Communicating Effectively: An Exploration of Communication Methods between Parents and Teachers with Mixed Methods

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Communicating Effectively: An Exploration of Communication Methods between Parents and Teachers with Mixed Methods

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Social Work
West Chester University
West Chester, PA

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

By
Melanie Solano
May 2022
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my school family. School is more than my career, it is my passion, as teaching defines who I am as a person. These past eight years both of my schools have become my home, and the students, parents, and staff my family. This family, and especially my second-grade team, has encouraged and supported me as I undertook this amazing journey. I am beyond grateful for their love and enthusiasm.
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Abstract
This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study explored the communication preferences of parents and teachers through traditional and new technology-based communication modes. Parents (n = 34) and teachers (n = 6) were selected from a public elementary school in the northeastern United States. Participants were administered Likert-type scales on the perceived connectedness of communication modes, as well as the Parental Academic Support Scale, Importance of Supportive Behaviors Scale, and Satisfaction of Communication Tools Scale. The survey contained four open-ended questions on home-school communication preferences. Survey results indicated that parents (M = 17.61, SD = 4.14) and teachers (M = 18.33, SD = 2.25) reported greater perceived connectedness with traditional communication modes, as opposed to parents’ (M = 13.38, SD = 5.19) and teachers’ (M = 13.17, SD = 2.48) perceptions of newer modes. Additionally, results revealed that parents (M = 13.79, SD = 3.66) and teachers (M = 15.50, SD = 1.22) perceived stronger connections to warmer and richer modes, as opposed to parents’ (M = 17.21, SD = 5.66) and teachers’ (M = 16.00, SD = 2.28) perceptions of colder and leaner modes as defined by Social Presence Theory and Media Richness Theory. However, the survey indicated that participants have a strong preference for using e-mail, a cold and lean mode, for all communication. Subsequent interviews and artifact reviews provided insight into the benefits and drawbacks of each mode and strategies for use, determining that preference was driven by convenience. This research contributes to literature surrounding parent-teacher communication modes and strategies.

Keywords: mixed-methods, parent-teacher communication, communication modes
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Chapter 1: Introduction

While there is no record of the first interactions between parents and teachers, traditional methods of communication, such as face-to-face conferencing, phone calls, written communications, and eventually e-mails, became the primary parent-teacher interactions over time (Graham-Clay, 2005). Numerous researchers have analyzed these methods, as well as their frequency as communication modes, strategies and benefits for use, and which modes are preferred for various communication topics (Bosch et al., 2017; Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2011; Graham-Clay, 2005; Thompson, 2008, 2009; Thompson & Mazer, 2012; Thompson et al., 2015). Therefore, teachers and parents often perceived a level of comfort when using these modes, as research has demonstrated their effectiveness in helping students achieve academic success and social well-being (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Bosch et al., 2017; Graham-Clay, 2005; Lazar & Slostad, 1999; McWilliams & Patton, 2015; Thompson et al., 2015).

However, in today’s changing world of technology, new communication platforms continue to develop (Bosch et al., 2017; Graham-Clay, 2005). While some researchers are beginning to study parent-teacher communication through texting, Facebook, and Zoom, there is little to no research on communication apps (e.g., ClassDojo and Remind) and Learning Management Systems (LMSs) (e.g., Schoology, Blackboard, and Canvas) (Bosch et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2015). Some research is focused on using communication apps and Learning Management Systems as a whole by analyzing the implications of all the features they entail, such as methods of student engagement and behavior management (Jordan & Duckett, 2018; Manolev et al., 2019; Williamson, 2017). However, there is a shortage of research that looks at these platforms as parent-teacher communication modes. Therefore, it was imperative for
research to be conducted on the benefits, deficits, and strategies for success that parent teacher
communication modes offer that includes these newer modes.

In this chapter, I will present my study of how parents and teachers interact with both
traditional and newer forms of parent-teacher communication. The goal of this research was to
determine which modes of communication parents and teachers are primarily using to
communicate different types of concerns. The next phase employed an analysis of participants’
attitudes for each communication mode, why those modes are being chosen for different types of
concerns, the benefits and drawbacks of each mode, and strategies for their use. This mixed
methods study utilized both survey design and case study design which included one-on-one
interviews with parents and teachers, as well as communication artifact reviews.

Rationale and Significance

Communication between home and school is vital to student success (Auerbach, 2007;
Bosch et al., 2017; Clement, 1980; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Graham-Clay, 2005; McWilliams &
Patton, 2015; Sirvani, 2007; Thompson et al., 2015). Frequent and specific communication
allows parents to become involved in the school community, better understand the inner
workings of the school and school curriculum, and increase their child’s academic performance
(Hara & Burke, 1998; Christensen & Cleary, 1990; Epstein, 2010; Loucks, 1992). In other
words, when parents, school districts, and teachers frequently communicate, there are positive
benefits for the entire school community and the success of individual students.

However, there is little agreement or discussion of which communication modes to use
when communicating between home and school (Benner & Quirk, 2020). Many districts
mandate a frequency of communication, such as requiring teachers to contact home at least once
per week or hold conferences with parents twice per year. Nevertheless, most districts do not
mandate which specific communication platforms they would like teachers and parents to utilize (Benner & Quirk, 2020). This communication choice often leads to discrepancies in modes between teachers, even teachers on the same team or grade level, and across districts. These discrepancies, coupled with the fact that some parents have more than one child in the district and that each child interacts with multiple teachers per day, have the potential to lead to communication confusion and overload for parents. It can therefore be challenging for parents to navigate how to best communicate with school district officials when each school and teacher is using a different mode of communication.

There are multiple modes of communication available to parents and teachers. School districts and parents have generally communicated through traditional communication modes such as phone calls, conferences, and e-mail, but technology is constantly changing (Bosch et al., 2017; Graham-Clay, 2005; Thompson et al., 2015). Facebook, texting, LMSs, and software applications have continued to evolve (Bosch et al., 2017; Graham-Clay, 2005; Thompson et al., 2015). While teachers, school districts, and parents have a multitude of communication choices, there is little guidance as to the pros and cons of each method. Phone calls, conferences, and e-mails are established communication modes with strong correlations to parent engagement and student success (Auerbach, 2007; Bosch et al., 2017; Clement, 1980; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Graham-Clay, 2005; McWilliams & Patton, 2015; Sirvani, 2007; Thompson et al., 2015). However, there is not sufficient data showcasing new forms of technology in the same light, even though the number of teachers and school districts using Learning Management Systems and communication applications is rising.

The present study examined which communication modes parents and teachers of third-grade students utilized at their suburban public elementary school. Participants then provided
their preferred communication modes when communicating different school-related concerns (i.e., academic performance, classroom behavior, preparation, hostile peer interactions, and health. Additionally, parents and teachers were asked to share the benefits and deficits of each mode, as well as strategies for their use. This study’s outcomes were instrumental in explaining what methods parents and teachers communicate through most frequently and why they prioritize those methods. Additionally, the results made it possible to analyze the benefits and drawbacks of new communication modes, compared to more traditional methods. Specific to participants, parents and teachers who took part in the study had an opportunity to reflect on their own communication practices and gain insight into how to best communicate between home and school. Finally, I provided suggestions for strategies that parents and teachers can use to increase best communication practices.

Problem Statement

Although traditional methods of parent-teacher communication have been proven effective in helping both parties meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students, more parents and teachers today are communicating through modes that have not been as heavily explored (Bosch et al., 2017; Graham-Clay, 2005; Thompson et al., 2015). As Thompson et al. (2015) highlighted that even though “[computer-mediated communication (CMC)] can have positive effects in the academic context, several researchers have raised important questions about the use of CMC in education, cautioning educators to critically evaluate the use of CMC in the academic realm” (p. 201-202). Because successful parent-teacher communication is vital to the success and well-being of students, and parent-teacher communication methods impact student success, it is therefore imperative to analyze what communication practices both parties are utilizing and why different modes are preferred or refused.
Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what modes of communication parents and teachers are primarily using to communicate with one another. While software communication apps and LMSs are becoming more prevalent in schools, more traditional methods of parent-teacher communication are often still utilized. Determining why parents and teachers prefer the modes that they do, as well as how frequently they use each mode, what circumstances they use it in, and what strategies they suggest for success is important for future fruitful communication.

