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Effective and Efficient Parent-Teacher Communication

An Action Research Report
By Germaine DiJohn

Effective and Efficient Parent-Teacher Communication

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in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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Date _____

Abstract

This action research study examines parent-teacher communication using a combination of an online email program called MailChimp, a text app called Remind, and a class web page. A group of 17 parents from a private elementary classroom in a Montessori school agreed to participate in this study. Time sheets, check-off lists, feedback from parents, and statistics from MailChimp were used to collect data. The majority of the parents were pleased with the school-to-home communication during this period. The email and text message programs were the most efficient communication methods. Updating the class web page proved to be the most time-consuming communication process. This study showed why teachers should use a variety of correspondence methods in order to be effective communicators. While I will continue to use MailChimp, Remind, and my web page for parent-teacher communication, I also discovered there is room for improvement in my communication methods

I am pleased to say that I have worked at the same Montessori school for almost 20 years. We do not have the biggest gymnasium or a state-of-the-art science lab. We have built something even more spectacular, a palpable loving family atmosphere. Our eighth graders will graduate with peers they have known since they were two years old. I often think my students more like cousins than classmates. Our school family includes students, parents, and faculty members. One of the building blocks for these caring relationships amongst the members of our community is good communication. For better or for worse, technology has changed the way we correspond since I began teaching in 1998. As a teacher, I hope to use technology as a benefit and find the most effective and efficient ways to communicate with the families of my students.

A private Montessori school provided the setting for this action research study. The study was conducted in a first through third mixed age Montessori classroom during the second half of the school year. A group of seventeen moms, dads, and a grandmother agreed to participate in this study. The participants included thirteen moms, three dads, and one grandmother. These adults represented a total of fourteen different families.

As a Montessori teacher, I believe parent communication is important, because good communication leads to productive cooperation. Teachers and parents must collaborate to join forces. I want the parents of my students to trust me and to feel involved with their children's education even if they are unable to volunteer in the classroom on a regular basis. As a teacher, I have been able to provide many unique, meaningful learning experiences for my students with the support of the parents.

Montessori saw schools and families as a team (O'Donnell, 2013).

I chose to explore parent-teacher communication methods involving technology, because I *usually* enjoy utilizing modern technology. I am oftentimes one who other teachers come to when they have computer related issues. Some of my coworkers have more difficulties learning technology. I share my coworkers' frustrations regarding computers when our Internet connection is lost or when technology makes seemingly simple tasks difficult. I wanted to learn helpful information regarding these technological communication methods to share with my colleagues.

Parents at our school receive a weekly email from administration and from each relevant class. This year, we are required to put our entire schedule and all of our classroom events on Google calendars. We also have an intranet and a school website with individual class web pages. One parent told me that he wished we would send all school information to him through text messages. With all of this technology, some parents continue to want more.

I can relate to the parents who want teachers to utilize more technology. There are benefits for teachers as well. Digital communication can be superior to traditional methods. Digital information is not easily lost, and it can be updated (Hernandez & Leung, 2004; Thomas, 1999; Piper, 2012). Technology also makes communication more accessible, and it can ease parents' anxiety and give teachers the opportunity to craft thoughtful responses (Moon, 2005; Penny 2006).

I feel like I spend the majority of my planning time on parent communication. Sometimes I wonder if I am spending too much time on this aspect of my classroom. Technology can make communication effective and efficient for teachers (Hernandez &

Leung, 2004). I want to be sure that my methods are effective and that I am using my time wisely.

I want to make sure my use of technology, as a means of communication is helpful. Digital communication can cause educators stress. Teachers may feel they have to be available nonstop (Myres, 2006; Thomas, 1999). Also, technology may take away some of the students' independence at school (Zaccheus, 2013; Thomas, 1999). Another problem is that an email's tone can be misread (Hernandez & Leung, 2004). To be effective and efficient, teachers need to keep newsletters simple (Hoerr, 2014; Shackelford & Griffis, 2006). Educators should communicate with parents using a variety of methods. I will contemplate these possible pitfalls as I conduct my study.

This research is intended to answer the following questions: Considering today's technology, what are the most effective ways for educators to communicate with parents? Is it best for teachers to communicate through email? Is it best for schools to set up a website for families and educators to share information? Should educators utilize social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter to reach parents? Are there new and better ways of communicating that many educators are not aware of, or is it best to leave technology out of parent-teacher relationships and rely on traditional means of communication like open houses, conferences, printed newsletters, and phone calls? Will the implementation of MailChimp, Remind, and a simplified class web page prove to be effective and efficient ways for me as a teacher to keep parents informed about students' assignments, field trips, and other special classroom events and thus improve the school-home link in my classroom?

