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Using Communication to Improve Parental Involvement in the Sixth-Grade Classroom

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Using Communication to Improve Parental Involvement in the Sixth-Grade Classroom

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Northwestern College

An Action Research Project Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Education

Abstract

The purpose of this action research project is to determine the impact of communication on parental engagement and student achievement. Various types of communication were sent home to help initiate parental engagement. During the first communication session, parents had access to a class website that was updated daily. During the second communication session, a weekly newsletter was sent home. In the final communication session, parents received a weekly email outlining what was happening in class and what homework students should be working on. Qualitative data was collected at the end of each communication period to determine parental engagement levels and student achievement based on involvement. Data was collected using an independent, two-sample t-test, where it assumed unequal variances. The test helped determine whether there was a significant difference between families that engaged with the communication and those that did not. Analysis of the data suggests a positive relationship between communication being used to boost parental engagement and student achievement.

Keywords: parental engagement, student achievement, parent-teacher communication, technology, middle school

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Using Communication to Improve Parental Involvement in the Sixth-Grade Classroom

At present, parental engagement at the secondary level is lacking. Very little is done to constantly communicate with parents, creating many situations when parents need to be contacted at the last minute or after an issue has taken place (Murray et al., 2015). After reading more about parental involvement, it has become clear that when parents are aware of what is happening in their child's school and have frequent communication, the child tends to be more successful in school. While involvement can be interpreted in many ways, simply being aware of what is happening in a child's school life, and talking to their student about it, can make a dramatic difference. According to Bachman et al. (2021), to ensure that middle school students are learning at their highest potential, family engagement is a much-needed factor. Helping parents become active participants in their child's education and teaching them how to be supportive tends to become an important role of their teacher (p.109). Opening lines of communication and creating a mutual understanding between families and their child's school builds effective partnerships based on trust (Bachman et al. p.109). While some schools encourage school-based involvement for their parents, simply being aware of school expectations, schoolwork requirements, and establishing a school routine at home, will see higher academic achievement in their students. It is clear that parental involvement, at an awareness level, has many positive benefits, supporting the idea that frequent communication should continue at the middle school and high school level to help foster parent involvement and student academic success.

The problem is, as students move each year through their education, parenteral communication and involvement tend to decline (Flores de Apodaca et al., 2015). When students attend school at the elementary level, teachers go above and beyond to inform and connect

parents with what is happening in the classroom (Flores de Apodaca et al., 2015). Teachers and schools use a variety of methods to communicate, newsletters, social media, apps, and weekly emails, all to ensure that parents are involved in their child's schooling. Often, when students reach the middle school level, it is expected that they begin to take on more responsibility, limiting the communication that is sent home to parents (Murray et al., 2015). Typically, communication is only sent home for major, school-wide activities, leaving parents unaware of what is happening directly in their classrooms unless there are behavior or academic issues. In researching the effects of communication with parents at the middle school level, most studies indicated that communication has a positive effect, but little explained which method of communication was most effective for connecting with parents (Murray et al., 2015 & Flores de Apodaca et al., 2015).

The purpose of this action research study is to determine which method of communication will be most effective for increasing parental involvement and student achievement. The topic of improving parental involvement through communication is an important focus for many schools and educators. Because of the potential decline in work completion/homework at the middle school level and beyond, discovering an ideal method of communication and implementing it in the classroom and across grade levels, might lead to improved work completion/homework, which will hopefully increase student achievement.

An analysis of past research led to this research question: What type of communication would best improve parental involvement in the sixth-grade classroom? The articles used for this research were published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals and reputable sources. These sources were carefully analyzed for pertinent information that supported the assertion that parental communication will lead to increased success for middle school students and for

communication methods that may be best for implementation. The main themes of the research helped identify how frequent communication can lead to improved parental involvement, increased student achievement, better parent/teacher/school relationships, and how technology can play a vital role in making those connections happen.