A mostly quantitative study by Thompson et al. (2015) found that parents primarily prefer communicating through e-mail. However, the lack of a qualitative follow-up leaves questions about why parents prefer that mode over other, newer modes of communication. Additionally, Thompson et al. (2015)’s study was only conducted with parents. Therefore, analyzing what modes teachers are using in their classrooms, and how that impacts parent communication will aid in future study. Teachers and parents are being presented with an increasing number of communication options and need guidance as to which modes to focus on for effective parent-teacher communication to occur.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research question: What modes of communication are parents and teachers primarily using to communicate with one another? This study contained four sub-research questions to further explore this topic:

1. How does the perceived quality of "connectedness" (defined as having meaningful contact) in parent-teacher communication differ between classrooms that use newer, technology-focused forms of communication and those that use more traditional methods? (quantitative)
2. What modes of communication do parents and teachers most frequently utilize to communicate different types of concerns? (quantitative)

3. What do parents and teachers in a suburban public elementary school perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of various modes of communication? (qualitative)

4. What strategies do parents and teachers in a suburban public elementary school suggest utilizing when communicating with one another through different communication platforms? (qualitative)

**Rationale for Mixed Methods**

In this study, I utilized an explanatory sequential design that involved first collecting quantitative data, followed by an explanation of the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) highlighted:

A gap exists because past research has not adequately explained the mechanisms or contexts behind quantitative relationships/differences/trends. There is a need to not only obtain quantitative results, but to explain such results in more detail, especially in terms of detailed voices and participant perspectives. (p. 151)

Thus, I selected this design to explore how the qualitative data enriches the quantitative findings. Thompson et al.’s (2015) study on parent communication modes primarily focused on quantitative survey data, with a few open-ended qualitative questions. The researchers noted that a limitation of the study was that, other than responses to the open-ended questions, the data provided little explanation for why participants chose the modes that they did. Therefore, this explanatory sequential mixed methods design contained an initial quantitative section (quan) followed by an in-depth qualitative portion (QUAL) so that the qualitative data could be used to
enrich the quantitative results and paint an overall picture of parent-teacher communication mode selection. This study is represented as an explanatory mixed methods study quan → QUAL.

In the first, quantitative, phase of the study, I collected survey data from 34 third-grade parents (including five partial responses) and 6 third-grade teachers at a suburban public elementary school. I first assessed whether the mode of parent-teacher communication related to the perceived connectedness of communication and overall satisfaction of communication. I then used the Parental Academic Support Scale (PASS) to analyze which types of concerns were communicated since the start of the school year. Parents and teachers then selected what type of modes they most frequently used to communicate those concerns.

The second, qualitative phase of the study, was conducted as a follow-up to the quantitative results to help explain why parents chose specific modes of communication. First, one-on-one interviews (involving 10 parents and 4 teachers) occurred. Interview participants then submitted artifacts of communication that provided examples of communication benefits, drawbacks, and strategies. Yin’s (2018) approach was utilized in this phase as he highlighted the importance of using case studies to examine social occurrences, as ‘case studies allow you to focus in-depth on a ‘case’ and to retain a holistic and real-world perspective’ (p. 5). Therefore, this perspective allowed me to analyze the “case” of the entire third-grade teachers and parents.

**Survey Design**

Parent-teacher communication research often contains survey design as a primary data collection method, or as a part of a mixed method study (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Schweiker-Marra, 2000; Thompson, 2008, 2009; Thompson, Mazer, 2012; Thompson et al., 2015). Becker and Epstein (1982) surveyed teachers of first-, third-, and fifth-grade students in Maryland when they sought to determine teacher perceptions of parent involvement in home learning.
Schweiker-Marra (2000) used surveys to demonstrate the disconnect between parent-teacher communication and parent perspectives on school. Feedback from their initial survey was used to develop changes that revealed improved teacher attitudes on a subsequent survey. Thompson (2008, 2009), Thompson and Mazer (2012), and Thompson et al. (2015) employed different survey designs to capture parent perspectives on e-mail communication and why parents selected various modes of communication for different types of concerns. Thompson and Mazer (2012) and Thompson et al. (2015) primarily used the Parental Academic Support Scale (PASS), which I also utilized during this study. This valid, reliable tool uses a three-pronged approach to measure which communication modes parents are using, the frequency of each mode, and which situations require which mode selection. Survey data from the quantitative portion of my research study was triangulated with other data, which is important to show the information is credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable within a mixed methods study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 217).

**Case Study Design**

Parent-teacher communication research is often quantitative or mixed methods in nature. However, some research does employ qualitative methods, with case studies and ethnographies being the most common qualitative research designs (Auerbach, 2007; Cheatham & Ostrosky 2013; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Ramsay et al., 1992).

Case study design allows a bounded system to be researched. In this study, the boundary was set around the third-grade. This boundary meets the criteria that Merriam (1998) defined for features of a case. Merriam (1998) argued that a case must focus on a specific program or situation, provide a vivid description of what is being researched, and emphasize the reflection behind the experience. In this study, the cases focus on a) the experiences of parents and teachers
in third-grade with various communication modes, b) the use of one-on-one interviews, qualitative short-answer survey questions, and artifact reviews to provide a descriptive analysis of how and why these modes are being chosen, and c) the reflections of parents and teachers as to the benefits and strategies for various communication modes in different contexts.

Additionally, Merriam (1998) stated that data should be analyzed in a way that creates meaning-making. This involves, “consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen” (p. 178). This suggestion correlates with how interview and artifact data was synthesized in this study, as interview quotes were paired with artifact examples to provide a stronger picture of what was occurring in third-grade.

Furthermore, this study utilized Yin’s (2018) theoretical presentation of a case study. Yin (2018) concluded that case studies are best used when “a how or why question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which a researcher has little or no control” (p. 13). Within this study, a case is defined as the entire third-grade in a suburban public elementary school and questioned how and why parent-teacher communication was facilitated as a whole within this group. A second case was originally defined as individual third-grade classrooms within the grade-level. This would have allowed a focus of questions pertaining to how and why parents and teachers communicated within that specific setting. Unfortunately, this secondary analysis did not take place as a result of low parent participation on the survey.

Researcher Positionality

Researchers must encompass themselves in every facet of the research process. Each researcher’s worldview contains underlying ontological (beliefs about social reality and the world), epistemological (beliefs about knowledge), and individual (environmental interactions and experiences) assumptions (Holmes, 2020). As a second-grade teacher and former
kindergarten teacher, my views on parent-teacher communication have shifted throughout my eight-year teaching career. As an undergraduate education major, I received little instruction on how to communicate with parents. During student teaching I had opportunities to observe my cooperating teachers’ contact with parents through conferences, phone calls, and e-mails, but I was not able to generate my own responses or fully participate in the discussions. As a new teacher, I often struggled with communication—either sharing too little, too late, or oversharing more than was needed. In several early conversations via e-mail, I found my wording to be misconstrued by the parent and I had to conduct what I considered “damage control,” usually with a phone call, to get the conversation back on track.

The parents I have worked with have often asked for greater transparency between home and school, both from me as a teacher and from the district as a whole. Both districts I have worked in have made an attempt to go “paperless” in terms of newsletter communication from the district. I have witnessed parents getting lost in this shuffle, often missing messages online that are no longer sent home by other means. I now use a combination of different communication modes within my class in an attempt to reach all parents. While I always used phone calls, conferences, and e-mails, I began using ClassDojo software during my third year of teaching. I liked the ability to communicate with parents immediately from my smartphone. During my fifth year of teaching, I created a classroom Twitter account. I primarily use it to share pictures of our classroom activities. In 2020, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, I also began communicating with parents through the Canvas LMS that was purchased by my school district.

My understanding of parent-teacher communication has evolved through these different modes and the stark differences between them. I find myself wondering if I am communicating
in too many places and what parents think about the various modes as well as how I can communicate most effectively with parents. This research study will allow me insight into these questions, not only for me but for other educators, parents, and school districts who want to ensure that they are utilizing best communication practices to promote student success.

**Limitations**

This study contained several limitations, including the timing of the study, sample size, and researcher bias. Research took place fairly early within a new school year, and there was not as much data available during that time period as there would have been at the end of the school year. To ensure that participants were only commenting on the current school year, questions were worded in a highly-specific manner that provided parents and teachers with the date ranges of interactions.

Limitations in sample size were also present throughout this study. The initial quantitative survey was sent to all parents and teachers within third-grade, but only 40 out of about 300 parents completed it, with several surveys being only partially completed. This made it difficult to complete the quantitative analysis as planned. There is also a strong possibility that only the parents who participate most frequently in school programming responded, which caused unequal representation of parents in terms of their involvement.

Finally, my research bias and positionality could prevent me from fully analyzing the data. As an eighth-year teacher, I have communicated with parents through various communication modes and had parents reach out to me through numerous modes. When interviewing parents and coding my data for themes, I needed to be cognizant of what my participants were sharing and not let my own experiences and feelings conflict with my analysis.
Definition of Terms

In this section, I define relevant terms in the field of parent-teacher communication that will be used in this study.

Communication Applications: Communication applications (apps) are platforms that make collaboration easier as “apps provide a way to centralize information and enable team members to quickly seek additional information or help from others” (Hughes, 2019). ClassDojo and Remind are two common classroom communication apps.

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC): Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is an umbrella term that incorporates countless forms of communication that take place through computers (e.g., Zoom, Skype, e-mail, chat rooms, etc.) (Cleveland, 2020; Thompson et al., 2015).

Connectedness: Connectedness refers to having meaningful contact with others. As Chen et al. (2015) established, parties that are communicating effectively should establish a sense of belonging and connectedness with one another.

Curriculum: Curriculum is the arrangement of planned lessons that follow set standards, goals, and benchmarks. Students work through these lessons to hopefully reach proficiency or mastery of each goal (Bailey, 2000; Ersoy, 2007; Werner & Kelly, 2011).

Data: Data refers to any information about a student that is pertinent for families to know. It may include homework completion, grades, behavior, standardized test scores, and student interests (McWilliams & Patton, 2015).

