Program evaluation of home-based parental involvement and school communication at a rural Oregon charter school

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Abstract

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Keywords: charter school, parent-school communication, parent satisfaction, parental involvement
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Program Evaluation of Home-Based Parental Involvement and School Communication at a Rural Oregon Charter School

Early educational experiences are extremely valuable; they set the learning trajectory for the child that will affect their entire educational career. It is a widely held belief that parental involvement has considerable influence on early educational experiences, academic achievement, cognitive and social-emotional development, aids in the formation of parent-child relationships, and reinforces community efforts in raising and caring for children (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, & Ochoa, 2002). Research has consistently shown that parental involvement in education is crucial for increasing student academic achievement (Epstein, 1988, 1995; Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Fantuzzo, Perry, & Childs, 2006; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Ritblatt et al., 2002).

As of late, parental involvement and educational policy have been closely connected in attempts to boost student academic achievement (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; National PTA, 2011; U.S. Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2007; US Department of Education (ED), 2010).

Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) conducted a case study regarding parent and teacher responses about parent involvement policies. They found the policies were based on normative assumptions about families and their resources. In addition, few policies took into account that schools in low-income communities required additional funding to be able to provide the same advantages middle-class children received at home. Moreover, tensions were evident between teachers, schools, and parents because parents felt ambivalent about the nature, type, and expectations of their involvement. Parents reported feeling that schools now expect them to pick
up the slack for the lack of funding they are receiving. It was identified that in-school involvement is gendered and classed. Specifically, middle-class parents with the economic resources and job flexibility were more likely to respond positively to policies advocating parental involvement.

Educators and researchers have spent considerable time examining parental involvement because it was recognized as a vital component of early childhood education (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2011; Epstein, 1988, 1995; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Herrold & Mulligan, n.d.; Lee & Bowen, 2006; McWayne, Campos, & Owsianik, 2008; National PTA, 2011; Seginer, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Parental involvement has been found to be a key protective factor in low-income, ethnic minority children and youth (Hohlfeld, Ritzhaupt, & Barron, 2010; Jeynes, 2003; McWayne et al., 2008; Parcel, Dufur, & Cornell Zito, 2010).

Research has indicated that on average, parents with higher levels of education and income are more involved (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000; Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000). Children with more access to books tend to be more successful academically than students in homes with fewer than 100 books (Liu & Whitford, 2010). All these variables are important parent involvement factors, however, the strongest predictors of student academic achievement are the parents’ expectations and aspirations for their child (Hill, 2012; Hong, Yoo, You, & Wu, 2010), their mindset about their child’s ability (Moorman & Pomerantz, 2010), and their motivational style (Gottfried, Marcoulides, Gottfried, & Oliver, 2009).

Parcel et al. (2010) proposed that parental involvement at school understated the extent that resources from families and schools should work together to better support the child’s academic and social outcomes. They discussed how financial capital provided the foundation for
family financial support. Higher parental education positively affected the home environment, which is beneficial for the child’s behavioral and academic outcomes. Therefore, at-school involvement is more important for low-socioeconomic (SES) parents than it is for high-SES parents (Parcel et al., 2010), however, low-SES parents were less engaged with the school (i.e., volunteering, parent-teacher association (PTA) membership, and helping with homework).

Hong et al. (2010) compared the longitudinal associations between parental involvement (i.e., mathematics value and academic reinforcement) and high school students’ mathematics achievement. They found parental reinforcement of academics had no effect on math achievement; however, they found parental value of math was positively related to students’ math achievement. The results supported the hypothesis that parental involvement is multidimensional and has a domain specific effect (i.e., influences only math or reading).

Moorman and Pomerantz (2010) examined parental mindset about their child’s academic achievement. They sought to identify the influence of the two mindsets (entity and incremental) on the quality of the parent’s involvement in children’s learning. A parent with an entity mindset believed ability is relatively fixed and resistant to change, this resulted in helplessness – dampened persistence, ineffective strategy use and heightened negative affect. Whereas, a parent with an incremental mindset believed the child’s ability was malleable and associated with mastery-oriented responses to challenge. The authors found that mothers with an entity mindset displayed higher levels of unconstructive involvement (i.e., more performance-oriented teaching, heightened control, more affectively negative) than did mothers with an incremental mindset. This research is important in parental involvement research because it showed that the quality of involvement is more important than simply being involved.
Liu and Whitford (2010) examined the relationship between the opportunity to learn at home and the student’s attainment in science. The authors found that students who did not reach science proficiency had fewer than 100 books at home, participated in large groups, small groups, one-to-one, or out-of-school lessons with their teacher or other teachers. Students that met science competency had the following profiles:

- More than 100 books at home
- Did not participate in out-of-school instruction with teachers
- Parents had higher educational levels
- There was access to a computer and internet at home
- Parents spent at least 1 hour a week helping with homework
- A father/stepfather lived with the child
- Less than 1 hour per day was spent watching television or playing video games
- English was the primary language spoken at home.

Again, it was found that parent expectation and aspiration for their child was related to student academic success. They also found the availability of home resources (i.e., books, parent’s ability to assist with schoolwork, educational support, etc.) were related to student’s academic success. The results indicated teachers needed to raise their awareness of the importance of home opportunity to learn variables.