Review of the Literature

Improved Parental Involvement

One component of parental involvement is school-home communication. This type of involvement attempts to engage parents in becoming active participants in their student's education by informing them of what is happening in their school or classroom. Prior research has established the benefit of parent involvement on children's academic performance as early as preschool (Mendez et al., 2013). Literature suggests that many factors have a significant impact on parental involvement including socioeconomic and cultural factors, effective parenting, and bidirectional communication (Mendez et al., 2013). In researching the effects of positive communication with parents at the middle school level, there were many studies and research that supported the assertion that positive communication had a direct link to improved parental involvement. Presently, literature can define parent involvement in two ways, *at-home*, and *at-school*, this study will focus on improved parental involvement *at-home*, where parent involvement includes discussing school activities, helping with homework, monitoring grades, and work completion (Bennett-Conroy, 2012).

While literature has proven that communication has the potential to increase parental engagement and involvement, Hourii et al. (2019) demonstrated that parental engagement and increased involvement can be achieved with as little as one personalized letter. When parents are directly engaged by their child's teacher or school, they are more likely to become active participants in their child's education. In a similar study that was completed using personalized parent-teacher communication to improve parental involvement in the math classroom, the researcher found that personalized communication yielded such positive results, that parent involvement increased to the point where nearly all participants in the study passed their final

exam and the class; proving that parental involvement is critical to student engagement and achievement (Benson, 2016). The parents in this study engaged with the communication the researcher sent home by having conversations with their students, which in turn led to increased student achievement.

In a study conducted by Bennett-Conroy (2012), a majority of parents interviewed revealed that involvement in their child's education is something that all parents should be doing, and some believe that it is essential that students know that their parents are involved so they understand that they care about their school achievement. When parents actively engage in bidirectional communication, they demonstrate their commitment to their child's education and show their children that they are serious about their schooling and academic success. It is also suggested that when parents are engaged and committed to their student's education it helps not only with student academic success but is also seen as a form of investment in education, which has significant benefits on the national economy (Meier & Lemmer, 2015). Involved parents work to ensure that they are doing all they can to guide them in the right direction, not only in schooling but into adulthood as well.

To further support the benefits of increasing parental involvement in schools and the classroom, a study conducted by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2013) showed that increased parental involvement and engagement due to improved communication between parents/teachers/schools can also have a positive impact on a students' ability to self-regulate, their self-esteem, their self-perception of their academic ability, and has been known to help with the factors that can lead to depression; which only further emphasizes the benefits of using communication to engage parental interest in their student's schooling. The study further outlines that these impacts positively influence improved classroom environments that have an impact on all students, not

just those who have parents actively engaged. It has been suggested that teachers underestimate how willing parents may be to be involved in their child's schooling and that if they just reach out and clearly communicate steps for involvement, they might be surprised at how quickly involvement improves (Bennett-Conroy, 2012).

Increased Student Achievement

Student achievement often goes hand in hand with parental involvement. For many decades now, parent involvement has been viewed by the educational community as an essential way to enhance academic achievement in students of all socioeconomic backgrounds and races, most specifically low-income children of color (Alameda-Lawson, 2014). In a study conducted by Houry et al. in 2019, a total of 25 students and their parents each received one personalized letter provided by their child's teacher via e-mail and mail that expressed the teacher's strong belief in the student's current academic achievement and encouragement for future success. The use of this intervention demonstrated an increase in parental behavior and engagement for the majority of parents involved, and their engagement positively correlated with changes in student behaviors and academic achievement. Based on their findings, when communication is done right, and parents feel connected to their student's school and classroom, improved student achievement, and positive behavioral outcomes are often the result (Houry et al., 2019). Additionally, empowering parents with useful and prompt information afford them the opportunity to actively foster home engagement that will positively influence student achievement (Bergman & Rogers, 2016). The more *at-home* engagement that communication can encourage, the more learning and academic success in the classroom there will be.