Learning Management Systems (LMSs): “Web-based software platforms that provide an interactive online learning environment and automate the administration, organization, delivery,
and reporting of educational content and learner outcomes” (Turnbull et al., 2019). Schoology, Blackboard, Canvas, and Desire2Learn (D2L) Brightspace are popular Learning Management Systems in classrooms.

*Parents:* Although the term parents appears throughout this research study, this term is referring to the child’s legal guardian who most regularly interacts with teachers. This guardian could include a grandparent, aunt or uncle, foster parent, or another legal guardian.

*Parent-Teacher Communication:* Impressions and words fostered between parents, teachers, and school districts within a school context (Graham-Clay, 2005).

**Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the rationale, significance, and problem statement for the research study. I outlined the overarching research question, as well as four sub-research questions that will be answered through data collection. A rationale for mixed methods research, survey design, and case study design was provided, as well as my own positionality. I concluded the chapter with the study’s limitations and the definitions of frequently used terms. In the next chapter, I will assess related literature that is pertinent to the study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I will review supporting literature for the study. This chapter begins with an exploration of my theoretical framework and then includes: (a) a brief history of parent-teacher communication in schools, educational policies and national organizations, (b) the development of parent-teacher relationships and the role of parents in schools, (c) methods to involve parents in schools, (d) an overview of the cultural and digital divide, and (e) the benefits, modes, and established strategies of parent-teacher communication.

Theoretical Framework

Human beings, by nature, are social creatures and depend on dialogue with others to efficaciously navigate society (Brown & Duguid, 2002). However, in today’s culture, parents and teachers do not always have the option of sharing a dialogue that occurs face-to-face. Technological devices are shaping new methods of communication (Bosch et al., 2017; Graham-Clay, 2005; Thompson et al., 2015). From a parent-teacher communication lens, these formats often allow parents and teachers to communicate through written forms such as e-mail, texting, and different formats of private message chats through various communication software and Learning Management Systems (Bosch et al., 2017; Graham-Clay, 2005; Thompson et al., 2015). When parents, teachers, and school districts prioritize these methods, they prevent communication from taking place with auditory, visual, and social cues that one normally analyzes during an in-person conversation to ensure it is progressing as planned. The absence of these cues can cause a conversation to be misunderstood as a result of misconceptions with tone or wording that would have been present in a two-way communication method, such as in-person conversations or phone calls.
To fully analyze this phenomenon, this study’s theoretical framework is rooted in Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986), as it connects with Lombard and Ditton’s (1997) updated Social Presence Theory and Kemp and Rutter’s (1982) theory on Cuelessness. Figure 2.1 showcases the interaction of these three theories.

**Figure 2.1**

*Flow Chart Detailing Interactions of Communication Theories*

**Kemp & Rutter: Cuelessness**

Absence of social, auditory, or visual cues while communicating leads to difficulties navigating the conversation.

**Lombard & Ditton: Social Presence Theory**

- Communication modes have differing abilities to convey presence
- Each communication mode transmits visual and verbal cues differently

**Daft & Lengel: Media Richness Theory**

- Communication modes can be described as lean or rich
- Rich communication modes allow for immediate feedback, multiple social cues, natural language, and “a personal focus.

In light of this…

Communication modes can be analyzed through…

*Note:* The figure above showcases how various communication theories can be combined to provide a new lens for this study to be analyzed through.
**Cuelessness Theory**

In a regular, in-person conversation, two or more participants are able to hear what the other person is saying, both through talking and with bodily sounds (i.e., snorts, laughs, sighs of exasperation, etc.). Additionally, people rely on visual and social cues that are exhibited through body language. This may present as someone waving in a friendly manner, cheering with excitement, or showing anger or displeasure with a scowl and crossed arms. These auditory, visual, and social signs often shape the conversation and help people formulate correct responses during a discussion.

In a phenomenon called Cuelessness, Kemp and Rutter (1982) determined that the absence of one of those auditory, visual, or social cues in communication causes feelings of isolation with the other party. In other words, the perception is as though the other person is not truly there. Kemp and Rutter (1982) found that when one communicates with an absence of one or more of these cues, there is a greater sense of psychological distance among participants. This can often lead to ambiguity and misunderstandings in messages, as well as feelings of anonymity among participants as they are unable to fully “read” the situation they are communicating within. This is a challenge in many computer-mediated communications (CMC) such as texting, e-mailing, or chatting through a Learning Management System (LMS) or communication app, as the other party loses the auditory, visual, and social cues that were established when the message was sent.

**Social Presence Theory**

Positive parent-teacher relationships depend on the establishment of close personal connections (Thompson & Mazer, 2012; Vickers & Minke, 1995). However, it is often difficult to foster close connections through CMC where visual, auditory, and social cues are not present.
Social Presence Theory (Short et al., 1976; Lombard & Ditton, 1997) recognizes this by expanding upon Cuelessness Theory to encourage the formation of connections between the use of technology media and the closeness, or warmth, that it allows. Media that allow for higher degrees of social presence are considered warmer and more personal than other modes. Figure 2.2 illustrates where common parent-teacher communication modes fall under Social Presence Theory.

**Figure 2.2**

*Diagram of Social Presence Within Parent-Teacher Communication Modes*

Note: The figure above displays how various communication modes can fall under Social Presence Theory depending on the amount of warmth they contain. This diagram was adapted from Cocchiarella (2020).

Warmer communication modes allow for individuals to express emotion, use inclusive language, respond to messages, discuss information, acknowledge others, participate, and demonstrate immediately (Chen et al., 2015). These traits often allow both parties to establish a sense of belonging and connectedness with one another (Chen et al., 2015). Therefore, under Social Presence Theory, communicating teachers and parents should perceive a higher quality of
communication through modes that allow for higher ratings of social presence, as these allow for
the building and maintaining of interpersonal relationships which are essential for parents and
teachers.

*Media Richness Theory (MRT)*

Daft and Lengel (1997) took the concept of Social Presence Theory one step further with
the establishment of Media Richness Theory (MRT). MRT is a communications-based theory
with the belief that both parties should achieve a shared meaning through the method of
communication they choose to speak in, and that there is a set of criteria that will help determine
if this shared meaning will occur (Thompson & Mazer, 2012). All communication modes are
identified on a spectrum ranging from rich to lean, depending on how many components of
richness criteria they meet. Face-to-face conferences and phone calls are considered rich modes
of communication that allow for “immediate feedback, [multiple social] cues…, personalization,
and language variety” (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

Leaner modes of communication (e.g., written communications through technology
media such as texting, messaging, or e-mailing, or paper media such as report cards and
classroom or school newsletters) only meet a few aspects of the MRT criteria, or none at all. For
this reason, lean modes may provide a lower quality of communication and are suggested when
communicating short messages. For example, e-mail communication may cause a delay for both
parties when waiting for a response, and information may be misinterpreted without social cues
and tone of voice present to show context. Thompson and Mazer (2012) posited that “individuals
who fail to use a medium with the necessary level of richness might experience ambiguity as a
result of multiple conflicting interpretations of a message” (p. 133). Therefore, lean
communications work most effectively for short, quick messages that are not intricate, while
richer modes of communication are perfect for messages in which complexity is increased so that ambiguity is less likely to occur. Popular forms of rich communication include face-to-face conferencing and phone calls while lean forms include e-mail and written communications.

Figure 2.3 shows different communication modes through this lens.

**Figure 2.3**

*Communication Modes through the Lens of Media Richness Theory*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Richness</th>
<th>Communication Mode</th>
<th>Type of Feedback</th>
<th>Social Cues</th>
<th>Natural Language</th>
<th>Personal Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Face-to-Face (Conferences)</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
<td>Visual Audio</td>
<td>Natural Body</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Face-to-Face (Zoom)</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
<td>Visual (some) Audio</td>
<td>Natural Body (some)</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone Calls</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>Audio</td>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written (E-Mail, Texting, Messaging)</td>
<td>Slow</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written (Report Cards)</td>
<td>Very Slow</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Natural Numeric</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written (Newsletters, School Websites)</td>
<td>Very Slow</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>Impersonal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** This figure presents various parent-teacher communication modes on a scale of high richness, to low richness (leanness), as per Media Richness Theory. This figure is adapted from Bergin (n.d.).

**Summary**

Cuelessness Theory revealed that the best forms of communication often contain the most cues that allow for social, auditory, and visual feedback (Kemp & Rutter, 1982). The absence of any or all of these cues can lead to information being undelivered or misconstrued (Rutter, 1984). Social Presence Theory (Lombard & Ditton, 1997) and Media Richness Theory (Daft &
Lengel, 1986) highlighted the importance of choosing communication modes that allow for richness and warmth to flow among participants. These rich and warm conversations often allow feelings of connectedness and belonging to formulate between both parties, thus allowing for a stronger quality of communication to occur (Chen et al., 2015). As Vickers and Minke (1995) established, “joining,” defined as trust, availability, and dependability, is an equal part in positive parent-teacher relationships alongside frequent communication. While individuals may not prefer utilizing these communication methods, the theories do provide insight into the quality of communication that takes place through different modes. The next section will explain the history of that communication between parents and teachers.

**The History of Communication between Parents and Teachers**

While there are no records of the direct origin of parent-teacher communication, there are aspects of the initial process that have evolved into the communication modes that exist today. A discussion of the history of parent-teacher communication precedes an outline of federal policies dictating home-school communication policies. Finally, this section contains information on other policies and organizations that foster connections between home and school.