Gottfried et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal study of parental motivational practices from elementary school through high school and the relationship to math and science academic intrinsic motivation. They found parents’ task-intrinsic and task-extrinsic motivations to be differentially related to math- and science-intrinsic motivation for the student. Task-intrinsic motivation was found to be most beneficial, whereas task-extrinsic motivation was adverse.
These results about parental motivational practices are generalizable across math and science motivation.

Although there is a considerable amount of research about parent involvement, there are large gaps in the body of knowledge and the term ‘parent involvement’ is not well defined. The multiple definitions and interpretations of parent involvement range from home-based to school-based activities. Hill (2012) defined parental involvement as parents’ interactions with schools and their children to promote academic success, and these interactions extend beyond simply engaging at school but also engagement at home, expectations, and educational values parents communicate directly and indirectly to children. Kohl et al. (2000) defined parental involvement as three areas: direct contact with teachers, parental actions at school and parental action at home.

Nonetheless, what these multiple definitions and interpretations illustrate is that parent involvement is multidimensional. Epstein (1995) noted six types of family and community involvement (parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) described parental involvement as home-based activities related to learning and school-based involvement. Whereas, Bronfenbrenner (1986) viewed parental involvement as a multidimensional concept that viewed the family system as the most important influence on a child’s development, stating that parents can either promote or hinder child development. He proposed that factors such as parental home involvement and expectations were not influenced by at-school involvement.

Models of Parent Involvement

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1995) model of parental involvement is comprised of multiple levels involving home-based and school-based involvement domains. Primarily they
categorized parental involvement into two domains: home-based and school-based involvement. Home-based involvement includes anything related to the child’s learning for school (e.g., parents reviewing the child’s work, monitoring child progress, helping with homework, discussing school events or course issues with child, providing enrichment activities related to school success and talking with teachers). School-based involvement entails any activity held at the school (e.g., going on field trips, volunteering, going to conferences, and serving on the parent-teacher advisory board). They took their model a step further by attempting to explain the decision process a parent goes through when choosing how to become involved. They proposed parents’ basic involvement decisions to be influenced by numerous variables such as the parents’ view of their parental role, parents’ sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school, and the parents’ general choices of involvement forms. Their model of parent involvement included five levels and demonstrated that specific variables create patterns of influence at critical points in the parental involvement process.

- **Level one:** What parent’s basic involvement decision is influenced by (e.g., parent’s construction of the parental role, parent’s sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school)
- **Level two:** Parent’s choice of type of involvement (e.g., specific domain of parent’s skill and knowledge, mix of demands on total parental time and energy)
- **Level three:** The major mechanisms through which parental involvement influences educational and related developmental outcomes in children (e.g., modeling, reinforcement, instruction)
• Level four: The major mediating variables that enhance or diminish the influence of involvement (e.g., parent’s use of developmentally appropriate involvement strategies)

• Level five: The major outcomes for child learning (e.g., skills and knowledge, personal sense of efficacy for doing well in school)

Epstein’s (1988) model of successful parent-school partnerships involved five types of parental involvement: obligations of parents, obligations of schools, involvement at school, involvement at home, and involvement in decision making. In 1992, Epstein defined a sixth type of involvement, collaboration with community organizations. These six types of involvement develop successful family-school-community relationships. Basic obligations of parents entail parent and caregiver obligation to provide safe, healthy home environments. Schools can aid parents with this by offering free workshops or presentations about parenting, health, and safety (Epstein, 1988).

Why Do Parents Become Involved?

An important question to ask is “why do parents become involved in their child’s education?” Parents choose to become involved due to implicit and explicit reasons. If parents are explicitly reflective, they are aware and active in relation to their decision about being involved in their child’s education. A parent’s attitude about their role in education and their sense of efficacy effect their level of involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) such that some parents’ views range from perceiving their roles solely as caregivers to regarding themselves as equal active partners with the school.