In Benson's (2016) research study, his weekly personalized communication yielded positive results on academic success, so much so that during the 2013–2014 and 2014–2015

school years, 100% of the geometry students and approximately 95% of the algebra students passed the final exam. By simply sending a weekly personalized email home, nearly all students passed the class. However, he did note that communication alone is not always 100% effective and that sometimes other interventions need to be paired with the communication such as teaching parents how to access the online grading portal and adding signatures on assignments/work (Benson, 2016). Additionally, it was suggested that even if parents did not actively have conversations with their students about their classwork, just having students know that their parents were being contacted seemed to have an impact, too.

A second study by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2013) further stressed the immense impact parental involvement can have on student achievement, while also uncovering the positive impact it can have on a student's mental health. By identifying which types of parental involvement are most effective for high school students they were able to conclude that *at-home* parental involvement in 10th grade improved not only academics but also emotional functioning among adolescents in 10th grade and above (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013). Likewise, the results found that when there is more home-based involvement and academic socialization, academic achievement increases, whereas school-based involvement had the opposite effect on academic achievement- further proving the advantages of bidirectional communication amongst all grades (Wang and Sheikh-Khalil, 2013). Because emotional function plays a significant role in student success, using communication to foster improved mental health is a benefit to all students.

Beyond communication improving mental health, it also positively correlates to quality relationships with students who have Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder or are on the Autism spectrum. According to Garbacz et al., (2016), children that are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder often have far greater needs that require home and school-based services that

cannot be properly carried out without critical communication between teachers and parents. These students, as well as those with ADHD, however, often have complex relationships due to the challenges that can be presented when working with children who have additional needs (Mautone et al., 2015). Mautone et al. (2015) demonstrated in their study that parents and students with ADHD both connect positive communication to their school and academic success, especially when it comes to work completion and increased organizational skills. To ensure that these students are being given the greatest advantage in class, frequent and intentional communication is needed to create those positive effects.

Improved Parent/Teacher/School Relationships

In addition to communication fostering promising student achievement and parental engagement, it also helps create positive relationships between schools and families and helps build trust. Many studies and disciplines have shown that common everyday relationships have a positive correlation with trust and future potential and outcomes (Ekick, 2014). While trust can be measured in many ways, it often pertains to the overall quality of the relationship between parent and teacher (Wang et al., 2014). In a study conducted in 2014 by Froiland & Davison, there was substantial evidence to support the idea that students who have parents that believe they have a trusting relationship with their student's teacher or school, tend to have high academic success through their educational years. Parents who report high levels of trust with their child's teachers are more likely to be involved in school and related programs and events. To achieve this level of trust, home-school communication is particularly important both for promoting positive parent-teacher relationships and enhancing student academic success (Hourii et al., 2019). Essentially, when students have parents who are both trusting of the school system and their student's teacher and are engaged and involved in their student's educational success,

have students with better academic and behavioral achievements as compared to students of parents with low trust and engagement (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

Today, it can be particularly challenging for schools to build trust with families and their communities. With schools often being viewed negatively, families are not always trusting of schools, teachers, and the education that their students will receive (Sheninger & Murray, 2017). To help negate their skepticism, teachers and school leaders must ensure that they are doing their best to create positive relationships to foster a trusting and safe environment. In Hourri et al. (2019), and Benson (2016), both studies show that parental engagement and increased involvement can be achieved with as little as one personalized letter. Their ability to create a personalized relationship with their students' families appears to be an essential ingredient to establishing a meaningful, trusting relationship that encourages active parental engagement in their child's school. This personalization not only created trust between parents and the school but also between them and their students, too. By sending parents personalized communication it demonstrated to students that their teacher genuinely cared about their education, had high expectations for them, and wanted them to succeed (Hourri et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, this is not always true for students of all socioeconomic backgrounds and races. For minority groups, it is not only prenatal relationships that foster trust but community relationships, too (Alameda-Lawson, 2014). Creating a strong relationship with minority communities further impacts a child's academic success and empowers parents to become active participants in their school community (Alameda-Lawson, 2014). Schools often work hard to ensure that student families are aware of vital information happening in this district, this includes grading practices, assessment results, and the latest programs and initiatives. This information, however, is not always shared beyond the school community, leaving community members

without students in the dark (Sheninger & Murray, 2017). While districts may not always believe that the community at large needs to be notified of what is happening in the schools, when community members learn information from a secondhand source or have to seek out information on their own, it is not guaranteed that the information will be accurate and distrust and disconnect can easily occur (Sheninger & Murray, 2017). To eliminate miscommunication and potential distrust, having a good relationship with the local news, and sharing essential information on websites and social media can ensure that all community members have access to information and are getting it directly from the source.