**Communication Origins**

One of the earliest forms of communication between home and school came through report cards that established grades for each subject and reported on a student’s progress (Kaycheng, 2011). William Farish first created this process in 1792 when he worked as a tutor at Cambridge University in England (Kaycheng, 2011). The process helped him to quickly see which students were performing to expectations in certain areas and transformed education into the cookie-cutter, assembly line process that exists today (Kaycheng, 2011). While there is not a specific record of Farish’s interactions with families through the grading process, grading
systems did spread to other schools and age groups and is an established procedure within schooling today.

Parent-teacher interactions began to take off further in 1897 when Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst founded the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (National Parent Teacher Association, n.d.). The founders “believed mothers would support their mission to eliminate threats that endangered children” (National Parent Teacher Association, n.d., para. 7). The National Parent Teacher Association (n.d.) pushed for advancements in labor laws, school art programs, school safety, and the creation of kindergarten programs. Additionally, the organization promoted parent-teacher conferences in schools throughout the country and contended that there should be more connections between school and home.

**Federal Communication Policies**

The United States government first showed an interest in family-teacher communication with the creation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-a). During this time period, the country was coming off of a financial crisis that left many in poverty, as well as racial segregation that caused numerous civil rights struggles as a result of the aftermath of Jim Crow. President Johnson signed the ESEA into law, which focused on providing more resources for vulnerable students through a commitment to quality and equality (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-a). In order to qualify for federal grants and resources, school districts had to meet the requirements of the law, which included timely communication with families of vulnerable students.

In 1997, a stronger interest in family-district communication was growing. The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) created standards for family involvement in schools. These standards included regular communication between home and school,
opportunities for families to volunteer at school, and community outreach and support (National School Public Relations Association, 2006). Many state and local programs adopted these standards, and lawmakers considered them in the formation of the next two education laws, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (National School Public Relations Association, 2006).

NCLB overrode ESEA in 2001. The goal of this law was to level the playing field for disadvantaged students by holding schools accountable for student growth and achievement (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-b). Schools were mandated to communicate with families and communities by reporting student test scores and their overall school rating. Schools that did not show annual yearly progress (AYP) received penalties such as less funding, changes in leadership, and school closures (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-b).

President Obama reformed NCLB into the ESSA in 2015. This act focused on preparing all students for success after high school, either in college or careers, by working to protect and advance education for disadvantaged and high-needs students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-a). The law reformed the seven Titles from previous education acts that focused on providing aid to different populations of state education systems and local school districts (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-a). Title I, which provides funding to children of low-income families, and Title III, which provides funding for bilingual students, both contain language that mandates the need for timely parent-teacher communication about student progress and district resources (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-a). In order to receive the federal monetary assistance, districts are required to inform parents if their children attend a Title I school and are participating in Title I programming.
Today, districts are required to follow federal U.S. Code 6318: Parent and Family Engagement Local Educational Agency Policy. This policy outlines procedures for what district communication must look like between families and schools, beginning with a written parent-teacher compact that must be submitted to the state and provided to all families within the district (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). This includes districts holding family events, allowing for parent volunteers, providing access to curriculum, holding conferences, sending report cards, making staff accessible, and providing information in a family’s home language upon request (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). Districts must allocate 1% of their funding to family events each year, and those districts who do not follow this code can lose federal funding (Legal Information Institute, n.d.).

Additional Policies

There are other federal, state, and local policies that pertain to parent-teacher communication. One policy requires districts to allow parents to request that communications are sent home in their native language. Additionally, Title I schools must hold a set number of parent nights and events in order to qualify for funding.

Many school districts welcome Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTO) or Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) on their premises. These organizations contain a group of parents who act as a governing board within the school (National Parent Teacher Organization [NPTO], 2015). The board often organizes or provides assistance with school events like picture day, fundraisers, art shows, or concerts. The organization communicates with the school and then sends the information to families. Families can ask questions and the board will help get answers from the school (National Parent Teacher Organization [NPTO], 2015).
Summary

In the United States, public schools are required to follow federal laws that mandate communication between parents and school districts. Districts have a communication compact that outlines how parent-teacher communication will occur within their district. National organizations, as well as school parent association groups, help to facilitate more communication between home and school. The next section will further outline parents’ role in schools and the perceptions of school that influence communication between parents and teachers.

Parent-Teacher Relationships & their Role in School

Every school has a different policy for how to work with parents (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). While some schools allow parents to observe teachers, serve on curriculum committees, and enter at any time during school hours, other schools only allow parents to come at set times or to preselected activities (Clement, 1980; Evangelinou-Yiannakis, 2016; Hoppock, 1952). Therefore, there is often a debate between parents and school districts for how much involvement parents should have in their child’s education. In this section, I will first analyze the roles that parents and schools play in a child’s education (Stitzlein, 2015). I will then outline positive and negative perceptions that parents often hold about the school climate. Povey et al. (2016) highlighted “a school’s climate is created partly through relationships and interactions among all members of a school community” (p. 130). Therefore, these perceptions of school usually influence the mode, frequency, and tone of communication between parents and teachers.

Role of Parents and Schools

Parent-teacher communication is often influenced by questions and concerns about school curriculum. Many parents have asserted that they have a right to not only know what their child is being taught in school, but to also influence the policies and curriculum that make up the
school culture (Burgess et al., 2014; Stitzlein, 2015). Stitzlein (2015) argued that parents live in a democracy where they can work to change aspects of education with which they disagree. In addition to inspiring parents to raise concerns to school administration and take matters to court when necessary, Stitzlein (2015) encouraged parents to solve problems until their child’s needs were met. Recent parent concerns about curriculum include high-stakes testing, emotional stress on students, narrowed curriculum, and lost instructional time as a result of teaching to the test (Stitzlein, 2015). Some parents choose to engage in passive forms of dissent, such as opting their child out of state-wide testing or moving their child to a different school in order to meet personal preferences (Stitzlein, 2015). Other parents engage in more active forms of dissent such as speaking to legislators, lobbying for laws, taking school districts to court, and holding demonstrations (Stitzlein, 2015). A charter school may be founded when enough parents are dissatisfied with the current public school (Stitzlein, 2015).

The news media and political agenda has recently been flooded with parents advocating for school choice or “the right to express a preference for particular schools and for each parent's highest possible preference to be honored” (Burgess et al., 2014, p. 1263). In these situations, parents often argued that their voices were dismissed and that their children did not receive a quality education that met their needs.

Additionally, some parents disagree with the content being taught within schools, as they claim that schools are biased or that they teach political agendas. Strasser (2011) summarized two legal cases that highlighted parents’ concern for public school curriculum interfering with personal beliefs. The first case, Mozart v. Hawkins County Board of Education, involved various parents rejecting the textbooks used at their child’s school. The parents stated that the material went against their religious beliefs and other world viewpoints and values, fearing that if their
child was exposed to the content, he or she might interpret that viewpoint as being viable, and therefore disagree with their parents’ perspectives (Strasser, 2011). In this occurrence, the court ruled that the parents had no right to dictate what was or was not taught in public school and that they could move their child to a private school that more closely aligned to their personal beliefs if they did not like the curriculum (Strasser, 2011). The second case, Parker v. Hurley, contained a similar situation where the parents did not like how the public-school curriculum included books containing diverse families (Strasser, 2011). The court once again ruled in favor of the school district, determining that the district had a right to promote inclusion and awareness of all family lifestyles in their first-grade curriculum (Strasser, 2011). In these situations, the parent received an ultimatum to either remove their child from the school, or allow their child to participate in the curriculum with their peers.

School district, state, and federal policies often take the stance that it is their job to provide all students with a well-rounded education. At times, this may involve covering content that some parents do not support, such as climate change or presidential elections. Most recently, there was a debate about whether Critical Race Theory should be taught in public schools. An Alabama lawmaker stated that anyone who teaches “certain concepts regarding race or sex, such as critical race theory, should be fired” (Crain, 2021, para. 1). In Central York School District in Pennsylvania, school board members issued a freeze on books promoting anti-racism after hearing complaints from white parents who were concerned the school reading list would cause guilt among white students (Bunch, 2021). After push-back from school students, concerned parents, community members, and authors on the banned book list, the school board ended the freeze, admitting that they were concerned about the vocal minority group of parents and acknowledging that a book ban was not the answer (Bunch, 2021). Thus, public schools are often
walking a line between satisfying the needs of all parents and students while also teaching what is mandated under law. Many schools limit parental participation and communications with parents in order to avoid these conflicts.

**Establishing Connections**

Although school districts and teachers may be inclined to limit what is shared with parents, students who have opportunities to learn cooperatively from both their parents and school leaders are more likely to be successful (Dye, 1989; Hoppock, 1952). Hoppock (1952) suggested working with the local community to problem-solve student needs and help students make connections outside of school, as well as for teachers to involve parents in the classroom as room parents. Hoppock (1952) highlighted that parents who are more involved in their child’s school often voice better opinions about what is being taught and the way in which it is taught, which helps to avoid conflicts later on.