Review of Literature

Communication between educators and families is not always effective and efficient. Moore (2000) states that frequent parent-teacher communication increases the success of students. Moreover, Montessori viewed schools and families as a union. She did not want schools to be a separate rebellion of home (O'Donnell, 2013). Good communication between educators and parents should be respectful and promote parent involvement (Moore, 2000). Penny (2006) says that families with school-age children rely on technology for information. Piper (2012) found in a 2012 survey at Raymond Cree Middle School in Palm Springs, 87 percent of their 1,000 families had Internet access. In this literature review, I will be outlining effective, efficient, and pleasing ways for teachers to communicate with parents.

Efficient and Effective Digital Communication

Hernandez and Leung (2004) state that modern technology can make communication between teachers and parents more efficient. The use of modern modes of communication, like mass emails and websites, saves educators' time and energy. Some people believe that logging into an email account is quicker and easier than writing notes by hand.

Digital communication can be superior to print information. Technology can help to make sure that printed information such as notes and report cards reach the parents (Hernandez & Leung, 2004; Thomas, 1999; Piper, 2012). Printed information wastes resources and cannot be updated (Piper, 2012).

Moon (2005) states that school conferences are mostly made by appointment only, and open houses are often overcrowded. Technology can make communication

from school-to-home, and vice versa, more accessible. Digital communication can allow parents to communicate with teachers without making an appointment.

Electronic communication, such as emails and websites with children's grades, can ease parents' anxiety, because they are not shocked with information for the first time when they have a face-to-face meeting with children's teachers (Moon, 2005). Cichucki, the head of a Montessori school believes technology helps her communicate. She writes carefully worded emails at any time during the day or night. Using email enables her to choose her words carefully without being rushed (Penny, 2006). According to Moore (2000), email can be an easy and effective way of communicating. Issues can be addressed quickly with parents in a nonthreatening manner. Email can also be used to encourage sharing and open discussions. Tana (2014) says that two-way communication between school and families is the key to success for students.

Piper (2012) asserts that Google Translate is a useful tool for parents who do not speak English. This feature can be used to translate information on a school web page. In addition, she says that Google has a feature that allows parents with vision issues to change the size of text to make information more readable. A well-designed website can help a school remain accountable even with limited resources (Piper, 2012). Thomas (1999) believes a well-designed website can also help students remain accountable. When students are absent, they may be able to check an online calendar for missed assignments.

Remind101 is a text message service that is used by more than 20,000 schools. This service allows messages to be sent to one person at a time or a whole group at once. A log of messages is kept so that administrators can review it. Users say that Remind101 is superior to emails and paper planners, because the information is sent directly to

phones and cannot easily be ignored (“Remind101 Supports Back to School,” 2013). Andrew Campbell, a teacher at Major Ballachey Public School in Brantford, used Remind101 to send mass text messages that informed parents about homework assignments. The feedback he received regarding the use of technology in his classroom was 98 percent positive even though many parents were concerned about the use of technology in the beginning (Kane, 2012).

Issues to Consider

With today’s technology, we live in an "immediate feedback" world. Many people feel guilt if they have to wait to respond to e-mail sent to them on their smartphone (Myres, 2006, para 6). With technology making teachers more accessible, some educators feel like they are working twenty-four hours a day (Thomas, 1999). This may cause teachers stress.

It is also suggested that teachers should not rely solely on digital communication. In a reader poll conducted in 2008, “Has Technology Improved Your Home-to-School Connection?”, it was found that communicating through the Internet alone may create a divide between low-income families that do not have Internet access and families that can afford Internet access. Also, the tone of an email can be misread, and sometimes sensitive issues like possible retention are more professionally presented in person (Hernandez & Leung, 2004). Clemente (2002) documented the utilization of a web-based program called Homeworks.net. This program was used to keep middle class families in an urban community informed of activities, assignments, and other issues. Six teachers and twenty-eight parents participated in this study. Most teachers and parents thought that face-to-face communication and telephone calls were the preferred method of

communication, however through teacher and parent interviews and data from the program, Clemente found that parents rated the electronic communication more favorably because they liked that it was faster.

