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School-Parent Communication: Is There an Association Between Grade Levels and Parental Receipt of School Information?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this quantitative study was to discover if an association exists between grade-level and the type of avenues through which parents wish to receive information from their child's school. Participants were a sample of one hundred and fifty parents of seventh and eighth grade students at an urban public junior high school in Northwest Arkansas. Participants completed an eleven question causal-comparative survey that asked parents to identify the various ways in which they prefer to receive information from the school including looking the information up on their own or having the information sent to them. In addition, the survey sought to ascertain exactly which means of modern communication parents prefer. An analysis of the results revealed that parents overwhelmingly prefer contact from the school and that the contact be through modern forms of communication such as email, text messaging, the school website, and/or Remind. Further, the analysis of the data collected revealed that parents of seventh grade students and eighth grade students each prefer contact from the school via modern avenues of communication and therefore grade-level made no distinct difference.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, technology has become interwoven into the fabric of the lives of both parents and students alike (Trevino, 2012). Parents expect immediate communication from schools and their child's teachers. Positive parental perception of the school is enhanced when parents receive frequent communication from the teacher and the school (Ames, 1995). Also, the frequency and content of school-to-home communications, including information about classroom work and practices, their child's work and progress, and helpful information regarding how parents could assist their child with homework, increase parental involvement (Baker, 2016). Such involvement results in positive parental perceptions regarding school and improved student performance and motivation (Ames, 1993).

There was a time in the 1900s when parents and school personnel exchanged passing regards and limited talk at grocery stores, churches, and social and community gatherings (Tucker, 2017). However, in today's society, social media has replaced such venues with e-mails, text messages, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, and countless blogs (Bavuso, 2016). Schools and their constituents have had to adjust and explore these new avenues of communication and, therefore, incorporate these into their processes of communicating with parents and encouraging parental engagement.

SCHOOL-PARENT COMMUNICATION IMPACT

When schools empower parents with actionable and timely information, such as assignment due dates or consistent updates on their student's grades, student achievement improves and student outcomes are maximized by parental engagement (Bergman & Rogers, 2016). In addition to enhanced student outcomes, improved communication with parents through modern methods such as e-mail, texting, up-dated websites, and Twitter have enabled schools to increase parental participation. As a result, more parents participate in school events such as open house, informational nights for things such as pre-AP and AP classes, and student performances such as band and choir events or robotic competitions (Blakes-Greenway, 1994). It could be that using technology effectively throughout the school organization creates a new dynamic between the school and parental involvement, promoting a supportive culture between parents and their child's school and school personnel (Blau & Shamir-Inbal, 2016). A more cooperative culture between the school and parent could, then, create a more significant opportunity for improved student achievement.

SCHOOL-PARENT COMMUNICATION THEMES

Procedural and interpersonal communications between school and home have essential themes. One of which is the need for schools to establish efficacy in communicating with parents using modern-day technologies (Lascelles, 2012). Avenues such as Remind and Google Classroom have emerged as useful resources in communicating with parents on a daily basis that is effective for parents and teachers (Bavuso, 2016). Providing Remind and Google Classroom access to parents effectively promotes parental access to student assignments, due dates for assignments, and upcoming projects. These modern technologies enable parents to keep up with their students and provide them easy access to their schedules (Tucker, 2017). Another theme is the fast-paced lifestyles parents maintain. Parents are making a living for their families and do not want a plethora of telephone calls or stacks of paper communication from teachers and schools. Remind and Google classroom allow parents easy and immediate access to their child's school without feeling intruded upon in regards to their time and schedules (Kraft, 2017). Honoring parental time sends a message of respect and accountability on the part of the school.

SCHOOL-PARENT COMMUNICATION GAPS

Paper copies of information have always been barriers to home-school communication because students often lose or misplace such correspondence before reaching the parents (Ozmen, 2016). Avenues such as Remind and Google Classroom can help alleviate such mishaps by enabling parents to access information when convenient. Ames (1995) suggested that yet another gap between home-school communications is that of parental comfort with the school and its personnel. Parental comfort levels are supported with consistent contact, engagement, trust, and transparency. Frequent, consistent contact with parents, from early childhood education through graduation, encourages parental involvement and assists in engaging parents proactively in their child's education (Blau & Hameiri, 2016). Transparency and trust infuse parents with a comfort level that promotes confidence (Murray, 2015).

Schools that consistently communicate with parents build trust and establish credit with parents because communication helps parents feel schools and teachers are transparent and care about their child's education and well-being.

Failure to communicate effectively at the seventh- and eighth-grade levels could signal the beginning of disconnects between the home and school. Communication disconnects or gaps create adverse ramifications later in high school (Halsey, 2004). One such disconnect is truancy. Students skipping classes is an age-old problem. However, modern technology can alleviate such behavior and provide instant communication between school and home that prevent poor academic potentialities and gives parents and schools a means to ensure that students are in a classroom (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005). In other words, modern modes of communication can serve as preventative interventions that in earlier years were not available to schools or parents. The key is that long-term parental involvement is needed and useful. It behooves schools to initiate consistent communication and not allow gaps to develop at any grade level (Tucker, 2017).