Parental involvement often begins with teachers who value parents as essential members of the classroom team. Gellert (2005) recommended that teachers begin establishing connections with parents in their first communications home. Dye (1989) found that teachers who held weekly curriculum sessions with preschool parents were nervous that parents would not listen to the content or that teaching techniques would be questioned. Instead, with practice, the teachers saw student skills strengthen and that parents were both responsive and appreciative of their suggestions (Dye, 1989).

One of the most important ways that parental involvement in school curriculums can be increased is to make sure that data is shared appropriately with families (McWilliams & Patton, 2015). Data refers to any information about a student that is pertinent for families to know and may include homework completion, grades, behavior, standardized test scores, and student
interests (McWilliams & Patton, 2015). When parents begin asking questions about their child’s learning, they are becoming a partner with teachers in their child’s education.

**Positive Parent Perceptions about Schools**

Teachers and other school officials often hope that parents enter the school system with positive perceptions from the start. Positive outlooks frequently come from student success, opportunities for advancement and growth, student satisfaction and enjoyment, and parental participation in and understanding of curriculum and school structure. From a communication lens, it is important for teachers and parents to frequently communicate student successes and classroom news, as when positive parents and students frequently talk to each other about their optimistic outlooks, they often inspire others to react similarly. There are four main reasons for positive parent perceptions of curriculum that schools and teachers are encouraged to promote.

**Student Success.** When parents receive positive messages and satisfactory report cards stating that their child is successful in a course, they often have positive perceptions of the content being taught and the way the class is structured. For example, Bailey (2000) surveyed parents on their impressions of an integrated art, social studies, and language arts curriculum in a middle school. Many parents commented that their child did well in the courses and that they maintained this as result of factors of the integration process such as teacher collaboration across the classrooms that made for a more wholesome experience, as well as a way to monitor student participation and growth (Bailey, 2000). Overall, the majority of parents agreed that they would like their child to participate in another integrated classroom experience because they witnessed their child’s success with the initial one (Bailey, 2000). Dodd (1998) noted similar findings in that parents were more likely to react positively if the student was successful, thus having his or her individual needs met. Ersoy (2007) took this a step further by listing some of the individual
needs a child may improve upon. Ersoy (2007) remarked that parents expressed positive views if:

[t]heir children ha[d] shown positive progress; increased desire towards learning, self-confidence, analytical skills, retention of gained information, social development, hand skills, sense of responsibility, level of efficiency, success…[reinforced] exploratory skills, [used a] quicker learning pace, [and] expanded their self-expression abilities. (p. 759)

In other words, when parents contend that a curriculum is working for their child by expanding their child’s skill set and knowledge about select topics, they are more likely to want a similar structure of programs repeated in the future so that their child stays on track. Good grades also play into success, as parents see these as a measure of student growth and understanding. Parents often communicate these opinions with school staff members during school board meetings or PTA events. This desire for student success leads into the next positive perception parents hold: advancement and growth.

**Advancement and Growth.** Parents across multiple studies praised curriculums that encouraged critical thinking and problem-solving because they perceived that these courses prepared their child for college and real-world aspirations (Bailey, 2000; Ersoy, 2007; Werner & Kelly, 2011). Additionally, Ersoy (2007) found that parents preferred curriculums that involved inquiry-based learning because they brought out a child’s talents. Many high schools are now offering classes centered around these skills that help to prepare students for college or other career aspirations. While some of these are marketed as AP classes, others pertain to specific subject areas that are meant to resonate with different groups of students. Werner and Kelly (2011) asked parents for their perspectives on one such course, a high school engineering
curriculum called Project Lead the Way. They found that 96% of surveyed parents upheld that the program positively benefited their child because it allowed the students to gain exposure to engineering content before college (Werner & Kelly, 2011). Simply put, parents affirm that the program gave their children an advantage over peers who did not participate in the course, as well as an opportunity for students to gain initial experience with the track and see if it was something they would be interested in turning into a career.

Additionally, Project Lead the Way’s high school courses included an option for students to use the class for college credit at select universities (Werner & Kelly, 2011). Parents claimed that this helped their child get ahead in their studies and looked good on college applications, therefore contributing to the positive feelings towards the Project Lead the Way curriculum. Dodd (1998) also determined that parents showed positive reactions towards a curriculum that had significance outside of the school walls. This curriculum could be a system that helped prepare a child for college or the workplace or a curriculum that helped to keep a tradition alive (Dodd, 1998). Any curriculum that challenges students and provides an opportunity for skill advancement and growth are often positively communicated about by parents. Similarly, student satisfaction and enjoyment with a course has the same effect, as seen in the next section.

**Student Satisfaction and Enjoyment.** Parents showed positive perceptions of school when their child expressed satisfaction and enjoyment. Frequent teacher communication, when combined with the stories and experiences that children bring home, give parents a complete picture of what is driving their child’s success. Bailey (2000) had several parents favor integrated courses because their child enjoyed the classes or teaching styles, their child found the information easier to remember because it was repeated across multiple classes, and their child simply had fun. Similarly, Dye (1989) found that parents were happy with their child’s preschool
program simply because their child enjoyed going each day. When parents see their child engaged in content and expressing personal satisfaction, parents often agree that the school is meeting their child’s needs and are more likely to communicate in a positive manner with teachers and school officials.

**Participation in & Understanding of Curriculum.** Parents who show a better understanding of a curriculum are more likely to react positively about a school’s structure. Parents may participate in a curriculum committee or attend School Board meetings where they hear about curriculum challenges and help to influence curriculum decisions (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Parents who attend curriculum nights or Back-to-School nights often gain a better understanding of what their child is learning (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Many parents speak with teachers at parent-teacher conferences to learn about their child’s interactions with the school curriculum (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). While these sorts of interactions are common in the upper grades, Dye (1989) had preschool parents attend weekly school meetings so that educators could share what the students were learning. Students shared the art projects they had made and took their parents around the classroom displays. Furthermore, parents rotated teaching a weekly skill from their career or household to the preschool class (Dye, 1989). This increased understanding of curriculum through participation in school events caused parents to perceive a stronger connection to their child and the other parents in their child’s class (Dye, 1989). Both their involvement with the curriculum, as well as the parents’ understanding of the curriculum, helped to create a positive experience for everyone involved.

**Negative Parent Perceptions about Schools**

While most teachers and school communities are hopeful that parents will perceive the experience in a positive light, negative perceptions do sometimes occur. This can cause teachers
and parents to communicate in a damaging manner with one another. There are several prominent reasons for negative perceptions of schools including resistance to change, student failure, student dissatisfaction, and lack of information or understanding towards the curriculum. Each section will include suggestions for how to engage parents in schools to reduce the chance of negative perceptions occurring from the start, or continuing once they occur.

**Resistance to Change.** Dodd (1998) found that many parents held negative impressions of school climate because they identified the content and structure as being different from when they had been in school themselves. When speaking about English and history being integrated into one combined American Studies course, one parent remarked, “I go along with the old school. That’s the way I did it. Why change it? Those two were separate classes” (Dodd, 1998, p. 466). Similar to this parent, many parents held the viewpoint that if things worked fine when they were in school, there was no need to restructure things moving forward (Dodd, 1998). This idea does not just apply to integrated courses; it is also in response to group projects, team teaching, room set-ups, and other new ways of teaching curriculum (Dodd, 1998). When parents are resistant to change, it often comes from a misunderstanding of why the changes are taking place. Teachers and school officials are encouraged to share this information with parents and to clarify questions (Dodd, 1998). Changes to school content and structure take place for the good of the students. Once parents understand that these measures were put in place to help set their child up for success, they are usually more willing to communicate constructively with the school and hold the school structure in a more positive light.

**Student Failure.** If students were unsuccessful in a course, parents shared negative perceptions of the class. In examples where students were struggling with course material, parents often remarked that their children had difficulties remembering which assignments were
for which class, as the content in each course was similar (Bailey, 2000; Dodd, 1998). Additionally, some parents remarked that the workload was too heavy and that students required more scaffolding, supports, and individualized attention built into the curriculum in order for all students to be successful (Dodd, 1998). When speaking about a challenging course that her son could take next year, one parent predicted that her son would struggle with the content because it would have, “a great deal of analytical writing, very few choices, and not much small-group discussion” (Dodd, 1998, p. 467). The parent reflected that these areas were difficult for her son in other classes, so if the expectation remains the same moving forward, this curriculum would essentially set him up for failure (Dodd, 1998). In other words, she alleged that her child was failed by the curriculum before he even attempted it.

Other parents spoke out about concerns with broader curriculums throughout a state or nation. Ersoy (2007) found that surveyed parents in Turkey were disappointed that the K-5 primary school curriculum did not match the national examination system. Parents asserted that because the content being taught did not align with the national exam, and because the textbooks were lacking information, their child was therefore unprepared for the exams and set up for failure. This dissonance in content brings in the important perspective that resources need to align with curriculum objectives. If not, some parents may find a disparity between teachers and schools where some classrooms are filling the knowledge gaps better than others. Parents are encouraged to raise concerns about school curriculum with teachers, school districts, and potentially local and state officials, as all students have a right to an adequate education.