There are some concerns over the use of social media as a means of communication for educators. A small number of people want to utilize this informal kind of communication (YouGov, 2010). YouGov, an international research firm, conducted a study, reported in the Edinburgh Evening News article “Parents want Facebook for Teacher Chats”, in which they found that within families from schools and clubs in the large city of Edinburg, Scotland, "Twenty-two percent of parents would like to be able to text or correspond with their child's teacher over social media networks such as Facebook" (2010, para. 4). Trevino (2012) and Zaccheus (2013) say these sites should be used cautiously. Trevino (2012) points out that there are privacy and safety concerns when using social media. Additionally, some teachers are worried that informal Facebook groups could encourage parents to mull over unimportant details and become overprotective (Zaccheus, 2013). With increased parental access to teachers, students may lose some of the healthy autonomy of their school environment (Thomas, 1999).

Recommendations

According to Hoerr (2014), one teacher suggests putting only the most important information in a newsletter to simplify them and make them more likely to be read by parents. Likewise, Ray Shackelford, a professor at Ball State University and his research assistant, Kurt Griffis (2006) assert that a newsletter must quickly and effectively obtain the reader’s attention. In addition, they suggest putting the most important information first, keeping the language simple and varied, using headings, and keeping the format

clean and simple (Shackelford & Griffis, 2006). They also suggest editing newsletters very carefully before sending them out (Shackelford & Griffis, 2006). Hoerr (2014) suggests letting parents know they can expect to receive a response to emails within twenty-four hours. This may help teachers feel less pressure to respond to parents immediately. Piper (2012) recommends that parents should have a variety of communication outlets like online calendars and phone contact to get school information. Clemente (2002) recommended that teachers receive continued training in many technology communication methods to increase parental involvement.

According to public speaker, trainer, and management consultant, Schumacher (2013) a face-to-face interaction makes communication more precise:

Study after study has shown that effective communication between people comes through body language and tone of voice. In fact, 93 percent of communication happens through non-verbals. Phrases like "read between the lines" and "your actions speak louder than words" attest to that fact (para, 8).

Myres, a large organization leader, agrees. He says that the "human touch" can make people feel more comfortable (2006).

Conclusion

This literature review has demonstrated that researchers believe technology presented in a well thought out, clear, logical manner can make parent-teacher communication more effectual and less labor-intensive. Modern communication can be more effective by helping to ensure that information reaches parents and by giving teachers many tools for reaching out to parents. We can choose to send information in an email, through a text message, or we can share information on a web page. According to

the research, technology can also make school-to-home communication more efficient. Through this literature study, it is clear that with all of the modern communication resources available to us we cannot rule out the importance of old fashioned, more personal means of communication like meeting with someone face-to-face. A variety of tools, digital and personal, should be used to give parents the information that they want, in the form that they want it.

Methodology

From the literature research I did on the topic of parent-teacher communication, I found that it was important for me to use a variety of methods for communication with the parents of my students (Piper 2012). I also learned that simplifying information was necessary (Shackelford & Griffis, 2006). During this study, I tried to put these ideas into practice so that I could exercise good communication with parents. I used my data collection materials to find out if these methods were, in fact, effective and efficient.

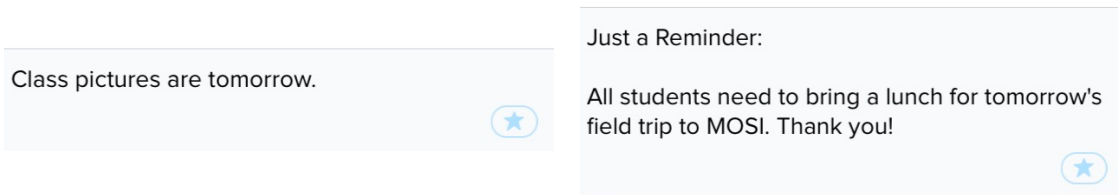
During my study, I worked to simplify and update my class web page. I changed my class Google calendar from “month” view to “agenda” view. The “agenda” view made it so that more details could be listed for each date. I uploaded new pictures of my students and moved older pictures to the bottom of the page. I condensed as much information as possible so that parents did not have to scroll so much to find the information they wanted. Overall, I worked to give the web page a cleaner look. After the initial update of my web page, I added new information four times, as needed, during the six-week study.

I used MailChimp, a web-based email marketing program, to send emails once each week in a new interactive format. To begin, I made an email template with a

heading for my class and regularly used links. This email format offered button styles I could select for parents to visit our links, rather than having the web link written out for the parents to click. In my emails, I included links for parents to sign up for conferences or volunteer opportunities and visit our class web page and Facebook pages.

