacher of your OLDEST child currently in 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade.

SECTION 1: Methods of Communication

PART A

Please use the scale below to indicate how often you or your child's teacher uses each of the six types of communication:

"Occasionally" = inconsistent and approximately once or twice a quarter
"Regularly" = more consistently and approximately once or twice a month
"Frequently" = consistently and approximately once or twice a week

0 = Never   1 = Occasionally   2 = Regularly   3 = Frequently

METHOD OF COMMUNICATION	NEVER	OCCASIONALLY	REGULARLY	FREQUENTLY
Planned Meetings	0	1	2	3
Written	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls FROM the teacher	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls TO the teacher	0	1	2	3
Informal Interactions	0	1	2	3
Technology (emails, web page, etc.)	0	1	2	3
OVERALL, how often do you think your child's teacher communicates?	0	1	2	3

PART B

Please use the scale below to indicate how you feel your child's teacher does in using each of the six types of communication to communicate ***important school-wide and classroom information*** (i.e., scheduling, report card, and event information):

0 = Poor   1 = Fair   2 = Well   3 = Very Well

METHOD OF COMMUNICATION	POOR	FAIR	WELL	VERY WELL
Planned Meetings	0	1	2	3
Written	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls FROM the teacher	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls TO the teacher	0	1	2	3
Informal Interactions	0	1	2	3
Technology (emails, web page, etc.)	0	1	2	3
OVERALL, how do you feel your child's teacher does at communicating with you about important school-wide information?	0	1	2	3

PART C
Please use the scale below to indicate how you feel your child's teacher does in using each of the six types of communication to communicate *specific information about your child* (i.e., great successes, specific challenges, ways you may be of help to your child at home, behavior problems):

0 = Poor   1 = Fair   2 = Well   3 = Very Well

METHOD OF COMMUNICATION	POOR	FAIR	WELL	VERY WELL
Planned Meetings	0	1	2	3
Written	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls FROM the teacher	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls TO the teacher	0	1	2	3
Informal Interactions	0	1	2	3
Technology (emails, web page, etc.)	0	1	2	3
OVERALL, how do you feel your child's teacher does at communicating with you about your child specifically?	0	1	2	3

PART D
Please use the scale to indicate OVERALL how you feel your child's teacher does in using each of the six types of communication to communicate with you:

0 = Poor   1 = Fair   2 = Well   3 = Very Well

METHOD OF COMMUNICATION	POOR	FAIR	WELL	VERY WELL
Planned Meetings	0	1	2	3
Written	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls FROM the teacher	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls TO the teacher	0	1	2	3
Informal Interactions	0	1	2	3
Technology (emails, web page, etc.)	0	1	2	3
OVERALL, how do you feel your child's teacher does communicating with you?	0	1	2	3

PARENT COMMUNICATION SURVEY

SECTION 2: Parent Demographic Information

Please tell a bit about yourself by checking the boxes that describe you:

1.   Please indicate your relationship to the student:
        Parent   Grandparent   Aunt/Uncle   Foster parent
        Step-parent   Other_____

2.   What is your gender?   Male   Female

3.   What is your ethnicity? (Please check only one.)
        Caucasian   African-American   Asian   Native
American
        Latino   Other_____

4.   What grade is your child in?
        3rd Grade   4th Grade   5th Grade

5.   For how many years has your child attended school within the district?
        Less than 1   2-3   4-5   6 or
more

6.   Did you attend school within the Rockdale County School District?
        Yes   No

7.   If yes, for how many years?
        Less than 1   2-5   6-10   11+

8.   What is the highest level of school you have attended?
        High School   College   Graduate School

9.   Is your child eligible to receive a free or reduced price lunch in school?
        Yes   No

SECTION 3: Qualitative Feedback

Please use the space below to share any other information related to this topic you think is important to share:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you very much for your thoughtful responses to this survey.

Please return this survey in the enclosed envelope to:
     Mrs. Jill Murphy
     Barksdale Elementary
     596 Oglesby Bridge Rd.
     Conyers, GA 30094

APPENDIX B: TEACHER COMMUNICATION SURVEY

September 15, 2008

Dear Colleague:

My name is Jill Murphy, and I am the Academic Coach and EIP teacher for grades 3-5 at Barksdale Elementary School. I am currently enrolled as a doctoral student at Walden University in the School of Education. I am conducting a survey to learn about teachers' and parents' perceptions of school-to-home communications. You are receiving this survey because you are currently a classroom teacher of third, fourth, or fifth grade students at Barksdale Elementary.