**Student Dissatisfaction.** While parents often had positive perceptions of curriculum when their child expressed interest in the material and school structure, if students expressed concerns about an area of schooling, their parents held a more negative perspective towards the
area involved. Some parents noted that course repetition caused their child to find the work boring, and thus they were unmotivated to put forth effort (Bailey, 2000). Other students complained that classes did not provide enough choices with assignments and group partnerships (Dodd, 1998). According to Dodd (1998), one parent’s son commented there were too many mandatory books used in his classes, while Ersoy (2007) found that parents and students were upset with the focus on handwriting execution. In these cases, parents seemed to have little knowledge of what was being taught in the classroom or why these specific policies and assignments were taking place. Parents simply shared negative reviews with their children because of their children’s complaints. Frequent communication between teachers and parents about current curriculum and necessary resources could help resolve these disputes.

Evangelinou-Yiannakis (2016) presented an interesting occurrence at a Catholic school in Australia. Parents complained about the weekly requirement for students to attend mass and participate in four outdoor Processions throughout the year because their children were bored with the events (Evangelinou-Yiannakis, 2016). Even though these requirements were central to a Catholic private school education, and something that parents had committed to upon enrolling their child, the school ended up changing the requirements to appease parent negativity. A similar event occurred when parents wanted their children to have a school-wide dance to celebrate the end of the year. The parish was concerned about the nature of this event but compromised so that students could have an outdoor fun day instead. When school officials are receptive to parent and student complaints and are willing to compromise, parents are more likely to change their perspective because the school’s malleability shows that their concerns are being acknowledged (Evangelinou-Yiannakis, 2016).
Some students, and therefore parents, also showed dissatisfaction with being left out of a program. Bailey (2000) provided an example where some students were excluded from a special program because of staffing challenges. This caused some students to only receive partial participation, giving parents the impression that their child missed out. Many students complained that they were learning different content than their peers and did not get to participate in the same projects (Bailey, 2000). Previous findings have suggested that schools and parents should work together to address student and parent complaints related to school structure and curriculum (Dodd, 1998; Evangelinou-Yiannakis, 2016). Once a school or teacher explains why a policy is operating in a certain way, parents and students are usually more accepting of the content and may change their perspective. However, parent perspectives can also be impacted by a lack of information.

**Lack of Information.** Parents cited how the terms used in curriculum often left them confused, even if it was something their child had participated in (Bailey, 2000; Dodd, 1998). Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems (2016) conducted research on self-regulated learning. In order to speak to caregivers about self-regulated learning, they first had to provide caregivers with a definition of the term and examples of when the learning might be occurring at home without parents realizing it. Teachers and school staff often used unfamiliar terminology (i.e. self-regulated learning, team teaching, or integrated classrooms) with parents without first presenting what it was or why it was being used. Thus, whenever a teaching term is being used in schools, teachers should first communicate the definition of what that term looks like and why it is occurring at the start of the school year (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems. 2016). Teachers and school districts often get caught up in educational discourse without realizing that parents are not on the same page and require refreshers to understand what is being taught and why.
Additionally, school staff need to be cognizant of the fact that just because something is stated once, parents may not have heard it or understood it the first time. Werner and Kelly (2011) determined that many parents remarked positively about Project Lead the Way’s engineering courses being exchanged for college credit at several universities. However, the researchers also found that parents who were not aware of this until surveyed, or were aware but were not sure which colleges accepted the transfer credits, held more negative perceptions about the program (Werner & Kelly, 2011). If schools are able to relay important information about academic advancement through multiple means of notification, more parents may react positively towards a program because they are better informed.

Evangelinou-Yiannakis (2016) commented that many of the Australian Catholic School’s complaints from parents, such as material taught and length of time spent on material per week, involved confusion about religious education curriculum. Many parents self-identified as being non-Catholic, non-practicing Catholics, or lapsed Catholics who had lost touch with Catholic faith and practices (Evangelinou-Yiannakis, 2016). Therefore, the religious education requirements were foreign to them. After the school held parent meetings to inform parents more about the faith and broke down the time allotted towards religious education each day, parents were more receptive to allowing their students to participate (Evangelinou-Yiannakis, 2016). Dye (1989) noted similar research with preschool parents. While the parents in her study held positive perceptions of the program because they were frequently involved in the school and invited to weekly curriculum meetings, many commented that they wished upper grades allowed for the same levels of involvement and interaction. That is to say that when parents perceive that they are a part of the school community and understand the curriculum being taught and how their child engages with it, they hold more positive perceptions of the school’s curriculum simply
because their comfort level increases. Schools can therefore combat negative parent perceptions by allowing time for parents to enter the classrooms and learn more about what is occurring and why.

**Demonstrations of Dissatisfaction.** When parents are unhappy with the curriculum, the first step taken is usually a conference between the parents, the teacher, and the principal to determine a resolution for the dispute. Some school districts allow parents to opt out of material that they find offensive or that goes against their religious beliefs. When districts choose to counter these arguments, the school board must step in to determine a resolution.

McCarthy and Stanton (2017) highlighted a case study that required school board action. When a parent was concerned that a tenth-grade required novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, was racially insensitive and negatively portrayed Native Americans by only focusing on derogatory features, such as alcoholism and drop-out rates, instead of positives within their heritage, traditions, and culture, the conflict sparked great controversy within the school, especially between students (McCarthy & Stanton, 2017). A student who self-identified as Native American resonated with the story and stated that the tale deserved to be heard so he created a petition and gathered signatures from classmates before speaking before the school board with his peers at a three-hour discussion about the text (McCarthy & Stanton, 2017). The students’ commitment to the novel inspired the board to rule in favor of the book and an opt-out option was not given to parents who disagreed with the novel’s message, as the board asserted the novel was just showing one perspective, no different from other novels in the curriculum (McCarthy & Stanton, 2017). While this situation resulted in the book remaining in the curriculum, other situations have had books banned from school or for an opt-out opportunity to go into effect when parents state their concerns about curriculum or curriculum materials.
While many concerns are settled by school boards, other parental concerns are taken to court if they disagree with the board’s decision. The court case *Parker v. Hurley* contained a situation where the parents did not like how the public-school curriculum included books containing diverse families (Strasser, 2011). The court ruled in favor of the school district, determining that the district had a right to promote inclusion and awareness of all family lifestyles in their first-grade curriculum (Strasser, 2011).

Some court cases involve parents and school districts working together to promote a fair curriculum for their students. Stern (1979) summarized the 1975 court case *Loewen v. Turnipseed* that occurred over two textbooks in Mississippi. The Mississippi State Textbook Purchasing Board refused to approve a history textbook called *Mississippi: Conflict and Change* because it portrayed an accurate picture of Mississippi state history (Stern, 1979). Instead, they only approved one Mississippi history textbook, *Your Mississippi*, which contained racist ideas, provided minimally accurate events, and promoted whiteness (Stern, 1979). Parents, school districts, Catholic schools, and the textbook author of *Mississippi: Conflict and Change* sued the board for infringing upon students’ first amendment rights for appropriate school materials (Stern, 1979). The court did rule in favor of the schools and parents, and allowed use of the textbook throughout the state (Stern, 1979). If parents and schools had not spoken up, students may have not received the quality education to which they were entitled.

**Summary**

When parents hold a strong perception about a school, they are more likely to voice their opinion, question, or concern with teachers and staff members. By allowing parents to participate in school events and openly share what is taking place in school, and why, teachers are more likely to foster strong partnerships with parents that lead to more positive and frequent parent-
teacher communication. Several strategies for increased parental involvement will be addressed in the next section.

**Parent Involvement**

Positive parent-teacher relationships ensure that future communication between parties will be successful and productive. Vickers and Minke (1995) established that “joining” (referring to trust, availability, and dependability) is an equal part in positive parent-teacher relationships alongside communication. These constructs can be accomplished through open and honest communication and responses that occur in a timely manner. Thompson and Mazer (2012) found, “Parents who regularly communicate with their child’s teacher might experience feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the degree of support received from the teacher” (p. 142). Therefore, teachers and parents establish positive relationships when they communicate in a way that allows both parties to have their needs met and understood.

Ozmen et al. (2016) noted that teachers often encounter personal barriers that impede their ability to positively communicate with parents depending on how many years they have been teaching. Ozmen et al. (2016) determined, “Teachers with ‘5 years and less’ work experience encounter personal barriers the most, and the teachers who have ‘16 years and more’ and ‘6-15 year[s]’ of work experience follow them” (p. 39). Novice teachers and experienced teachers alike are both encouraged to refresh their communication skills and to work towards building positive relations with parents by getting parents more involved in their child’s education and encouraging them to participate in school events. Positive parent-teacher relationships are also fostered from the successful use of strategies such as monitoring tone, using positive language, and participating in active listening through verbal and nonverbal cues.
Strategies for Involving Parents

There are multiple strategies for how parents could be incorporated into school activities and classroom events. Hoppock (1952) provided potential strategies such as inviting parents into the classroom to share personal skills that incorporate student learning. For example, if a classroom was learning about Veterans Day, the teacher invited in parents who were veterans to share about their experiences and bring classroom learning to life. This benefits both parents and students, as students received a more wholesome classroom experience, and parents made a connection with their child’s school and learned material. The same benefit was true of parents chaperoning field trips (Hoppock, 1952). These experiences allow parents to continue the learning within school walls when the students return.