Additionally, the emails included news about field trips, homework, book reports, classroom celebrations, service projects and class photos. Early in the study, I included directions for subscribing to my class text messages. These emails were automatically formatted to be mobile friendly. I was able to preview exactly how the emails would look if they were opened on a smart phone or tablet.

Also, I used Remind, an app, to send mass text messages to communicate information to my students' parents. I used this app six times, about once a week, for short message reminders or to send out last-minute changes to class plans. Here are some examples of my Remind text messages:



To keep track of, generate, and record my information, I used observational reports (see Appendices A and B), parent-generated artifacts, statistics generated by MailChimp, and parent feedback forms (see Appendix C). I made observational reports with a check-off list (see Appendix A) and a time sheet (see Appendix B). The Google parent feedback forms were used at the end of my study (see Appendix C).

I used observational reports in two forms, a check-off list (see Appendix A) and a time sheet (see Appendix B). I observed and kept track of items that the students brought

in or did not have as a possible result of my parent-teacher communications. I made a check-off list (see Appendix A) to keep track of the items I asked for in parent-teacher communications, such as costume pieces or permission slips. I also made a time sheet (see Appendix B) to keep track of the amount of time I spent preparing my web page, emails, and text messages. The checklist helped me to see if my school-to-home communications were effective, and the time sheet helped me to see if my parent-teacher communication methods were efficient.

I planned to keep track of parent-generated replies to my emails and notes from parents to gain insight into how the parents perceived my communications. For instance, I planned to keep responses to my weekly email updates. I only received three email replies from parents during the six-week study, therefore this data did not provide as much information as I thought it might. I did not receive any emails asking for clarifications about information I sent out, so I assumed my communications were clear.

I used statistics generated by the MailChimp “Dashboard”. MailChimp kept track of precise statistics that provided information such as how many recipients opened an email and how many recipients clicked on a link. These statistics helped me to learn if my emails were effective by letting me know how many parents were looking at the information that I sent home. If the MailChimp statistics showed that an email was left unopened, I knew that I needed to reach that parent with important information in another way.

Finally, my Google feedback form (see Appendix C) was used to find out which types of communication parents preferred. I sent a link to the online form via email and

group text message. Google parent feedback forms helped me understand what modes of communication the parents liked.

Data Analysis

Data Source #1 Computer-Generated Artifacts from MailChimp

My first data resource was computer-generated artifacts from the MailChimp email program. I sent out one email each week through MailChimp to my participants. A total of six group emails were sent out. One parent did not give me his email address, so I was only able to send emails to sixteen of the participants.

Successful Deliveries	15	15	15	16	16	16
# of Times Email was Opened	30	25	15	33	18	27
# of Recipients Who Opened	13 (86.7)	10 (66.7%)	9 (60%)	10 (62.5%)	10 (62.5%)	12 (75%)
Date Sent	1-15-15	1-23-15	1-30-15	2-6-15	2-12-15	2-20-15

Table 1. MailChimp Mass Email Statistics

One of the parents did not receive the first three emails I sent out. I mistyped her email address into the program. She did not notify me to let me know that she was not getting the emails. I saw she was not receiving the emails after studying the MailChimp statistics, and I was able to fix this issue. MailChimp helped me to be sure all of the parents received my emails. In this way, MailChimp helped me to be a more effective communicator with the parents of my students.

Each email was opened more than once by some of my participants. This showed me that parents referred back to the information that was written in the emails. With the use of a smartphone, the information from my emails was readily available for review while parents were on the go.

Overall, 63% percent of the received emails were opened. Knowing that not all of the emails I sent out were opened told me that valuable information should be communicated to parents in another way as well. An average of 33.3 percent of these emails were opened on a computer. An average of 67.7 percent of these emails were opened on a mobile device. Since most parents open these emails on a mobile device, it was useful that MailChimp automatically formatted emails for readability on a smartphone or tablet.

The link the parents used the most was for an online sign-up for conferences. This link was used 16 times. It was used more often from the second email that contained the link. This may have been because the second email was sent out closer to the date of conferences. These sign-up links were the only ways I offered for parents to sign up for conferences. These links were likely used the most out of necessity.