SCHOOL-PARENT COMMUNICATION CONNECTIONS

Knowing and using preferred parental technology to communicate with parents increases their child's academic success and achievement and promotes a student's social well-being (Fishel and Ramirez, 2005). It is, therefore, an advantage for schools to know how parents want to be contacted and use those means to maintain positive two-way communication at all grade levels. Parents want communication links that transcend grade levels and that prevent communication gaps in seventh- and eighth-grade, just as they desired communication connections with their child's teachers in elementary grades (Lewin & Luckin, 2010). Parent-school connections translate into parental engagement that is meaningful for the student. Maintaining open communication between home and school is one means for continuing academic success (Yoder & Lopez, 2013). The use of online tools such as Remind and Google Classroom can assist in developing and maintaining communication interaction between parents and teachers (Lewin & Luckin, 2010). Other means such as e-mail, instant messaging, texting, and Twitter are also effective connections between parents and their child's teachers.

CONCLUSION

The literature suggests that parents, regardless of their child's grade level, want modern methods of communication from teachers and schools to keep them informed, involved, and actively engaged in their child's education from pre-school through high school. The critical factor then becomes precisely what type(s) of modern communication parents want their child's school to utilize in contacting them. Do parents prefer one particular method over another?

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine if an association existed between grade-level and the type of communication parents wish to receive information from their child's school.

HYPOTHESIS

There is an association between student grade-levels and the types of communication through which parents wish to receive information from their child's school.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study were a convenience sample of 150 seventh- and eighth-grade parents at an urban public junior high school in Northwest Arkansas. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants. Survey responses included 75 seventh- and 75 eighth-grade parents. Respondents were 48% male and 52% female. Eight out of every ten respondents were White, regardless of gender.

Table 1: Gender and Ethnicity of Survey Respondents

Characteristic	(n = 150)	
Sex		
Male	72	48%
Female	78	52%
Race/Ethnicity		
White	120	80%
Black	12	12%
Hispanic	9	6%
Asian	6	4%
Other	3	2%

INSTRUMENTATION

The instrumentation for this study was a non-experimental survey created by the researcher. The survey drew from a population of parents at an urban public junior high school. The survey contained eleven questions, including demographic inquiries. A copy of the survey is included in the appendix.

PROCEDURE

Once IRB approval was obtained for this non-experimental study, the survey was forwarded to the junior high school principal for approval. Subsequently, the survey was distributed to seventh- and eighth-grade parents at a required enrollment conference. The participants, parents of seventh- and eighth-grade students who attend the urban public junior high school, were asked to place a checkmark or an X by the response that best indicated their experiences and feelings. The surveys were completed and returned to the researcher. A chi-square test of independence was used to test for statistical significance.

RESULTS

A chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing the number of seventh- and eighth-grade parents who preferred modern methods of communication from their child's school to those seventh- and eighth-grade parents who preferred traditional methods of communication from their child's school $X^2(1) = 0.2799, p = .596799$. The results were *not* statistically significant at $p > .05$; therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be

rejected. The alternative hypothesis was not supported. There was no statistical significance that existed between grade level and parental receipt of school information.

Table 2: Modern Means of Communication v. Traditional Means of Communication per Parental Desire

Communication Preference	7 th Grade Parents (n = 75)	8 th Grade Parents (n = 75)
Parents Desiring Modern Methods of Communication	66 (88%)	68 (91%)
Parents Desiring Traditional Methods of Communication	9 (12%)	7 (9%)

DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

The survey results from parents of seventh- and eighth-grade students indicated that parents wanted to receive information from their child's school via modern methods of communication such as email and/or text messaging. Grade level had no effect on the parent's desire to be communicated with nor did grade level matter regarding the means of that communication. The results of this study supported the research reviewed that noted parents preferred communication to be initiated by their child's school and that the communication be in the form of modern methods of communication.

LIMITATIONS

The study and survey did have limitations. The convenience sample was taken from a public school and did not include private or charter schools and, as such, could not be used to determine parental preference for communication in those respective settings. The public school surveyed also lacked demographic diversity in ethnicity thus preventing generalization to the overall population. Similarly, the location of the study, an urban setting, prohibited generalization to different regions of the country such as suburban and rural areas.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study, which indicated that parents of an urban junior high school preferred being contacted by their child's school via modern methods of communication, regardless of grade level, corresponded with the literature outlined in the literature review. According to Lazaros (2016) and Bavuso (2016), today's parents desire modern communication such as email and text messaging from their child's school over traditional parent-teacher conferences or papers being sent home from the school. Further, grade level had little to nothing to do with communication preferences. Grade level neither determined nor influenced how parents preferred contact (Kraft, 2017). Based on both this study and research, school-parent communication should be school-

initiated, consistent, and through modern means of communication regardless of grade level.

FUTURE RESEARCH

School-parent communications increase parental involvement and engagement, in the classroom and outside the classroom (Beason, 2010). This fact is not restricted nor influenced by their child's grade level. With the ever-changing field of technology, new techniques will inevitably arise, such as virtual conferencing, that will influence both schools and parents alike (Grundmeyer and Yankey, 2016). Future studies should include a more extensive random sampling of parents in all grade levels in public and charter schools. Broader ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and a variety of geographical settings (including rural and suburban schools) should be included.

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