Parents and teachers are encouraged to work with the local community to problem-solve student needs and help students make connections outside of school (Hoppock, 1952). If a class was learning about arctic animals, they could connect with a local zookeeper to conduct an interview on questions pertaining to the animals they are studying. When students are able to explore curriculum in a new way, parents can also participate to form connections with the local community.

Additionally, Hoppock (1952) encouraged teachers to involve parents in the classroom as room parents. The parents helped clean the area, provided snacks, assisted with parties and classroom events, and came up with new ideas for learning, including fundraising for classroom materials (Hoppock, 1952). Parents who are more involved in their child’s school often have more positive views about the method of instruction and are more likely to communicate positively with teachers.
Parent criticisms can often lead to positive change. When parents’ concerns are communicated, teachers should not be averse to inviting parents into the classroom to see how they teach and encourage different skills (Hoppock, 1952). Evangelinou-Yiannakis (2016) encouraged all schools, but especially newer schools, to be prepared for parent concerns and feedback as there will be problems to work through the first few years. The more that schools are able to compromise with parents while staying true to their main mission and focus, the happier everyone involved will be. Evangelinou-Yiannakis (2016) suggested creating a parent council to listen to parent concerns and address them in a timely manner if there is a high number of criticisms to address. Schools are encouraged to consider recruiting parents, as well as taking volunteers, because simply taking only those who volunteer often results in extreme viewpoints which causes conflict and clashing ideas (Clement, 1980). Providing a forum to listen to parent ideas can give them a sense they are heard and change negative attitudes or misguided opinions in a positive direction.

Sharing Data with Parents

One of the most important ways that parental involvement can be increased is to make sure that data is shared appropriately with families, often through strong communication. Data refers to any information about a student that is pertinent for families to know and may include things like homework completion, grades, behavior, standardized test scores, and student interests (McWilliams & Patton, 2015). While each school and teacher have their own way of communicating this information, there are a few key factors to keep in mind. First, schools collect an overwhelming amount of data on students and not all information needs to be shared at once. Teachers are encouraged to choose the most important bits of information to share, and to focus on those areas with parents before letting the parents’ questions and concerns lead the way
towards further conversations (McWilliams & Patton, 2015). When parents begin asking
questions about their student’s learning, they are becoming a partner with teachers in their
child’s education.

Additionally, remembering that parents do not always understand a score out of context is
important. Teachers and administrators can help parents make sense of the scores being sent
home by including additional information such as a rubric that shows points earned out of points
offered, or a percentile on a standardized test that shows how the student scored as compared to
others in the age group or grade-band (McWilliams & Patton, 2015). All school districts use
different methods of reporting information and parents may not be familiar with how to access
their child’s grades on the platform being used, further complicating the issue (McWilliams &
Patton, 2015). School districts and teachers are encouraged to hold family information nights that
can review how to access these programs and answer any questions that parents have
(McWilliams & Patton, 2015). Even outside of these nights, teachers are encouraged to ask
parents early on how they would prefer to communicate and how they would like data to be
shared (McWilliams & Patton, 2015). This partnership between parents and teachers provides
parents with advance notice for where their child stands and where they need to be down the
road.

Teacher Preparation

Parental involvement in schools begins with strong teachers who value parents as
essential members of the classroom team. Gellert (2005) recommended that teachers begin
establishing connections with parents in their first home communication. Teachers are reminded
to choose their words carefully when introducing themselves to parents through written
discourse. If a teacher comes off too strong and portrays their self as an expert, parents are less
likely to view themselves in a partnership with the teacher and the school curriculum that year. Lieberman and Walker (2007) pointed out that teachers may require more training in order to do this effectively. For example, teachers applying for a National Board Certification must complete three levels of extensive internships, field studies, coursework, and reflections, yet there is little focus on strategies for working with parents (Lieberman & Walker, 2007). Dye (1989) showed similar results in her research when teachers began holding weekly curriculum sessions with preschool parents, as teachers were nervous that parents would not listen to the content or that teaching techniques would be questioned (Dye, 1989). Instead, with practice, the teachers saw their skills strengthen and that parents were both responsive and appreciative of their suggestions. It is recommended that teachers receive more training on working and communicating with parents, as a partnership with parents is one of the best methods to engage parents with positive, constructive communication.

Summary

In order for parents and teachers to communicate successfully, it is imperative that parents are involved members of the school community. Teachers and school districts have numerous ways to involve parents in classroom activities, as well as district-wide events and committees. Strong parent connections often begin in the first few months of school and carry over into the school year. It is important to build these connections with all types of families, which can be difficult when working with families who are linguistically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse. These families are often trapped within the digital divide which can limit communication techniques and require a need for strong school support to build home-school connections.
The Digital Divide

Over the last twenty years, an increasing number of work-force jobs, school tasks, and communication platforms have formed a dependency on technology (Bach et al., 2018; Kelly, 2008; Ritzhaupt et al., 2013). Unfortunately, not all students and families have access to completing these technology-based tasks in the same way (Bach et al., 2018; Kelly, 2008; Kormos, 2018; Luongo, 2012; Ritzhaupt et al., 2013). These scholars referred to this gap in access as the digital divide. Van Dijk (2006) defined the theory of this divide as “the gap between individuals who have and do not have access to new forms of information [and communication] technology” (p. 221-222).

However, Kelly (2008) took this theory (and therefore the definition) a step further by addressing that there is not just a digital divide in terms of technology access, but a cultural divide that is preventing linguistically and culturally diverse individuals from achieving their full potential. This section will address multiple factors that contribute to the digital and cultural divides in schools and communities, as well as provide suggestions that highlight using computer-based learning in a culturally-sensitive manner to counter these problems.

Examining the Digital and Cultural Divides

While school districts have pushed students and parents to complete an increasing number of tasks digitally, many students and families who come from linguistically and culturally-diverse backgrounds do not have access to the technology necessary to complete these assignments and connect with schools (Bach et al., 2018; Kelly, 2008; Kormos, 2018; Luongo, 2012; Ritzhaupt et al., 2013). Kelly (2008) noted the inequalities of technology infrastructure, such as computers, equipment, software, Internet connections, and Internet speeds, in schools and households. Many families are sharing devices, or only have access to a community device
during limited hours that might interfere with work schedules or meal times (Kelly, 2008). This lack of technology resources, paired with inequalities that widen the gap and inadequate student technology training, often puts students and families at a disadvantage.

**Limited Access Impedes Success.** Bach et al. (2018) provided an example of job applicants at a Philadelphia job fair. Since most companies only accepted applications online, applicants were at a disadvantage if they did not have home-based technology allowing them to check for postings and apply frequently to multiple positions (Bach et al., 2018). Bach et al. (2018) also noted that most companies at the fair were only hiring for part-time positions, mostly in retail, while most applicants were looking for full-time jobs with benefits. The unavailability of necessary jobs, coupled with the online application process, caused many individuals to become trapped in a cycle of social and economic marginalization (Bach et al., 2018).

This marginalization often carries into schools. Luongo (2012) surveyed and interviewed teachers to gather their thoughts on technology education. The author determined that teachers were concerned about aspects of technology education, specifically the lack of time devoted to technology education in elementary school, and the difficulties with teaching young students basic skills, such as how to log into the computer, during that time. Luongo (2012) reported that many teachers did not have enough devices in their school for them to be used effectively. This is consistent with Kormos’ (2018) finding that “there is a digital divide in the frequency of use and perception of effectiveness of technology among teachers” (p. 28). When surveying web-based technology in urban, suburban, and rural K-12 schools, there was a large discrepancy between access to technology in suburban districts compared to urban districts (Kormos, 2018). Teachers in urban school districts reported lower numbers of devices and software programs for students (Kormos, 2018).
Inequalities Widening the Gap. Achievement-enhancing technology instruction is not provided to all students as a result of poor teaching habits and misconceptions about student ability levels (Kelly, 2008). This lack of high-quality instruction is causing some students to be caught in poor teaching habits, such as only receiving technology instruction unless as a reward for good behavior or allowing certain groups of students to partake in more engaging, creative tasks, as opposed to simple drill and practice activities (Giraldo-García et al., 2019; Kelly, 2008). Luongo (2012) also noted a discrepancy across genders in technology education. Teachers gave more attention to males, thus developing their skills further than female students.

Similarly, discrepancies in technology proficiency often arise when students are given technology-based tasks to complete. Ritzhaupt et al. (2013) found that middle school students in Florida were being tested on classroom material through computer-based tasks. Many culturally and linguistically diverse students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds did not perform as well on the assessments as their white classmates from middle- and upper-class backgrounds (Ritzhaupt et al., 2012). The authors determined that the more technology the child had access to at home, the better they did on the test. Ritzhaupt et al. (2013) stated, “If individuals do not have access [to technology at home], they have less opportunity to use these tools for their personal empowerment” (p. 300). Home technology allows students to experience different features at their own pace and become comfortable using devices in different ways. When students do not have access to technology at home, they fall behind in essential skills that are necessary for today’s society.

Training. In addition to having technology available at home, owning or working with any form of technology requires training. As Kelly (2008) highlighted, not all students receive the same technological training in school. These inconsistencies among students contribute to
both the digital and cultural divide because not all students leave school with the necessary skills to achieve success in college and the workforce. An increasing number of jobs rely on applicants to have basic or advanced proficiency in computer programs such as Adobe Acrobat, Microsoft Office, and the Google Suite, and these students are failing compared to more knowledgeable applicants.