Sixteen out of 18 links sent out in these emails were used only once or not at all. The school Facebook link and the class web page link were never used. The link to the PDF form of the book report for first-year students was used once. The link to the PDF form of the book report for second and third-year students was not clicked at all. These forms were also posted on the class web page and sent home with students as hard copies. Links to a PDF copy of permission slips were each used once. In addition, these permission slips were posted on the class web page and sent home with students as hard

copies. Most of the links were not used. This may have been because the links were not needed.

Data Source #2 Observational Reports

For my second data resource, I used observational reports. These reports included a check off list to keep track of items I asked for in parent-teacher communications, such as permissions slips, and a time sheet to keep track of the amount of time I spent preparing my emails, text messages, and web page.

Item Student Needed	Show & Tell Item	Slip for January Field Trip	Requested an Additional Chaperone	Bagged Lunch for Field Trip	Slip for February Field Trip	Bagged Lunch for Field Trip
Informed by Email	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Informed by Text	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Informed by Web Page	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Outcome	60% Brought	100% Had	Request Satisfied	100% Had	100% Had	100% Had

Table 2. Items Requested Through Parent-Teacher Communication

According to this data, all of the needed items that were requested were received.

In addition to the communication methods listed above, my assistant also asked parents

for permission slips face-to-face when she saw them in carline. She was eager to arrange carpools. This may have affected the number of students who had their permission slips turned in on time. My students all brought bagged lunches on our two field trips as asked.

Not all students who were scheduled for show and tell brought in an item to share. This request was not a requirement. One of my students does not like to share. His mom told me that he does not want to bring in an item. He is new to our class this month. It took him a couple of weeks to want to speak in front of others during group lessons, so I do believe that he is does not want to share an item from home with his peers at this time.

I sent out a special request through the Remind text message app, because we were short on chaperones for a field trip. Within a matter of minutes, a parent responded to my request offering to drive. With this app, I was able to solve a classroom issue quickly and effectively.

Summary	Prepared template, imported emails, 622 words, 4 links	292 words, 1 photo, 3 links	282 words, 1 photo, 3 links	403 words, 3 links	662 words, 5 photos, 3 links	354 words, 5 photos, 2 links
	Preparation Time	2 hrs. 36 mins.	56 mins.	41 mins.	53 mins.	1 hr. 13 mins.
Date	1-15-15	1-23-15	1-30-15	2-6-15	2-12-15	2-20-15

Table 3. Time Spent Preparing MailChimp Emails

Summary	24 words, 1 link	18 words	10 words	8 words	23 words
Preparation Time	5 mins.	3 mins.	3 mins.	2 mins	7 mins.
Date	1-16-15	1-19-15	2-3-15	2-10-15	2-18-15

Table 4. Time Spent Preparing Remind Text Messages

Summary	6 links were prepared and added for conferences and book reports	2 links prepared and added for permission slips	1 link prepared for study club	2 photos of a celebration added, class calendar updated with field trip information
Preparation Time	1 hr. 18 mins.	45 mins.	13 mins.	40 mins.
Date	1-13-15	2-3-15	2-5-15	2-6-15

Table 5. Time Spent Revising Web Page

During the first week, I spent a total of four hours and twenty-six minutes preparing parent-teacher communications. I spent more time in the first week, because I was setting up MailChimp and making more significant changes than usual to my class web page.

During the second week, I spent about one hour preparing my weekly communications for this study. I did not make any changes to my web page this week, since I had made the changes necessary the week before.

On the third week of my study, I spent approximately forty minutes preparing my weekly communications. I did not have any changes to make to the web page since all of the needed information was already posted. I did not have any necessary reminders to send out through text messages either.

For my fourth week of this study, I spent two hours and forty-five minutes putting together my parent-teacher communication. This week took me longer because I made several updates to my web page. I added links, photos, and updated our class calendar. This week I worked on all three methods of communication. I sent a mass email, a mass text message, and I updated my web page information.

I spent one hour and fifteen minutes working on parent-teacher communications during my fifth week of this study. This week I sent out my longest email and a short text message to the parents of my students. The email I sent out included five pictures and three links. I did not make any changes to my web page.

During the last week of my study, I spent a total of fifty-five minutes on my parent-teacher communications. I wrote an email, and I sent out a text message reminder. I did not find it necessary to update my web page.

I used emails to send the bulk of my necessary information to the parents of my students. That is why I was sure to send an email out each week. My web page was prepared ahead of time with general class information, and a calendar of events. Current web page information was updated and added to the top of the page when necessary. I

used the Remind text messages to send out more urgent information or reminders. I used the Remind app as needed.