Using Technology to Create Connections

Establishing strong relationships and parental involvement can be challenging without the right form of communication. Schueler et al. (2017), examined this topic; trying to determine which barriers parents feel prevent them from being actively engaged. Of the many barriers parents discussed, communication was a common one among all demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds (Schueler et al., 2017). In trying to reduce communication barriers, digital communication platforms have become an essential tool for schools and teachers. Findings indicate that most families have internet access, and that parents and teachers are comfortable using digital tools to communicate (Laho, 2019). Because technology has become an effective and socially acceptable means of communication, email, websites, and other communication-based apps have become a favorite for teachers and parents alike (Olmstead, 2013). In a study conducted by Olmstead (2013), it was discovered that when teachers choose the right type of method to deliver information to parents, it helps promote parent involvement. Palts and Kalmus (2015), conducted a group of interviews with both parents and teachers that revealed that digital communication between school and home is important for not only parental

involvement, but student academic progress as well. As Ramirez (2001) points out, digital forms of communication allow for information to be shared quickly and for parents to have immediate access to student progress and academic feedback. Additionally, digital communication helps increase teacher-parent interaction, making the teacher easily accessible for parents, which helps promote positive relationships.

To help address the communication issues that hinder many parents from being involved in their children's academics, digital forms of communication have become the norm. Digital or electronic communication methods can include email, class websites or social media sites, voice-calling systems, school parent portals, apps, and more (Olmstead, 2013). Because parents of middle school children are more concerned about their children's education than parents of elementary school children, finding the right communication method is essential (Otani, 2019). In Chena and Chena (2015), it was found that when parents do not find the method of communication to be useful, it becomes more of a deterrent for parents. The study further suggests that when using technology or digital platforms to communicate, intention becomes just as important as finding the right platform or delivery method. Many studies have been conducted to help determine which methods are most effective and efficient for reaching and maintaining engagement with parents.

One popular method of communication is parental portals. Parent portals as a means of communication provide a valuable comprehensive approach for locating resources and information (Laho, 2019). These are often used within an entire district and offer parents the ability to view their student's grades, work completion, and attendance records. These systems have many benefits, as they provide immediate access to parents, can be personalized to notify parents when grades have been updated, and are associated with a lower percentage of course

failures (Abele Mac Iver et al., 2021). Additionally, when parents have access to their student's grades, missing assignments, and personalized teacher comments, studies have shown that there are significant benefits for low-income and minority students, especially in the areas of student achievement and parental engagement (Bergman & Rogers, 2016). Furthermore, their findings revealed that when parents feel empowered and are provided information promptly, it has a greater impact on student achievement and outcomes.

Despite the overwhelming benefits of this communication method, Abele Mac Iver et al. (2021) explained in their study that these systems often lack participation, especially when parents are required to sign up or join themselves. The study also found that participation was particularly low for underserved non-white families, especially those who lived in non-English speaking homes, signifying that it is not always the best system of communication to engage parents. Bergman and Rogers (2016) go on to suggest that when parents are automatically enrolled in these programs, and an opportunity to opt-out is available, participation is higher and student outcomes and achievement is significantly improved.