You are invited to participate in a study that will look at the many different ways you communicate with your students' parents. Participation in this study involves completing the attached survey, which should take about 15 minutes of your time. The survey is intended to be completed in reference to your current communication practices. ***Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary and you may decide not to participate or choose to stop your involvement at any time during this research without fear of penalty or negative consequences of any kind.*** You may complete the questionnaire at your leisure and return it in the enclosed envelope to the designated box in the school's mailroom by September 19th.

There are no risks associated with your participation and there is no compensation for your participation. *However, for every survey that is returned, I will donate $1 to Barksdale's Relay for Life Fund which benefits the American Cancer Society in honor of your participation.*

The information/data you provide will be strictly confidential. Results of the research will be reported as aggregate summary data only and no individually identifiable information will be presented. Furthermore, all raw data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home. You also have the right to review a copy of the research results by contacting me via email at jdmmurphy1@bellsouth.net.

By completing and returning this survey, it is assumed that you have read and understand the foregoing information explaining the purpose of this research and your rights and responsibilities as a subject, and you consent to participate in this research according to the terms and conditions outlined above.

If you have any questions regarding the survey process or your participation in this survey, feel free to contact me or my supervising faculty member at Walden University, Dr. Casey Reason, at casey.reason@waldenu.edu. Also, you may contact the Research Participant Advocate, Dr. Leilani Endicott, at 1-800-925-3368, ext. 1210, in case you would like to talk privately about your rights as a participant.

Sincerely,

Jill Murphy

TEACHER COMMUNICATION SURVEY

SECTION 1: Methods of Communication

PART A

Please use the scale below to indicate how often you use each of the six types of communication *with each of your parents*:

"Occasionally" = inconsistent and approximately once or twice a quarter
"Regularly" = more consistently and approximately once or twice a month
"Frequently" = consistently and approximately once or twice a week

0 = Never   1 = Occasionally   2 = Regularly   3 = Frequently

METHOD OF COMMUNICATION	NEVER	OCCASIONALLY	REGULARLY	FREQUENTLY
Planned Meetings	0	1	2	3
Written	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls TO the parent	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls FROM the parent	0	1	2	3
Informal Interactions	0	1	2	3
Technology (emails, web page, etc.)	0	1	2	3
OVERALL, how often do you, as the teacher, think you communicate with each of your parents?	0	1	2	3

PART B

Please use the scale below to indicate how you feel you do in using each of the six types of communication to communicate *important school-wide and classroom information* (i.e., scheduling, report card, and event information) to the parents of your students:

0 = Poor   1 = Fair   2 = Well   3 = Very Well

METHOD OF COMMUNICATION	POOR	FAIR	WELL	VERY WELL
Planned Meetings	0	1	2	3
Written	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls TO the parent	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls FROM the parent	0	1	2	3
Informal Interactions	0	1	2	3
Technology (emails, web page, etc.)	0	1	2	3
OVERALL, how do you feel you, as the teacher, communicate with parents about important school-wide information?	0	1	2	3

PART C
Please use the scale below to indicate how you feel you do in using each of the six types of communication to communicate *specific information about a student to his/her parents* (i.e., great successes, specific challenges, ways parents may be of help to their child at home, behavior problems):

0 = Poor   1 = Fair   2 = Well   3 = Very Well

METHOD OF COMMUNICATION	POOR	FAIR	WELL	VERY WELL
Planned Meetings	0	1	2	3
Written	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls TO the parent	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls FROM the parent	0	1	2	3
Informal Interactions	0	1	2	3
Technology (emails, web page, etc.)	0	1	2	3
OVERALL, how do you feel you, as the teacher, do at communicating with parents about their child specifically?	0	1	2	3

PART D
Please use the scale to indicate OVERALL how you feel you do in using each of the six types of communication to communicate with parents:

0 = Poor   1 = Fair   2 = Well   3 = Very Well

METHOD OF COMMUNICATION	POOR	FAIR	WELL	VERY WELL
Planned Meetings	0	1	2	3
Written	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls TO the parent	0	1	2	3
Phone Calls FROM the parent	0	1	2	3
Informal Interactions	0	1	2	3
Technology (emails, web page, etc.)	0	1	2	3
OVERALL, how do you feel you, as the teacher, do at communicating with parents?	0	1	2	3

TEACHER COMMUNICATION SURVEY

SECTION 2: Teacher Demographic Information

Please tell a bit about yourself by checking the boxes that describe you:
1.   Please indicate the grade level you teach:

   3rd   4th   5th

2.   What is your gender?   Male   Female

3.   What is your ethnicity? (Please check only one.)

   Caucasian   African-American   Asian   Native American

   Latino   Other_____

4.   For how many years have you been teaching (including this year)?

   1-4   5-8   9-12   13+

5.   Did you attend school within the Rockdale County School District?

   Yes   No

6.   Do you live within the Rockdale County School District?

   Yes   No

7.   What is your current level of certification?

   T-4 (Bachelors)   T-5 (Masters)   T-6 (Specialist)   T-7 (Doctorate)

SECTION 3: Qualitative Feedback

Please use the space below to share any other information related to this topic you think is important to share:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you very much for your thoughtful responses to this survey.

Please return this survey in the enclosed envelope to:
   Mrs. Jill Murphy
   Barksdale Elementary
   596 Oglesby Bridge Rd.
   Conyers, GA 30094

APPENDIX C: TABLES

Table

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Teachers

		PART A	PART B	PART C	PART D
N		14	14	14	14
Normal Parameters[a]	Mean	2.17	2.4286	2.4490	2.4082
	Std. Deviation	.381	.44827	.47167	.49123
Most Extreme	Absolute	.175	.143	.164	.177
Differences	Positive	.175	.116	.121	.154
	Negative	-.132	-.143	-.164	-.177
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.654	.535	.615	.661
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.785	.938	.844	.774

Table

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Parents

		PART A	PART B	PART C	PART D
N		161	161	161	161
Normal Parameters[a]	Mean	1.42	1.8953	1.8536	1.9423
	Std. Deviation	.528	.64082	.67969	.68033
Most Extreme	Absolute	.089	.077	.087	.101
Differences	Positive	.089	.077	.087	.098
	Negative	-.064	-.070	-.078	-.101
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.131	.978	1.101	1.288
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.155	.295	.177	.073

Table

Independent Samples t-*test Results for Part A, Part B, Part C and Part D*

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
PART A	Equal variances assumed	1.484	.225	5.227	173	.000	.754	.144	.470	1.039
	Equal variances not assumed			6.862	17.662	.000	.754	.110	.523	.986
PART B	Equal variances assumed	2.654	.105	3.046	173	.003	.53327	.17510	.18767	.87888
	Equal variances not assumed			4.102	17.985	.001	.53327	.13001	.26011	.80644
PART C	Equal variances assumed	2.192	.141	3.207	173	.002	.59539	.18566	.22893	.96184
	Equal variances not assumed			4.347	18.071	.000	.59539	.13697	.30771	.88306
PART D	Equal variances assumed	1.533	.217	2.503	173	.013	.46584	.18613	.09847	.83321
	Equal variances not assumed			3.285	17.658	.004	.46584	.14181	.16748	.76419

CURRICULUM VITAE

110 Bluegrass Court
Oxford, GA 30054
(770) 385-1142

JILL L. MURPHY

EDUCATION	2008	Ed.D. Walden University
	2000	M.S. Georgia State University
	1996	B.S. Georgia State University

CERTIFICATION   T-6 Elementary Education and Middle Grades Math & Reading
Gifted Endorsed

EMPLOYMENT

August, 2007-Present	Rockdale County Schools/Academic Coach & EIP
August, 2004-July, 2007	Rockdale County Schools/Teacher (5th grade)
August, 1998-July, 2004	Rockdale County Schools/Teacher (7th grade math and reading)
August, 1996-July, 1998	DeKalb County Schools/Teacher (7th grade math)

ADDITIONAL EXPERENCE

Director of After-School Enrichment Program
President of Alpha Delta Kappa Sorority, Beta Mu Chapter

INDIVIDUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Who's Who Among America's Teachers
Wrote and received grants for a non-fiction leveled-reading library
Teacher of the Year, School-Level