I spent an average of two hours and forty-nine minutes preparing my weekly school-to-home communications. I spent a median time of one hour and five minutes on these communication methods each week. The most time I spent in one week on these communications was four hours and twenty-six minutes. I spent the majority of my planning time on parent communication. I was hoping to be more efficient. I am hopeful when I consider that my methods were less time consuming after the initial set-up and when I did not have major updates for parents.

Data Source #3 Parent-Generated Artifacts

My third data source was parent-generated artifacts. This was meant to include responses to my weekly email communications. During the six-week period of this study, I only received a total of three replies to my mass communication methods. One parent responded to an email letting me know that her son had an item to give me in his backpack. She wanted to be sure I retrieved the item. The other reply was from another mom. This was a direct response to a request for information that would allow a parent to chaperone an upcoming field trip. This mom was the same parent who responded to my text message asking for an additional chaperone for another field trip. Since I did not get any replies asking for clarification to my parent-teacher communications, I concluded that my correspondence methods were clear.

Data Source #4 Parent Google Feedback Form

As my fourth and final data resource, I used a parent feedback Google Form. This form was sent by email and text message to the seventeen study recipients. In all, nine participants responded to my feedback form.

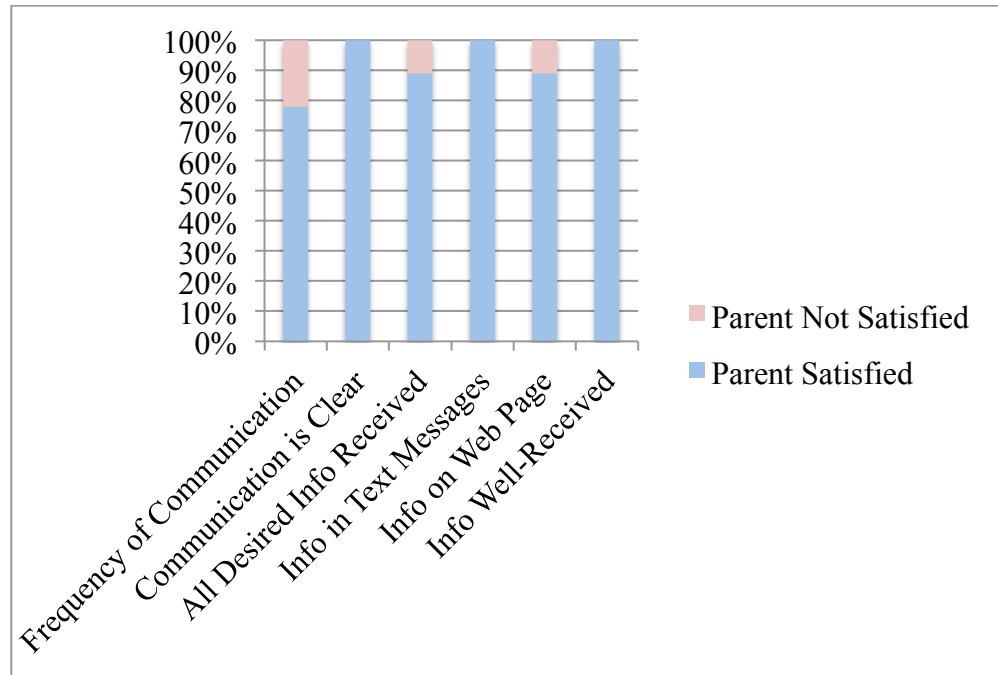


Figure 1. Parent Satisfaction According to Google Form

Seven out of nine parents said that the frequency of parent-teacher communication that they receive is just right. Two of the nine parents said that they would like to receive more communications. One hundred percent of the parents said that the communication was clear and easy to understand. Five out of nine parents said that they liked the MailChimp format. Four of the nine parents said that they did not have an opinion about this question. All of the participants except for one said that they felt they receive all of the necessary information for their child to be successful. Suggestions for improvements were not offered by the one parent who was not satisfied. All nine of the parents are subscribed to receive the text message reminders from me. All of the parents believe these text message reminders are helpful. Eight out of nine parents said that they get the information they are looking for when they visit the class web page. One parent felt the page should be updated more frequently.

The parents had the opportunity to make suggestions to improve my communication with them. One parent said that I was doing an excellent job communicating with the parents. The other parent that took advantage of this space wrote, "The web page does not seem to be updated very often. While I get most of my information from the text and e-mails, I wonder if someone who was relying on the web page for information would be under-informed." The other responders to the parent feedback form did not leave any comments.

