

Opening Communications Between Parents & Schools Through the Use of Websites

Ronda Rucker and Susan Rucker

SECTION I

Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to share the results of a recent study that focused on the benefits of getting parents involved in the schools website. As we move toward the 21st century, more homes are getting connected to the internet and more tech savvy educators are entering the educational system. In this highly technical world, communicating through the use of snail mail and land line is becoming obsolete, being replaced by immediate and more efficient forms of communication.

Introduction:

In recent years our school's website has become more user friendly and informative. It now contains information regarding the schools calendar, daily bulletin, weekly newsletter, employment opportunities, handbook, as well as links to individual teacher websites and much more.

More parents' today want to be kept informed weekly about their child's progress through email. Other parents want to be informed by email immediately if a teacher has a problem with their child in the classroom. This shows the trend that parents are relying more and more on technology to communicate with the school and teachers.

In a days time the office would field over 50 calls asking about events taking place within the school. If these parents where knowledgeable about the schools informative website , the amount of time spent waiting for an open line at school would

be reduced and the parents would have the information they need instead of a busy signal.

We are going to survey parents to discover if they have access to technology, knowledge about surfing the web and what would draw them to using this medium more often. In order to encourage this interaction we are going to set up computers during parent teacher conferences and have a hand out that walks parents and their child through the steps to get to the school website. Once there, have them go on a scavenger hunt to find pertinent information on the site. Since most people learn by doing and would be more likely to be a repeat visitor to the site, this activity will reinforce this skill.

Focus Statement:

The purpose of this action research project is to find a way to get parents to visit the school's website for their information before calling the school. Very few students and parents visit the school's website to view relevant information pertaining to school related activities, schedules and teacher websites. Parents are asking for more information about their child's activities, this information is posted and updated daily on our website.

Research Question(s):

1. How do we get parents to visit the schools website more often?
2. Would posting pictures of students, in school related activities, increase the number of hits to the schools website?
3. Does posting student pictures put students at a higher risk of predators?
4. Would parents be more likely to visit the website if they could view grades, bills, and

the attendance of their child?

5. Why are parents not logging into the schools website?

Related Literature:

Breivik (2005) stated that even though the young people of today are computer savvy, they are not taking this knowledge and becoming a better educated and informed college graduate. They are bombarded with technology from the moment they wake up and turn the TV on to the moment they turn their computer off and go to sleep. No where is the need for information literacy skills greater than in today's work environment where efforts to manage knowledge are increasingly necessary to keep a strategic advantage within a global market. Today most of the responsibility for developing information literacy skills is placed squarely on the shoulders of higher education. Also, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) have developed national standards for information literacy skills at the school and college levels.

Friedman's (2006) article is about a group of teachers that created websites and then completed a survey as to the benefits of their hard work. The results showed that due to a number of contextual barriers such as; a lack of access to appropriate software, a perception that parents and students cannot access the Internet at home, and a lack of time, over two-thirds of the teachers did not use their course website on a regular basis. Many teachers believed that the majority of parents would not be able to access the site, thereby mitigating any potential communication benefit that it might hold. However, one teacher did report that the course website made communication with parents easier and another teacher stated that the majority of their parents used

the website on a daily bases. For the better part of the past decade, the Internet has been described by teacher educators as a tool that can have far reaching benefits for both teacher and students.

Despite the fact that the Ivers & Barron's (1999) article is almost ten years old, we felt a large amount of the information it contained relevant to our study. This study focused on the purpose and benefits of school websites due to the fact more and more homes are connecting to the internet. The web is becoming a viable tool for exchanging and displaying information and educators are taking advantage of this trying to increase students' communication skills, motivation toward writing, organizing and synthesizing skills, cultural understanding, and authentic learning experiences. One trend that appears to emerge is the use of one's presence on the Web for interactive communication. School websites continue to offer links to education resources and use digitized images as dominate media elements. As new technologies emerge and become part of the educational environment, educators find themselves with new roles and responsibilities.

Magid (2008) maintains a site about child safety on the information highway. This article gives teachers and parents' tips on how to keep children safe while on the internet. The fact that crimes are being committed online, however, is not a reason to avoid using the internet. To tell children to stop using the internet would be like telling them to forgo attending school because students are sometime victimized or bullied there. A better strategy would be to instruct children about both the benefits and dangers of "cyber space" and for them to learn how to be "street smart" in order to better safe guard themselves in any potentially dangerous situation.