Cultural factors (i.e., parent’s idea about children’s learning) need to be considered in order to increase their involvement. Additionally, parental demographic variables such as SES,
education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), and family structure affect parental influence. McWayne et al. (2008) found that among culturally diverse families of head start students, parent gender and satisfaction with the school contact were the most salient predictors of involvement.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) found three major constructs central to parental involvement: parent’s role construction, parent’s sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed academically, and general invitations, demands, and opportunities for involvement. No matter how well designed school programs are they will always have limited success if issues of parental role construction and parental sense of efficacy are not addressed (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). According to their model, parents become involved because their parental role construction includes involvement, because they have a positive sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school and because they receive general opportunities and invitations from the school and their children for involvement. The authors posed parents high in these areas will likely find school efforts and invitations helpful but not essential to useful participation. However, parents that are low in these areas are likely to benefit from school efforts and invitations. They also suggested that the social construction of parental roles be created collaboratively between schools, teachers, and parents, so that everyone involved has a say in the expectations for the parent’s role in their child’s schooling. In addition, schools and teachers should be enabled to spend time interacting with parents, and employers should be encouraged to allow more flexibility in work hours for parents to spend (limited) time at the school to talk with teachers, pick up homework or simply observe their child at school. Overall, they suggest that schools that wish to increase parental involvement must focus on the parent’s perspective in the process, because the most effective efforts to improve involvement incorporate invitations that support and build a parent’s role construction and their sense of efficacy.
Ritblatt et al. (2002) examined the variables that facilitate or hinder parental involvement by developing a questionnaire exploring parental beliefs about their role and factors that hinder their involvement. The authors examined three different areas: (a) development of a questionnaire to identify parents’ perceived beliefs about factors that hinder or facilitate their involvement in their child’s education; (b) amount of time parents spent doing various activities, and (c) analyze differences in parents’ beliefs and time spent in involvement in education with demographic factors considered. Parents perceived four factors as relevant to their level of parental involvement in education: (a) communication between schools and parents, (b) sensitivity of school personnel to parents, (c) familiarity of parents with the school and of teacher and administrators with the parents and their cultural and physical environment, and (d) mutual support of schools and parents for each other. Their finding suggested that only 5-6% of parents held leadership roles at school, and a majority of parents were more involved at home, than they were at school with education. The authors found that sensitivity and support factors were significantly correlated with the total amount of time spent in involvement activities. Therefore, if schools wish to increase involvement in school issues, schools need to promote a more inviting atmosphere, and teachers and staff need to be trained to be sensitive to parents’ needs. Interestingly they found no significant correlation between the amount of time spent on homework and any of the four involvement factors. Their findings suggested parents preferred to invest their social capital in spending more time helping their child with homework and supervising the educational attainment of their child at home because they expected their involvement will increase their child’s educational attainment (Ritblatt et al., 2002).
Barriers to Parent Involvement

Parental involvement has many positive influences on a child’s early education and academic standing. However, there are multiple barriers to parental involvement with the most significant barriers being conflicting schedules (time), feeling unwelcomed or unappreciated. There are multiple problems with getting parents involved. The school day is during the same time that many parents work -- it is thought that the amount of time parent’s work outside the home can hinder academic achievement (Parcel et al., 2010). Many households are composed of single parents, and the noncustodial or joint custodial parents are often left out of the loop. Employed fathers, for example, tend to work longer hours, commute farther, and tend to be less likely to utilize workplace flexibility than employed mothers (Barnett & Gareis, 2008). Additionally, parental role constructions, sense of efficacy with helping their children, and language or educational barriers add to the difficulty with increasing parental involvement. Negative experiences with the school system inhibit parents from getting involved at school (Ritblatt et al., 2002).

School Communication

Effective communication between schools and families is a key component in parent involvement because it is essential for building trusting relationships (Rogers & Wright, 2008). There have been multiple studies investigating communication; however, it was rarely examined in terms of any explicit model. Schools’ obligations include communicating regularly with parents to keep all parents informed about school programs and their child’s progress. With technology, schools can inform parents of school-sponsored events helping parents facilitate their basic obligations; schools also communicate with parents through traditional methods of newsletters, notes, and telephone calls. Home-school communication is an important factor in
student academic success, however, factors such as time for both the parent (especially working parents) and the teacher can interfere with the desired quantity and quality of parent-teacher interactions.

Rogers and Wright (2008) found that parents and teachers were not taking full advantage of technology. By not fully utilizing technology, schools, teachers, and parents were not bridging the communication gap or building the quality school-family relationships, they could have. Schools could enhance parental involvement through increased communications through e-mail, enhanced school websites, electronic newsletters, allowing parents to access student data online, and checking out laptops to families in need (Furger, Rob, & Furg, 2006). Teachers and parents have professional and home responsibilities that mitigate timely communication, and children may interfere with traditional forms of communication by losing, forgetting or hiding written messages sent between school and parent.

Parents and schools alike should seek ways to increase the quality and quantity of communication. When parents have complete information about school activities, it increases the parents’ ability to assist their children (Rogers & Wright, 2008). Teachers are also better able to help children if they have a complete understanding of the child’s home experience. When teachers and parents communicate it fosters parental involvement, which positively influences academic success (Epstein, 2005) and technology such as cell phones, e-mail, and websites allow for increased communication among parents, teachers, schools and the community (Rogers & Wright, 2008).

Traditional communication with parents has been through parent-teacher conferences, report cards, phone calls between the parent and teacher, handwritten notes or emails between parents and teacher, memos or fliers from the school or teacher, and parent’s signatures on
homework, books, or tests (Cameron & Lee, 1997). Although traditional communication methods are effective, they are often time consuming for parents and teachers (Rogers & Wright, 2008) and costly for the school. Some parents may find certain modes of communication challenging because previous experiences with the school have been unfavorable or certain custody situations make it difficult for each parent to obtain the same information in a timely manner. Therefore, using school websites can effectively facilitate parental involvement by keeping parents informed about homework and important school dates (Rogers & Wright, 2008).

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**Measuring Parent Involvement**

With varying definitions of parental involvement, it is difficult to operationalize the concept and create a uniform measurement that will effectively capture the multiple dimensions of parental involvement. Therefore, parent involvement measures are typically unidirectional and only ask about specific parent activities, such as the amount of time spent volunteering. This unidirectional approach does not capture the nature and level of exchange between teacher and parent (Fantuzzo et al., 2000).