Data Analysis Conclusion

My study showed that to be an effective communicator a variety of communication methods should be utilized. I found this to be true during my literature review on the subject of home-to-school communications as well. I found my emails and

text messages to be the most effective forms of communication, and I also found that it was necessary to utilize my class web page. Overall, the combination of communication methods used in this study was effective.

Effectiveness. Not all of the email recipients opened the weekly emails. Because of this, a teacher must use additional forms of communication in order to be effective. The Remind text message app was effective, because all of the needed items that were requested through this method of communication were received.

One drawback to the Remind app is that the number of characters that can be sent in a text message is limited to 140. However, Remind text messages can also include links and photos, which may be a more efficient way to utilize the allotted number of characters. A link can lead to a site with more information, and a photo can be a screenshot of information. Because of the character limitation, I would use this form of communication in conjunction with others.

The parents did not use any of the links to my web page that were included in weekly emails. This lead me to believe that the class web page was the least effective way for parents to receive communication. Perhaps they did not feel it was necessary to visit the web page, because they got what they needed from the email. The parents may not be using the link to visit the class web page, because this information is not updated as frequently as the emails and text messages. Visiting the class web page also requires more effort than receiving the other two forms of communication. The emails and text messages are automatically sent to the parents' devices. This could be another reason parents did not use the link to visit the web page.

My students had the necessary items that were requested through my parent-

teacher communications. Parents did not request clarifications or additional information through emails or notes. The overwhelming majority of responses to the parent feedback form were positive. This leads me to conclude that my combination of communication methods was effective.

Efficiency. Using MailChimp became more efficient after the parents' email addresses were entered into the system and after the reusable template was prepared. The least efficient form of communication seemed to be my class web page. The web page took me the longest to develop, and parents did not utilize the direct link to the web page in any of the emails in which it was included. The mass text messages were prepared and sent quickly. All of these texts were drawn up and sent in less than ten minutes. The text messages were very efficient. The MailChimp emails were moderately efficient especially after the initial setup time. The web page did not seem to be efficient, but perhaps the time spent on the web page was balanced out by the short amount of time used to prepare the Remind text messages.

Action Plan

I will continue to use MailChimp, the Remind text app, and my class web page for parent-teacher communication. The majority of my students' parents were pleased with my school-to-home communication during this study, and my students had items such as permission slips when needed. Overall, these methods worked well. Nevertheless, I also discovered there is room for improvement in my communication methods.

With the communication systems I used during my action research study and the ideas I accumulated through the investigation, I think parents will be increasingly satisfied with the information they receive from me and with the methods I use. Parents

will have more opportunities to know what is going on in the classroom. With good communication through emails, text messages, and our web page, parents will not miss out on volunteer opportunities. Parents will be able to take full advantage of chances to spend time with their children at appropriate school activities. I have long thought that I could do almost anything to help a student if the parents were supportive and willing to work with me as a team. Improved communication will help parents to see how much I care for their children and help parents feel connected to their child's school environment. Therefore, parents will be more supportive. Students will benefit from increased parent endorsement of the way our classroom is run, and they will have items that are needed with well-informed parents. Enhanced communication methods will make the parents of my students and I effective partners for the benefit of students.

I will use the MailChimp email program in the same way that I used it during my study. I was able to put all of the information that I found necessary into the MailChimp format and reviewing the built-in statistics helped me to know when, how, and if parents received the information. The statistics helped me to know which parents were reading my emails. I will continue to reach out to the parents who are not reading my emails in other ways.

I will try to find new ways to utilize the Remind text app. My results showed parents liked receiving the text messages, the app was easy to use, and it was effective. The app has also been updated with new features that I did not use during my research. I used the text message app to send short messages and links, but I can also use the app to send pictures and to receive simple responses from parents. I did not feel comfortable trying out the new photo feature, because I was using my personal phone. I did not want

there to be a chance that I could send out a picture of my family in their pajamas on Christmas morning. I now have classroom iPads that I can use to send the text messages. I will be able to make even better use of this communication format in the future. This method helps me reach parents who are not opening their emails. Usually these messages pop up directly on people's phones, so the text messages are hard to avoid. If I could fit all of the needed information into a text message, this may turn out to be my most effective and efficient method of school-to-home communication.