The aim of Kong & Li's (2008) study is to investigate current parental support for student learning with information technology in Hong Kong. The high level of expectation among school heads for parental support reflects the need for schools to initial cooperation with parents to extend information technology supported learning to the home setting. The increasing popularity of digital culture has meant that learners need to possess information and communication technology skills to respond to digitalization of many industries. Parents are an important stakeholder group in school education and they are also one of the key contributor groups to the information technology supported learning environment. Parents have conflicting views, they do think this information technology is an important and useful learning tool, yet they fear students will become addicted to games and they will lose control of their child's internet use.

Description of Intervention or Innovation:

We will gather information about the hindrances of the schools website and what can be changed to encourage more parental hits.

SECTION II

Overview of Data Collection Strategies:

Qualitative data collection techniques were used as the primary research methods for this study. To keep our surveys democratically valid, we will be surveying parents, students and teachers to determine the amount of time, accessibility, and knowledge of the internet. With the information gathered from the parents and students we can hold informal training sessions to encourage and empower them with skills necessary to navigate the school's website. Information gathered from the

teachers' survey will help us determine in-service training on website development and blogging for the following year. Teachers conducting these surveys will remain unbiased and follow an ethical perspective that correlates with the schools code of conduct.

Data Sources:

- Parent Surveys- Parent surveys will establish what percent of parents have access to the internet on a daily basis and how fluent they are in retrieving vital information. These surveys will be mailed home with a return stamped envelope with first quarter mid-term grades.
- Teacher Surveys- Teachers will complete surveys to determine their knowledge and comfort level with creating and implementing classroom blogs and websites. These surveys will be passed out at an afterschool teachers meeting. Teachers will be asked to fill them out during the meeting and returned before they leave.
- Student Surveys- Student will complete surveys enquiring about the internet access they have at home. These surveys will be passed out during homeroom where the teacher will collect them before they leave.
- Informal Interviews- We will conduct an informal interview at the first quarter parent teacher conference where parents have had an opportunity to navigate the schools website.

Data Analysis Plans:

The parent and student survey will inquire about technology available to them and their computer skills, this will be determined using the Likert Scale. The yes/no questions will be sorted into like categories. The rest of the responses will be

categorized and ordered by frequency, this will give us a general overview of how parents and students feel about using technology as a communication tool, as well as, if there is technology available for their use.

The teacher survey will determine teacher's level of knowledge about blogs or websites and how beneficial this would work for their classroom. This information will be calculated using the Likert Scale and any yes/no questions will be sorted into like categories. The rest of the responses will be categorized and ordered by frequency, this will give us a general overview of how teachers feel about using technology as a median between parents.

The informal interviews with parents and students will involve discussing the user friendly benefits of technological communications. These interviews will take place during school and at parent/teacher conferences.

SECTION III:

1. Yes, other people will be involved in our action research project. They will be the parents, teachers and students that we involve in the survey and interview process. Their responsibilities will be to respond to the survey and interview questions with honesty and integrity.
2. We would need to secure our administrator's permission before conducting our research. Due to the fact we are from a small rural community, permission could be granted in an informal setting.
3. Timeline:
 - First Quarter – Collect Data
 - First Three Weeks In Second Quarter – Analyze Data
 - Fourth and Fifth Week in Second Quarter – Interpret Data
4. Timeline:
 - Third and Fourth Quarters – Develop Recommended Actions/Conduct Training

5. The overall strategy that I would suggest for implementation the recommended actions would be:

- First receive permission from the necessary administration to proceed
- Develop training opportunities for parents and teachers
- Provide for follow-up opportunities the following year

Monetary support from the administration would help guarantee the success of this program. Parental support is vital to the successful implementation of this program. A lack of desire for change would inhibit the success of using technology as a new tool for communication between parents and teachers.

6. The follow-up opportunities would allow teachers additional time to update their website or blog. A web counter on the schools website would determine success of the study.

References

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- Magid, Larry (2008). Child Safety on the Information Highway. <http://safekids.com/child-safety-on-the-information-highway/>.

Literature Matrix (Appendix A)

Focus Statement:

Very few students and parents visit the school's website to view relevant information pertaining to school related activities, schedules and teacher websites. Parents are asking for more information about their child's activities, this information is posted and updated daily on our website.