There is an abundance of research focused on parent involvement in school outreach and school-based activities (e.g., volunteering, attending Parent-Teacher Association or Organization meetings, going on field trips, etc.). However, recent research demonstrates no significant association between school outreach (at-school involvement) and parental involvement at home.
or parental expectations (Fantuzzo et al., 2004, 2000; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). Therefore, it is important to modify our thinking and measurement of parent involvement to a concept that encompasses school-based activities, home-based activities and community-based activities that encourage learning, as well as activities that reflect transactional experiences between home and school and between school and community (McWayne et al., 2008).

Fantuzzo et al. (2000) developed and validated a multivariate scale of family involvement. The authors administered the scale to urban students in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade. Factor-analyses revealed three involvement constructs: school-based involvement, home-school conferencing, and home-based involvement. Multivariate analyses of demographic and program differences of the constructs showed the higher a parent’s education the more the parents were involved at school and at home. In addition, two parent families had higher rates of home-school conferencing and home-based involvement than single parent households did. Lastly, the authors found increased school-based contact was not associated with higher levels of home-school conferencing and home-based involvement.

Galindo and Sheldon (2011) used an ecological and sociological view and prior research on family involvement to guide their examination of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) database. They examined how schools’ outreach to families was associated with three indicators of family involvement – involvement at home, involvement at school, and parent’s educational expectations. Then they examined the relationship of family involvement to students’ math and reading gain between fall and spring of kindergarten. Lastly, school outreach and its relationship to children’s achievement gains were examined to explore family involvement as a mediating factor. Their findings supported the theoretical assumption that achievement is interconnected with home and school involvement. They found higher rates
of in-school parent involvement in schools with higher rates of outreach. However, in-school involvement did not result in higher rates of at-home involvement or high parental expectations, but it did show that when schools use planned activities that increase school and teacher communication and connections with parents, in-school involvement increased. Regarding family involvement and the relationship to math and reading achievement, the authors found students with parents that reported higher levels of involvement and educational expectations, had higher achievement gains from fall to spring. They did not find home- or school-involvement to have stronger effects on learning, although their study could not determine the extent to which involvement at home was related to children’s achievement gains. The authors emphasized neither students, families, nor schools are exclusively responsible for explaining educational outcomes.

**Current Study**

What these authors have shown is parental involvement is a multifaceted construct. The potential of increasing academic achievement is an enticing idea for schools, because the reality of our current educational state is discouraging, to say the least. With budget cuts every year and higher student to teacher ratios than ever before, the job of the school to facilitate academic achievement increases in difficulty every year. Therefore, schools and educators alike want to use all available means to obtain the greatest achievement possible. Educational research has shown that empowering parents to support education is beneficial to achievement (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Hong et al., 2010; Moorman & Pomerantz, 2010; Parcel et al., 2010; Ritblatt et al., 2002; Yuen, 2011). In effect, the idea of involvement needs to shift to more family-centered approaches, which will increase all aspects of early childhood development including academic achievement (Gottfried et al., 2009; Liu & Whitford, 2010; Yuen, 2011).
The current study will examine parent home-based involvement, parent expectations and satisfaction with current school-based communication practices at a rural Oregon charter school. A charter school is a publicly funded, independently operated school that is allowed to operate with more autonomy than traditional public schools due to increased accountability (National Charter School Resource Center, n.d.).

The goal is to evaluate current levels of involvement, satisfaction, and expectations of parents. This study is a program evaluation created for Forest Grove Community School (FGCS) to evaluate: (a) the effectiveness of school to parent communication and (b) to establish the most effective methods to engage parents in their child’s education (e.g., homework support, academic enrichments, volunteering at school).

Method

Participants

The intended sample (recruited by email) included all families of children enrolled at FGCS. At the time of the study, 147 families with a total of 192 students (100 female, 92 male) were enrolled. From an ethnicity standpoint, there were 23 Latino students and 169 non-Latino students. The students fell into the following racial categories (166 Caucasian, 16 multiracial, six Asian American, two African American, and two Native American). In terms of socio-economic status (SES), 33% of the students qualify for free lunch indicating their family SES is below the poverty line.

Materials

The materials consisted of a recruitment letter (see Appendix A) and The FGCS Parent Communication and Involvement survey (see Appendix B). The qualitative survey was created from a review of relevant literature and the questions were created specifically for the needs of
the client. Some questions were created from modified questions from the Family Involvement Questionnaire (Fantuzzo et al., 2000), and the Parent Communication Survey (Rogers & Wright, 2008). The FGCS Parent Communication and Involvement survey was designed to examine the level of home-based parent involvement and parent satisfaction with the current communication methods used by the school.

After administering the survey, the qualitative data collected was examined to look for themes regarding communication and parent involvement. A copy of the survey results and themes were presented to the principal of FGCS along with recommendations based on the themes and the original questions.

**Results**

**Participants**

Participants were recruited from December 2012 until February 2013. Of the possible 147 families, 30 parents (23 women, 7 men) completed the survey. The racial and ethnic demographics of the parents were as follows: 24 Caucasian, two African American, two reported multi-ethnic (i.e., Euro Mexican, African), one Asian-Pacific Islander, and one declined to answer. Of the parents that participated 27 reported being married, two reported being divorced, and two reported being single. In regards to number of children participants report having enrolled in FGCS; 24 reported one child, five reported two children, one reported three children, and one participant reported having zero children.