I will continue to use my class web page as well. However, I want to find out more about how parents are using this form of communication. I will look to gain access to the web page statistics from our website designer. I also want to find ways to make posting information more efficient. This was my most time-consuming type of school-to-home communication and one parent indicated that the web page should be updated more often. Further improving my web page is a topic for potential future action research.

As I first learned in my literature study and confirmed during my action research project, it is necessary to communicate with parents for the benefit of students through a variety of means to fit varying situations and to meet the needs of different families. I learned that not all of my students' parents read my email, not all of the parents subscribed to my text messages, and even fewer parents seemed to visit my class web page. However, all of the parents seemed as though they received needed information in at least one way. That is why it is important for me to continue to use all of these methods and to do so in the most efficient ways possible so that I have planning time for other important aspects of my classroom.

As I became more familiar with the MailChimp email system, the Remind text app, and my class web page, I continued to think of ways I could make all of these communication methods increasingly efficient. In the future, I plan to save time by sharing responsibilities with other teachers on my team. We have divided up tasks in other areas; however, I have taken care of most of the parent-teacher communications because I was administering this study. I also thought I could make the communication process more manageable if I found a way to put all of the same updated information in the email, in the text, and on the web page without having to recreate the data in each format. For instance, posting weekly information on my web page and then sharing the updated page in the email and in the text message each week might help to save time. It would be much easier if I did not have to recreate this information for each mode of communication. Also, I will not be afraid to try new communication methods. Technology continues to be invented and improved, so there will be new avenues of school-to-home communication to be explored and used.

I started off this project looking for ways to make the process of communication with my students' parents more effective and more efficient. While I still believe it is a benefit to be efficient, I am willing to sacrifice some of the efficiency in return for greater effectiveness. During my study, I expected to get more replies to my emails. I only received three replies from parents, and they were all positive responses. I believe the parents felt more at ease and were more satisfied with the school-to-home communication.

I think that the focus to improve parent-teacher communication has made my job less stressful. This is not because I found huge timesaving methods like I originally

thought were important. I learned that the large amount of planning time spent on parent-teacher communication has a dandy payoff as long as it does not take away from my time with students and as long as I am able to properly prepare my classroom environment each week. I do need to be sure I am maintaining a healthy balance. As I learned in my background research, it is not reasonable for me to be available to parents twenty-four hours a day, and it is important for students to be held accountable for an age-appropriate amount of responsibilities (Thomas, 1999). I need to be sure I am not encouraging parents to take on their children's responsibilities with increased communication. I want to be sure I am effectively doing my part so that parents have the necessary information to properly support their children's education at home. I do not mind putting in the effort and time if it means less stress, increased parent satisfaction, and a better education for students are the outcomes.

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Appendix B

Time Spent Preparing Parent Communications

Form of Communication Used:			Communication #:
Date:	Time Started:	Time Completed:	Total Time:
Ideas Communicated:			
Additional Notes:			

Data collection tool created by Germaine DiJohn.

Appendix C



School Communication

Dear Parents,

Completion of these questions is voluntary and confidential. By completing this feedback form, you are giving your consent to participate in this study. Completing this feedback form is completely voluntary and you may quit at any time. Completion of these questions is confidential and no identifiable information is collected.

Sincerely,
Germaine DiJohn

How do you feel about the current frequency of communication from this teacher?

Please choose one.

- I would like to receive more communications
- I would like to receive less communications.
- The frequency of parent-teacher communication that I receive is just right.

Is the communication from this teacher clear and easy to understand?

- yes
- no

Do you feel like you receive all of the information necessary for your child to be successful in this class?

- yes
- no

Have you noticed that this teacher started using MailChimp to format weekly email updates?

Please choose one.

- yes
- no

Do you prefer getting emails that are formatted through MailChimp?

Please choose one.

- Yes, I like the format.
- No, I do not like the format.
- I do not have an opinion about this question.

Have you subscribed to receive text message reminders from this teacher?

- yes
- no

Have these text message reminders been helpful?

Please choose one.

- yes
- no
- I do not have an opinion about this question.

Do you like receiving these text message reminders?

Please choose one.

- yes
- no
- I do not have an opinion about this question.

When visiting your child's web page for this class, do you find the information you are looking for?

Please choose one

- yes
- no
- I do not have an opinion about this question.

Have there been any communications sent through email, our web page, or through text messages that you would have rather received through face-to-face communication or in a phone call?

Use the box below to write your answer.

Please use the space below to share any additional information that may help this classroom teacher improve her school-to-home communication methods.

Submit