In addition to parent portals, websites, automatic phone calling systems, and e-portfolios provide essential communication with parents in a frequent manner consistent with establishing strong interaction and engagement with parents (Sad et al., 2016). Websites and automatic phone calling systems give parents quick access to valuable information in a direct means. Websites can be updated by teachers and districts at any time, and parents have the ability to access them freely, whereas automatic phone calling systems directly reach out to parents to communicate essential information. In a survey conducted by Higgins and Cherrington (2017), e-portfolios provide parents with the most engagement, specifically when it comes to providing parents with insight into what their children are doing in class. The survey further showed that most parents

and teachers surveyed believed that e-portfolios as a form of communication helped strengthen parent-teacher relationships, as they felt the communication was more personalized (Higgins & Cherrington, 2017). With each of these systems, however, like before, they each come with their limitations (Gu, 2017). School and teacher websites are often only constructed in one language, preventing minority families from accessing it, and those without access to a phone are also left out. Additionally, while e-portfolios provide parents a personalized connection to what their children are doing in class, it is limited when it comes to providing a deeper connection to their children's progress including grades, feedback for improvement, and areas of future study (Higgins & Cherrington, 2017).

In the end, despite the many varieties of electronic communication Sad et al. (2016) found that parents still mostly prefer to communicate with their child's teacher and school through telephone, email, or social media. Although new tools are available, more traditional resources like email and phones continue to be used most frequently for bidirectional communication (Laho, 2019). It is suggested that schools and teachers provide a quick voice or annual surveys to determine the most effective and preferred method of communication for parents. The goal of the survey is to hopefully to find a method that improves parental engagement and student achievement (Meier & Lemmer, 2015).

Methodology

The purpose of this proposed action research study was to determine ways to improve sixth-grade parental involvement through communication. In looking at ways to improve student achievement through communication, two major questions come to mind-

1. What type of communication will lead to the best parent engagement?
 - Website
 - Newsletter
 - Email
2. Which form of communication will help boost student engagement and achievement?

To help answer these questions, an action research study was conducted to determine the impacts of different communication styles on parent involvement and student achievement. Using three diverse types of communication as the variable- class website, weekly newsletter, and weekly email- the researcher tried to determine which mode of communication was most effective at engaging parents in their child's schooling, while simultaneously boosting student achievement.

Independent/Dependent Variables

The independent variables in this study relate to the types of communication being sent home to parents (website, newsletter, or email). This research was conducted throughout part of the first semester of the 2021-2022 school year. The dependent variables for this action research project include parental engagement, as well as student engagement and achievement. This includes student outcomes related to work completion; both in-class work and work that students are required to complete at home and return to school the next day.

Research Setting and Participants

This action research project was conducted within the researcher's own school and classroom. This suburban district is located in a heavily populated area of southwest Iowa. The current population of this community has nearly 13.9% at or below the national poverty level; 2.1% higher than the national average (Public School Review, 2021). Prior to the 2019-2020 school year, nearly 55% of all students qualified for free or reduced lunch, but due to the Community Eligibility Provision, a program that allows students to eat free funded by the USDA, all students now receive free lunch (Johnson, 2019). Currently, the school has a minority enrollment rate of 23% (mostly Hispanic) and is ranked in the bottom 50% in IA for standardized testing (Public School Review, 2021). Additionally, due to a generous partnership with Google, the district is a one-to-one district, and all students, K-12, have a personal Chromebook.

This action research project took place in one of the two middle schools in this district, which serves 6th-8th grade students. This middle school is located on the eastern side of the city, which is considered to have higher family income levels than other parts of the city. The participants in this research were the researcher's own 6th-grade ELA students and their parents. The researcher teaches four periods of mixed ability English/Language Arts classes, two of which are co-taught, which contain a total of 97 students (44 boys and 47 girls).