**School Communication**

Frequency distributions were run to explore the qualitative data collected regarding communication. Participants selected all the communication methods FGCS uses to inform them about academic successes and issues, homework, volunteer opportunities, and behavior problems
Overall (70%) participants reported satisfaction with the usefulness of email communication. Of the participants that reported checking the school website for homework information (41.4%), they reported satisfaction with the process. Participants who check the school website (75.9%) for important dates (e.g., field trips, conferences) reported satisfaction with the website information.

**Engagement of Parents**

Frequency distributions were run to explore the qualitative data collected regarding parent at-home involvement. Examining the frequency participants reported helping their children with homework revealed that most participants help their child once a week or more with math homework (83.3%) and reading/writing homework (80%). Participants reported they share how much they love learning (76.6%) and share positive stories about when they were in school (46.7%) once a week or more. At least once a month (73.3%) participants reported taking their children to community learning activities (e.g., zoo, science/learning museums, etc.). Participants were asked about their ability to keep regular morning and bedtime routines (96.6% keep regular routines) and ensuring their child has a place for their books and school materials (96.7% have a regular place).

Regarding participants’ perspectives about assisting their children with learning, results revealed that participants believe they are integral in math (63.7%) and reading (76.6%). Additionally, participants’ perspectives about assisting their children with homework reveal participants believe they should help their child with homework (86.7%), review their child’s homework before it is turned in (60%), and believe homework is an important aspect to their child’s learning (70%). A majority of participants reported the amount of homework their child receives is about right (86.7%); however, participants were split about the difficulty of their
child’s homework (50% difficult, 46.7% easy). When asked about their beliefs about turning in homework, most respondents reported it was important (90%), and most participants reported being aware a majority of the time when their child does not turn their homework in (50%). Half (50%) of the participants reported their child always turns their homework in. In regards to the participants that reported their child does not always turn their homework in, the two most common reasons reported were: the student did not do it, and the parent forgot to check for or have the student do it (see Table 2). Participants reported their beliefs about their children attending college upon finishing high school and the majority of participants (70%) reported they believed their child would attend college.

**Discussion**

Frequency distributions were run to explore qualitative data collected about: (a) the effectiveness of school to parent communication and (b) to establish the most effective methods to engage parents in their child’s education (e.g., homework support, academic enrichments, volunteering at school). Overall, the results demonstrate the parents at FGCS are generally satisfied with the current communication methods the school uses to disseminate information about child successes or problems, homework, afterschool activities and so forth. Additionally results showed parents are generally academically inclined at home, such that parents assist with homework, view themselves as important components in academic learning, and engage in academically supportive behaviors.

**School Communication**

This study examined the effectiveness of FGCS’s current electronic communication methods. Previous research suggested electronic communication (e.g., email, school websites, and classroom blogs) could be an effective strategy to increase parental involvement (Furger et
Parents reported the two most frequent forms of communication FGCS uses are email and in person. Below is a comment from one parent about their excitement with using technology as a primary communication method with FGCS:

I always rely on the school emails to learn about events and fundraisers. I click on the links in the emails to take me to the site if I need more info but only if prompted in the email. I look at the teacher website for my son's class when I receive an email from her about a new addition to it. I love tech and using it to communicate.

Additional forms of communication mentioned by parents included conferences, classroom blog, and homework bag as forms of communication. In general, parents are satisfied and prefer email communication. Parents also reported satisfaction with the information available on the school website and classroom blogs. Suggestions from parents about improvements to communication included having a syllabus for homework, including a link to the classroom blog on email correspondences, consolidation of information to one place, and a calendar of events. One parent stated the following about the difficulty experienced with communication:

It is communicated in pieces in so many places that I find myself struggling to understand what is due and when – I have asked his teachers if they can do some form of a consistent syllabus that has all the information, and was told that the way they do it works better.

Another parent commented: “The school website isn’t exactly user friendly, so I don’t tend to look at it much. However, the class blog is much friendlier.” Another parent suggested including a calendar of events with links that open in a new screen. Parents that indicated they do not use technology for some or all of their communication were asked to explain why.

Several parents indicated they believed electronic communication is impersonal. One parent
stated the following “It's more convenient to speak with my child's teacher during pick up and drop off times.” Moreover, another parents stated:

I would use the website if it was more customizable - ie. if I was able to set up preferences to get the info I wanted when I logged into the website. (I guess there is a grades website or something that I don't know anything about yet, so I can't comment on that).

In summary, most parents reported feeling well informed, for example, one parent commented, “I am very pleased with the amount of communication and information [that] is sent via email from the school. It helps me stay connected with my son and his teacher and informed about school activities.” In order to improve communication parents were asked for suggestions. One parent had mixed emotions about emailing information, stating:

Better communication about after-school clubs and activities would be good (I see signs up at school but no emails about the offerings). Also there have been some errors in the emails. I have no problem receiving the email communications as I own a computer, but I think that if the school is to attract families of diverse socio-economic status it will need to provide alternate means of communication and not just assume everyone has easy access to email (I have noticed that minority parents attempt to convey this to the staff with mixed success, based on my personal observation in the office). I also have concerns about how effective it is to communicate extremely timely information to families via email.