Research Question(s):

1. How do we get parents to visit the schools website more often?
2. Would posting pictures of students, in school related activities, increase the number of hits to the schools website?
3. Does posting student pictures put students at a higher risk of predators?
4. Would parents be more likely to visit the website if they could view grades, bills, and the attendance of their child?
5. Why are parents not logging into the schools website?

Author's	Year	Variables Considered in the Study							
		Available Technology	Academic Achievement	Attitude to Change	Factors that Encourage Involvement	Barriers that Impede Website Use	Financing	Child Safety	Community Relations
Adam Friedman	2006	•		•	•	•	•		•
Ivers, & Barron	1999	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Larry Magid	2008	•		•	•			•	•
Patricia Senn Breivik	2005	•	•	•					
Siu Cheung Kong & Kai Ming Li	2009	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

**Data Collection Matrix
(Appendix B)**

Research Questions	Data Source		
	1	2	3
Available technology at home or work?	Parent survey	Student Observation	Web hit counter
Internet access?	Parent survey	Student Observation	Web hit counter
Danger of posting student picture.	Internet research-Statistics		
Teachers ability to update website.	Teacher survey	Informal interview	Observation
Beneficial Experience?	Parent survey	Teacher survey	informal interview
Increase hits by using pictures?	Parent survey	Student questionnaire	Web hit counter

**Data Analysis Matrix
(Appendix C)**

Data Collection Technique	Data Analysis Strategy		
	1	2	3
1. Parent Survey for information about technology available to them and if this would be a beneficial way to receive information from the school and teachers	Compile the average of each item on a Likert scale using a scale 1 to 5. Then group average scores over 3 equal to 3 and under 3.	Tally any yes/no answers and determine the percent of parents/guardians with access to technology.	Compile a list of each open ended response.
2. Teacher survey to determine teacher's knowledge about blogs or websites and how beneficial this would work for their classroom.	Compile the average of each item on a Likert scale using a scale 1 to 5. Then group average scores over 3 equal to 3 and under 3.	Tally any yes/no answers and determine the percent of teachers that feel comfortable communicating with parents/guardians using technology.	Compile a list of each open ended response.
3. Student questionnaire asking students what would be the best way to get their parents to visit the schools website more often.	Compile the average of each item on a Likert scale using a scale 1 to 5. Then group average scores over 3 equal to 3 and under 3.	Tally any yes/no answers and determine access to technology.	Compile a list of each open ended response.
4. Informal interview with parents & students discussing user friendly benefits of technological communications.	At parent/teacher conferences have students show their parents how to access the schools website.	Summarize feedback from parents during conferences.	

Parents and the Internet Survey 2009

1. Thinking about what it takes for young people to be successful in life, it is important for students and parents to know how to use the Internet?

5 Strongly Agree
4 Agree
3 Undecided
2 Disagree
1 Strongly Disagree

2. Do you have a computer with internet access at home?

Yes No

3. Do you use a computer at your workplace?

Yes No

4. Do you ever go online to access:

a. the Internet	Yes	No
b. the World Wide Web	Yes	No
c. to send and receive email	Yes	No

5. Our family goes online daily?

5 Strongly Agree
4 Agree
3 Undecided
2 Disagree
1 Strongly Disagree

6. If I could no longer go on-line I would miss it a great deal.

5 Strongly Agree
4 Agree
3 Undecided
2 Disagree
1 Strongly Disagree

7. Do you ever sit down with your child/children to use the Internet together?

Yes No

8. What my children are exposed to on the internet is a big concern for me.

5 Strongly Agree
4 Agree
3 Undecided
2 Disagree
1 Strongly Disagree

9. Have you ever used email to communicate with your child's/children's teachers?

Yes No

10. Have you ever visited the Tina-Avalon School's website?

Yes No

11. If no, why not?

12. Would you visit the school's website more often if you could view your child's grades?

Yes No

13. If no, why not?

14. Would you visit the school's website more often if you could view pertinent information to your child / children's daily/weekly schedule/activities?

Yes No

15. Would you visit the school's website more often if you could view your child's bills?

Yes No

16. Would you visit the school's website more often if you could view the attendance of your child?

Yes No

17. Would posting pictures of students, in school related activities, increase the number of times you would visit the schools website?

Yes No

18. Do you feel that posting student pictures put students at a higher risk of predators?

Yes No

19. What would you like to see on the school's website?