Data Collection

Data for this action research project is largely quantitative. The independent variable for this project was the diverse types of communication that were sent home. Those forms of communication include updating the class website each day, sending home a weekly newsletter, and emailing home a newsletter once a week. The data that was collected from this communication was quantitative, as information was collected on how many times parents responded to the communication. This communication could have been through phone calls,

email, or written notes. Data was collected continuously throughout each communication session and totaled at the end of each session. The first session was from Tuesday, September 7th to Sunday, September 26th. The second was from Monday, September 27th to Sunday, October 17th. The last session was from Monday, October 18th to Sunday, November 7th. Because of the estimated small numbers, a simple tally system was utilized as the main collection tool and was housed in an Excel spreadsheet to easily keep track. When students had a parent engage with the communication, their name would be highlighted and included in the session tally. To analyze the data, the researcher looked at the numbers and compared each communication session to see which yielded the highest response. The communication method that had the most parental responses helped answer the research question about which communication type leads to the best results.

The dependent variable for this action research project is the student outcomes related to work completion. This includes both in-class work and work that students are required to complete at home and return to school the next day. This data is also quantitative- as it includes average grades from each communication session. For the collection of this quantitative data, an Independent Sample *t*-Test was run to determine if students who had parents engage with the communication had better outcomes than students who did not have parents directly communicate with the teacher regarding the communication sent home. Group averages were calculated at the end of each communication session to see if averages increase, or decrease depending on the communication method and then also used to compare work completion rates and averages against the group of students that had parents engage with the communication. The data for the Independent Sample *t*-Test was collected using an Excel spreadsheet and housed on a dual-layered, password-protected computer.

IRB Exemption

In reviewing the federal policy regarding human subjects being used in research, the researcher determined that this action research study would be considered exempt. According to section 46.104 regarding exempt research, research conducted in common educational settings where normal educational practices are taking place, and where there the research does not adversely impact students nor their opportunity to learn, are exempt from needing to complete a full IRB form. This action research study was predominantly based on observation of public behavior and work completion rates, suggesting that no personal information regarding students or their parents would be recorded. Additionally, at no time were students placed at risk of harm. An IRB exemption form was submitted to Northwestern's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for consideration and was granted approval on September 9th, 2021.

Findings

Data Analysis

An independent, two-sample *t*-test, where it assumed unequal variances was conducted during this communication session to determine whether there was a significant difference between families that engaged with the communication and those that did not. During the first communication session, parents were given access to the class website where they could see what was happening each day in class. During that three-week window, only four parents reached out regarding expectations for classwork or had questions or concerns about what was happening in class. The work completion rate for students with engaged parents was 95% (19/20 assignments completed and turned in), with an average grade of 3.7 or 93% ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.29$). Compared to the students who did not have parents actively engaged with the communication, the work completion rate was 86% (423/490 assignments completed and turned in) with an overall average grade of 3.2 or 79% ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.92$). Based on the results of the independent samples two-tailed *t*-test the difference between the two groups is insignificant, $t(97) = -2.52$, $p > .086$, stating that this communication type had little to no influence on students and their achievement, largely because only four parents engaged with the communication. However, based on the averages of work completion, the parents who actively engage with the daily updated website and reach out with clarifying questions had students with better achievement in class.

During the second communication period, where physical newsletters were sent home with students each week, 10 parents engaged with the communication and reached out with questions or concerns about the work their student was required to complete. Of those 10 parents, three were parents that had previously reached out, indicating that only seven of these

parents were newly engaged parents. Another two-sample *t*-test was conducted during this communication session to determine whether there was a significant difference between families that engaged with the communication and those that did not. The same criteria were used as the first session, only this time, the communication was different. During this three-week period, the average work completion rate for students that had actively engaged parents was 97% (68/70 assignments completed and turned in), with an average grade of 3.2 or 81% ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.45$). Compared to the students who did not have parents actively engaged with the communication, the work completion rate was 80% (500/623 assignments completed and turned in) with an overall average grade of 2.5 or 61% ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.03$). Unlike the first communication session, the two-sample *t*-test data showed a significant difference $t(97) = -3.80$, $p < .001$. Based on this data, parents who are actively engaged with the communication sent home and have reached out with clarifying questions, have students with better achievement in class. Additionally, because more parents were actively engaged in their student's education in the second communication session, it is reasonable to claim that physical newsletters are a better communication method for reaching parents.