Other parents suggested presenting information about homework in one easy to read format, with clear explanations of assignments and deadlines and including links to the class blog when emails are sent about the website being updated “Teachers could set up auto signatures for
themselves which include their classroom link - that way they don't have to remember to include it.” Suggestions from parents were as follows:

- Ensuring the accuracy of emails and the information on the main calendar.
- Increased communication when homework is not turned in.
- A notification system that sends out notifications to parents’ phones such as Facebook or email.

Regarding the preferred method of communication, a majority of parents reported email was adequate for most situations. Parents reported satisfaction with the classroom blogs.

**Engagement of Parents**

Positive educational experiences are essential to a child’s academic achievement. As the literature shows, parental involvement at school and home has considerable influence on educational experiences and academic achievement (Gottfried et al., 2009; Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Liu & Whitford, 2010; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Parental involvement at home was examined by asking about activities parents engage in with their children at home (e.g., assisting with homework, encouragement, sharing positive stories, going on education outings). With regard to being involved at home, the results showed parents are academically engaged at home. Parents reported assisting their children with their homework, checking their children’s homework regularly, and in general were aware when their child does not turn homework in.

Past research indicated the importance of parental values with regard to student academic achievement (Gottfried et al., 2009; Hill, 2012; Liu & Whitford, 2010; Pomerantz et al., 2007). The results from parents about their beliefs were positive. Parents believe they are integral in their child’s learning of math and reading and share positive stories about their experiences in
school and how much they love learning. Additionally, parents reported in general they strive to keep regular morning and evening routines for their children. When asked to elaborate on what makes keeping a routine difficult, parents gave the following explanations: sports or other activities, older siblings playing video games and distracting, lack of regular routine enforcement, their own work schedule and travel schedule. The results are consistent with the research by Ritblatt et al. (2002) regarding factors that inhibit parental involvement.

**Conclusion**

Effective home-school communication has been found to be an essential component to student academic success (Rogers & Wright, 2008) and the results from this study suggest FGCS is doing a good job of facilitating effective communication. Although previous researchers found technology was not being used effectively (Rogers & Wright, 2008), it seems that FGCS has embraced the use of technology (i.e., classroom blogs, email, and school website). Additionally, participants view the use of technology by FGCS positively – reporting satisfaction with current electronic communication methods (i.e. email, classroom blogs). FGCS’s use of traditional communication methods (i.e., conferences, paper fliers, verbal communication) are also viewed positively by participants.

It is a well known fact that parental involvement is an important component of child academic success. The evaluation examined at-home parent involvement and found that parents believe they are essential to their child’s academic efficacy. Parents are involved in assisting and correcting homework and encouraging their children to be academically successful. Due to FGCS’ effective communication, the majority of parents reported feeling as if they are knowledgeable about what and how their children are doing academically. Almost all parents reported knowing or being notified when their child does not turn homework in.
**Recommendations**

Below are recommendations that came from the evaluation for FGCS regarding communication:

- Continued use of electronic communication
- Activity calendar that has a pop up window for information
- Email alerts for upcoming events or notifications
- Link to classroom blogs in email communication

These recommendations were conveyed to the administration at FGCS and opportunities for any follow up activities were explored.

**Limitations**

Although there were a limited number of informants, the evaluation showed parents are effectively engaged at home and enjoy the current communication methods FGCS utilizes. Another possible limitation was the amount of involvement the principle of the school had in the creation of the survey, her assistance in creating and editing the questions may have led to some confirmation bias. There is the possibility of sampling bias due to the survey being administered electronically in order to examine satisfaction with electronic communication methods, because of the administration method used parents that do not use electronic communication may not have been adequately sampled. Due to certain demographic information not being collected (i.e., Socioeconomic status, parent’s level of education) there is difficulty separating between-group and in-group differences, therefore I was unable to draw a connection because of this.

**Future Research**

Further evaluations of FGCS might look at communication via focus groups or paper surveys. These evaluation methods may elicit more participation from parents, which may allow
for greater feedback to the school and parents. It would be important to examine different
demographic dimensions (i.e., SES and parent level of education). Additionally, a better method
of collecting data about grade level of child and current academic achievement would increase
the ability to draw connections with level of parent at home involvement and satisfaction with
school-based communication. Additional research should compare different schools, for
example, a charter school and public and or private schools, in order to examine differences
between different schools. Overall, it is recommended for FGCS to continue consulting with
parents in order to ensure their methods of communication are most beneficial for parents.
References


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Table 1

*Communication Methods (could check multiple options)*

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cell Phone</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>In person</th>
<th>In writing</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
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<td>.57</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>.00</td>
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<td>.42</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>.97</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 2

*Reasons students did not complete homework*

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<thead>
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<th>Reason</th>
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<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student forgot</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent forgot to check</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student always completes homework</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After school activity/sport</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A

Hello, my name is Katlyn Hale and I am a doctoral candidate at the Pacific University, School of Professional Psychology. I am conducting my Doctoral Dissertation research project under faculty chair Dr. Tamara Tasker. My project is related to parent-school communication satisfaction and parent involvement at home. I am interested in examining parent satisfaction with school communication methods and parent's views on home-based involvement. If you are interested in participating in my research, it would be appreciated if you could take 10-20 minutes of your time and respond to my survey.

I know you all are very busy and taking the time out of your day to assist me is greatly appreciated.

Here is a link to the survey:

https://qtrial.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_55cBMg29VPrrjDf

Thanks for your participation!

Katlyn Hale, M.S.
Appendix B

FG Parent Communication-Involvement

Q1 Study title
Program Evaluation of home-based parental involvement and school communication at a rural Oregon charter school (IRB project number)

2. Study personnel
Name         Katlyn Hale, M.S.         Tamara E. Tasker, Psy.D.
Role         Principal Investigator         Dissertation Chair
Institution         Pacific University         Pacific University
Program         School of Professional Psychology         School of Professional Psychology
Email         Hale1599@pacificu.edu         tasker@pacificu.edu
Telephone         503-936-0049         503-352-2411

3. Study invitation, purpose, location, and dates
You are invited to participate in a program evaluation on parent home-based involvement and parent expectations/satisfaction with current school-based communication practices. The project has been approved by the Pacific University IRB and will be completed by July 2013. The study will take place via electronic survey. The results of this study will be used to inform school to parent communication practices and parent outreach/educational efforts from the school.

4. Participant characteristics and exclusionary criteria
All parents of students that attend the Forest Grove Community School are welcome to complete the survey. Anyone under the age of 18 years, or who does not currently have a child attending FGCS will be excluded from participation.

5. Study materials and procedures
After reading the consent form and selecting “Yes” for ALL consent areas the survey will begin. At any point during the survey you will be able to stop with no negative consequences or repercussions. If you agree to participate the survey should take between 10-20 minutes to complete.

6. Risks, risk reduction steps and clinical alternatives
   a. Unknown risks  Participation in this study may expose you (or an embryo or fetus,) if you are or become pregnant to currently unforeseeable risks.
   b. Anticipated risks and strategies to minimize/avoid  The risks involved with this study are minimal and do not exceed those expected from routine daily living.
   c. Advantageous clinical alternatives  This study does not involve experimental clinical trial(s).
7. Adverse event handling and reporting plan
Any report of an adverse event or reaction would be met with consultation both of the department and the IRB committee

8. Direct benefits and/or payment to participants
   a. Benefit(s) There is no direct benefit to you as a study participant.
   b. Payment(s) or reward(s) Participants will not be paid for their participation.

9. Promise of privacy
Names will not be needed on the survey and your survey responses cannot be linked with your IP or email address, thus all data are confidential. Survey responses are collected by Qulatrics and sent to the principle investigator in aggregate form. All data collected will be kept on a password-protected computer and in a locked file.

10. Medical care and compensation in the event of accidental injury
It is important to understand that you will not be receiving any form of service from Pacific University as a result of your participation in this study. During your participation in this project, it is important to understand that you are not a Pacific University clinic patient or client, nor will be receiving complete mental health care as a result of participation in this study. If you are injured during participation in this study and it is not due to negligence by Pacific University, the researchers, or any organization associated with the research, you should not expect to receive compensation or medical care from Pacific University, the researchers, or any organization associated with the study.

11. Voluntary nature of the study
Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Pacific University or Forest Grove Community School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw after beginning the study, some or all of the partial data obtained up to the point of withdrawal may still be used during data analysis.

12. Contacts and questions
The researcher(s) will be happy to answer any questions you may have at any time during the course of the study. If you are not satisfied with the answers you receive, please call Pacific University’s Institutional Review Board, at (503) 352-1478 to discuss your questions or concerns further. If you become injured in some way and feel it is related to your participation in this study, please contact the investigators and/or the IRB office. All concerns and questions will be kept in confidence.

13. Statement of consent
I have read and understood the above information and all my questions have been answered. I am a parent of a student currently enrolled in the Forest Grove Community School and agree to participate in the study.

By checking the YES boxes, you agreeing to participate in the program evaluation. If you do not wish to participate in the program evaluation, please check the NO boxes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am 18 years of age or over.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All my questions have been answered</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have read and understand the description of my participation duties.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been offered a copy of this form to keep for my records.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to participate in this study and understand that I may withdraw at any time without consequence.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q2 What is your gender?
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
Q3 What race or ethnicity do you identify with?
- White/Caucasian
- African American
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Native American
- Pacific Islander
- Other
- Latino/Latina

Q4 Are you currently (Check all that apply)
- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Separated
- Single
- Step parent

Q5 How many children do you have at Forest Grove Charter School (including step-children)?  
______

Q6 INSTRUCTIONS: If you have more than one child enrolled in FGCS and you have had differing experiences with your children, please feel free to complete an additional survey (or surveys) for your other child (or children) – one survey per child. Otherwise if your experiences and expectations are similar for all your children please list all ages of your children. When thinking about the following questions please indicate the child’s current grade for which you are completing this survey? (If you have multiple children at FGCS there will be an option at the end to complete this section again for the other child(ren)).
- Child 1
- Child 2
- Child 3
- Child 4
Q7 I spend time helping my child with his/her math homework.
   - Never
   - Less than Once a Month
   - Once a Month
   - 2-3 Times a Month
   - Once a Week
   - 2-3 Times a Week
   - Daily