In the last and final communication session, where weekly email communication was sent home to parents, 23 parents engaged with the communication and reached out with questions or concerns about the work their student was required to complete. Of those 23 parents, 9 were parents that had previously reached out, indicating that 14 new parents were newly engaged. A final two-sample *t*-test was conducted during this communication session to determine whether there was a significant difference between families that engaged with the communication and those that did not. The same criteria were used as the first and second sessions, again using a different method of communication. During this three-week period, the

average work completion rate for students that had actively engaged parents was 84% (155/184 assignments completed and turned in), with an average grade of 2.7 or 67% ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.98$). Compared to the students who did not have parents actively engaged with the communication, the work completion rate was 72% (432/600 assignments completed and turned in) with an overall average grade of 2.1 or 57% ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 0.97$). Unlike the first communication session, the two-sample t-test data showed a mildly significant difference $t(97) = -2.09$, $p < 0.04$. As previously discovered with the other communication sessions, parents who are actively engaged with the communication sent home and have reached out with clarifying questions, have students with better achievement in class. Furthermore, because email communication garnered the most direct engagement from parents, it is by far the most effective form of communication used out of the three.

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

Based on the results of the independent samples two-tailed *t*-test, bidirectional communication between teachers and parents has a significant impact on student achievement and work completion. With all three communication sessions, the sample of students that had parents who actively engaged with the communication (website, newsletters, and email) had an overall higher average of achievement and work completion. Additionally, based on the parental response to the communication, weekly email updates were the most effective form of communication used. Email communication helps foster positive relationships and trust, promotes engagement from parents, and positively impacts work completion rates and student academic achievement.

Limitations of the Study

The goal of this research project is to use communication to increase parent participation and student achievement. Because some of the data collected in this study was gathered from parent participants, it is important to point out that the demographics of the participants could vary in range. Those that choose to respond could have different socioeconomic statuses, education, age, race, and gender. These factors could possibly influence those that choose to respond to the communication and those who become more involved in their child's schooling. Realistically, there is nothing to be done to limit these variables, and as a researcher, it could be interesting to see what influence parental demographics have on the study.

Additionally, each student participant in this research study also has their own experiences, background, and personality that will factor into the data for student achievement. Some students are more welcoming to parental involvement, while others might reject their

parents being interested or involved in their school life. While the intention is for parental involvement to have a positive effect on this study, it is possible that it could have a negative effect on some students, affecting their behavior and work completion rates. To help eliminate this potential limitation, it could be necessary to include possible conversation starters for parents wanting to have positive conversations with their students about school and their schoolwork.

Lastly, because the research only takes place during the first semester of school, the results of this study may not be complete. A more comprehensive understanding of how communication can impact parental involvement and student achievement would need more than one semester to be fully understood. Typically, the second semester of the school year sees the greatest decline in student work completion, so it would ideally be more beneficial to continue the research further into the school year.

Further Study

Moving forward, it would be beneficial to take a closer look at how demographics and socioeconomic status play a role in engagement, and if a specific type of communication works better for engaging parents and creating involvement. Additionally, providing longer communication sessions, and carrying the study into the second half of the year would provide a more holistic understanding of the effects of communication and how it can impact parental engagement and student achievement.

Conclusion

This action research study investigated the associations between communication and parental involvement and student achievement. Various communication sessions were completed in the 6th grade setting to see which forms of communication worked best for boosting parental involvement. The results showed that of the three communication methods that were used with parents, website, newsletter, and email, parental engagement was highest when weekly emails were sent home to parents regarding what was happening in class and any work that needed to be completed. Additionally, in all three communication sessions, the students who had parents that were actively engaged with the communication, on average, had better work completion rates and higher scores on their work. This study mainly focused on addressing the gaps in the literature on which communication method is most effective for reaching parents. The results of the study suggest that the communication method that has the biggest impact on parental engagement and student achievement is email. When used frequently to communicate, parental involvement increases, thus improving engagement and student academic success.

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