Q8 I spend time helping my child on reading/writing homework.
   - Never
   - Less than Once a Month
   - Once a Month
   - 2-3 Times a Month
   - Once a Week
   - 2-3 Times a Week
   - Daily

Q9 I talk to my child about how much I love learning.
   - Never
   - Less than Once a Month
   - Once a Month
   - 2-3 Times a Month
   - Once a Week
   - 2-3 Times a Week
   - Daily

Q10 I share positive stories with my child about when I was in school.
   - Never
   - Less than Once a Month
   - Once a Month
   - 2-3 Times a Month
   - Once a Week
   - 2-3 Times a Week
   - Daily
Q11 I take my child places in the community to learn special things (e.g. zoo, OMSI, Children's Museum, etc.).
- Never
- Less than Once a Month
- Once a Month
- 2-3 Times a Month
- Once a Week
- 2-3 Times a Week
- Daily

Q12 I believe reviewing my child's homework/projects before they turn them in is important.
- Not at all Important
- Very Unimportant
- Somewhat Unimportant
- Neither Important nor Unimportant
- Somewhat Important
- Very Important
- Extremely Important

Q13 I make sure my child has a place for books and school materials.
- Yes
- No

Q14 Please indicate which statement best fits your perspective about homework for your child:
- Parents should help students with their homework as needed
- Parents should only supervise students to keep them on task while they are working on homework
- Students should work independently when doing homework

Q15 What is the most common reason your child might not complete his/her homework?
- The student forgets to do his/her homework
- I (the parent) forget to check for or have them do his/her homework
- My student always completes his/her homework
- After school activities/sports result in us getting home too late to do homework
Q16 I believe that homework is an important aspect of my student's learning.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q17 The amount of homework my student receives is...
- Far too Little
- Too Little
- About Right
- Too Much
- Far too Much

Q18 The difficulty of my student's homework is...
- Very Difficult
- Difficult
- Easy
- Very Easy

Q19 I am aware when my student does not turn his/her homework in.
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- All of the Time

Q20 I believe my child completing and turning his/her homework in on time is important.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
Q21 I believe that math learning is the responsibility of the teacher, not mine.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q22 I believe that reading learning is the responsibility of the teacher, not mine
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q23 I keep a regular morning and bedtime schedule for my child.
- Never
- Sometimes
- Most of the time
- All of the time

Q24 If keeping a regular routine is a challenge, please explain what makes it challenging (e.g. your work schedule, sports/activity schedule, etc.)

Q25 I believe my child will go to college upon finishing high school.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

If you have multiple children at FGCS and would like to complete the Parent section for each child check YES if you would like to move onto the section or do not have any more children at FGCS then check NO.
- Yes
- No

If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To This section asks questions...
This section asks questions your satisfaction with FGCS's current communication methods.

Q27 How does your child's teacher inform you about your child's academic struggles? (Check all that apply)
- Cell phone
- E-mail
- In person
- In writing
- N/A
- Other

Q28 How does your child's teacher inform you about your child's academic successes? (Check all that apply)
- Cell phone
- E-mail
- In person
- In writing
- N/A
- Other

Q29 How does your child's teacher inform you about your child's homework assignments that are currently due? (Check all that apply)
- Cell phone
- E-mail
- In person
- In writing
- N/A
- Other

Q30 How does your child's teacher inform you about your child's missing homework assignments? (Check all that apply)
- Cell phone
- E-mail
- In person
- In writing
- N/A
- Other
Q31 How does the school inform you about opportunities to volunteer? (Check all that apply)
- Cell phone
- E-mail
- In person
- In writing
- N/A
- Other

Q32 How does your child's teacher inform you when your child is behaving in a way that is problematic at school? (Check all that apply)
- Cell phone
- E-mail
- In person
- In writing
- N/A
- Other

Q33 Do you use email to communicate with your child's teacher?
- Yes
- No

Answer: If Do you use email to communicate with your child's teacher? Yes Is Selected

Q34 How satisfied are you with email as a method of communication?
- Very Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

Q35 Do you check the school website for homework information?
- Yes
- No
Q36 How satisfied are you with homework information available on teacher's website or blogs?
- Very Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

Q37 If you are dissatisfied, please tell us why.

Q38 Do you check the school website for important school dates (i.e. conferences, field trips, school functions)?
- Yes
- No

Q39 How satisfied are you with the school website regarding important dates (i.e. conferences, field trips, school functions)?
- Very Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

Q40 If you are dissatisfied, please tell us why.
Answer If Do you use email to communicate with your child's teacher? No Is Selected Or Do you check the school website for homework information? No Is Selected Or Do you check the school website for important school date... No Is Selected

Q41 Please explain briefly why don't you use technologies such as e-mail and/or websites for some (or all) aspects of communication with the school?

Q42 How can the school improve communication with parents?

Q43 What method of communication would you prefer the school to use?