Additionally, parents struggled to receive the training they needed to partake in online school programs and use school-issued devices. Although some school districts offered training, these usually occurred at inopportune times for parents, which makes it difficult for everyone to participate (Hourcade et al., 1997). Events that were held during the day often required parents to miss work, and those that were held at night often caused parents to seek childcare (Hourcade et al., 1997). Furthermore, Hourcade et al. (1997) highlighted that many families who did attend training sessions often reported “information overload” at the close of the session (p. 42). A similar information overload occurred when accessing computer programs. When families use public computers at local libraries or community centers, they may not be aware of all the programs offered on the device or have time to explore different features while working.

**Family Inequity**

Inequity in socioeconomic levels play a role in parent perspectives. Werner and Kelly (2011) found that while parents with higher income levels held more positive viewpoints of the high school engineering program Project Lead the Way, families with an annual income of less than $25,000 did not rate the program as highly. Werner and Kelly (2011) hypothesized that this may be because fewer students from that demographic plan to attend college or aspire to become an engineer. Simply put, while parents with higher income levels rated the program positively because they saw opportunities for their child to grow from the content, families with lower
household income levels did not make the same connection, and therefore rated the curriculum in a more neutral or negative light.

Mahuro and Hungi (2016) found that economically disadvantaged students in Uganda met serious barriers to their education. Although public education in Uganda is free for all students, schools tend to ask parents for money for supplies, exam fees, and other programs that parents cannot afford (Mahuro & Hungi, 2016). This coincides with Ersoy’s (2007) findings that many economically disadvantaged families lacked resources, as these families could not provide the same classroom supplies towards learning as other families attending the same school. Furthermore, factors such as the language spoken at home, the parents’ education level, the parents’ job and if he/she is afforded time off during school hours, and the distance from home to school impacted student success and parent-teacher communication (Mahuro & Hungi, 2016). Students who were pushed to get private tutors to continue their studies at home often had parents who could not afford to pay for the lessons, thus causing their children to fall further behind their peers (Ersoy, 2007).

Additionally, if students did not complete assignments in school, parents often found that their child took the work home to complete and that the parents suddenly had to become the teacher (Ersoy, 2007). Many parents were unprepared to teach their child at home, both because of a lack in content and home resources, and also a lack of time between when the parents got home from work and the child went to bed. Both Mahuro and Hungi (2016) and Ersoy (2007) suggested that schools should provide economically-disadvantaged students with resources at home and additional educational opportunities outside of the school day to help bridge the gap between peers. Home resources for students might be possible through grants or other government-funded programs. School districts are also encouraged to provide parents access to
district computers in a central office or other location, as this helps to make information more accessible to low-income households (McWilliams & Patton, 2015). By recognizing that not all students are afforded the same backgrounds and resources as others, teachers and school districts can implement measures to ensure that everyone receives appropriate materials that make the curriculum equally accessible to all and send parents positive messages of support and understanding instead of feelings of shame and negativity.

**Involving All Families in Schools**

Families can be provided with this support through increased involvement with school and staff members. McCarthy and Stanton (2017) encouraged this involvement by having school districts work more directly with their minority students to present culturally-relevant content in the curriculum. Their research showed that while 10% of the school district’s population of students self-identified as being Native American, students argued they were underrepresented in the curriculum. The district worked to add more culturally-sensitive texts into their studies and received overall positive acceptance from both minority students and white students who claimed the text helped to shape culture within the school. Johansson (2009) found similar results when he examined the curriculum in Swedish schools to see if it incorporated the culture of the native Sámi people. While the schools contained a high percentage of Sámi students, they were underrepresented in the school curriculum. Johansson (2009) worked with parents and school officials to add aspects of Sámi culture to the curriculum. They added culturally-relevant projects and texts that depicted Sámi lives. Students and parents were excited by the new curriculum because they could see themselves in it. Schools are encouraged to include diverse texts in their curriculums that accurately depict minority groups. When everyone sees themselves reflected in school curriculum, they are more likely to maintain more positively towards the program.
In addition to providing culturally-responsive materials, schools should have someone on hand to address technology and language-based questions (McWilliams & Patton, 2015). In many school districts this may be an ESL teacher or another member of the school community who has experience working with diverse populations. Prior research indicated Latino parents were not sure how to interact with teachers and were hesitant to reach out on their own (Auerbach, 2007; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Grace & Gerdes, 2018). Having a point person available in schools to handle parent needs helped parents become more confident to speak up. Ramsay et al. (1992) found that having a field officer (referred to as a developer) work with select schools in New Zealand increased parent communication with diverse families when the school had trouble connecting with the Native Samoan population (Ramsay et al., 1992). The developer worked with the school principal to visit the leaders of the tribe and make more personal connections between home and school (Ramsay et al., 1992). The personal connection led to increased parental involvement and a deeper understanding of school curriculum and policies among parents within the tribe.

Similarly, Delgado-Gaitan (1991) reflected on the importance of establishing personal connections when collecting data on a preschool program for Latino students. The teacher held a parent night monthly that included child care and presented situations that parents could work on with students at home. The program had a high success rate with parents because the teacher made home visits to families asking them to participate and conducted the meetings in the parents’ native language. Parents frequently visited the preschool to see what their children were learning and assisted with classroom tasks such as cleaning and providing snacks. This connection to the school community encouraged parents to be more invested in the school’s curriculum and culture. Teachers and school administrators must strive to include families from
all backgrounds in curriculum decisions, as well as represent and acknowledge all students within the school.

*Communicating with Diverse Families*

Schools traditionally see parents and teachers communicating through methods such as conferences, phone calls, and e-mail, but these conventional expectations do not take into account varying perspectives of the many types of diverse families often found in school districts (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Thompson & Mazer, 2012). A portion of these families may not have access to technology in their homes, while others have access, but are not sure how to use it to connect with schools.

Additionally, some families experienced difficulties when attempting to interact with schools. Smith (2020) observed that when working with students of migrant families, it is imperative for teachers to foster a connection outside of school. This involves holding conferences outside of school hours to accommodate parent work schedules, having translators available to assist with language barriers, and meeting parents at their place of employment if they lack transportation (Smith, 2020). While all families need support from teachers and school districts to establish proper parent-teacher communication, diverse parents and students often have different needs that require direct interventions to foster home-school connections (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Smith, 2020). Teachers are not just able to provide these families with resources, but they can also supply families with training to use them successfully. This often involves teachers establishing alternative modes of communication to connect with parents.

McWilliams and Patton (2015) highlighted suggestions from the Harvard Family Research Project for establishing connections with parents through data sharing of test scores, writing samples, and observations. Parents and teachers should share data with one another
frequently so that all members of the child’s support team are on the same page and working together (McWilliams & Patton, 2015). Additionally, McWilliams and Patton (2015) suggested that data should be shared in a way that makes sense, such as providing a rubric or percentiles to help parents understand what scores are showing. McWilliams and Patton (2015) also recommended that districts provide families with access to computers and staff members who are on hand to answer questions about student information system software and other questions related to strategies and resources available to help students. Having these supports in place allow teachers to create a parental partnership that sets students up for success.

Similarly, Auerbach (2007) utilized a qualitative case study with ethnographic data to examine the beliefs and practices of Latino and African American families preparing for college. All of the interviewed parents were working-class individuals who did not attend college themselves (Auerbach, 2007). Auerbach (2007) determined that although most parents did not outright seek information from counselors and teachers about college, they still wanted their students to be successful and attend. Many parents supported students at home through verbal reminders that they should use education to seek jobs better than those of their parents. Auerbach (2007) shared how one parent provided an example of how he motivated his son:

I always use me as an example. Like, “Look at me. Do you want to work like me? You know, work hard and live like this? If you want to be more comfortable later, you have to work hard now, go to school.” Couple times, I took him to my work [at a factory] just to let him see what kind of work I do and if he would like to do that for the rest of his life.

(p. 263)

Parents who did seek support from school reflected that they were met with challenges. Multiple parents remarked that they seemed to receive conflicting information from guidance counselors
and that teachers were not concerned about issuing grades that would help set students up for college, even though the students were trying to improve (Auerbach, 2007). Auerbach (2007) concluded that educators need to realize that not all parents may look involved at school but are cheering for their students behind the scenes.

Teachers are encouraged reach out to parents of diverse families and to help their students navigate complex systems, such as college, that parents have little experience with. Radu (2011) gathered similar data on parental involvement in countries within Southeast Asia through a survey tool. The study had a few limitations, such as providing limited information on participant selection methods and being published in a less-reputable journal, but did provide elements of parental involvement which are important to acknowledge. Parents with lower levels of education and socioeconomic status were less likely to outwardly participate in school activities and interact with teachers (Radu, 2011). Teachers are therefore encouraged to reach out to parents and to engage them in a way that promotes regular parent-teacher communication.

Delgado-Gaitan (1991), Johnson (2014), and Smith (2020) suggested beginning with home visits to these households.

Using Technology to Communicate with Families. Marshall (2016) highlighted that although not all families own computers, e-mail addresses, or wireless internet connections, many do own smartphones. Both Marshall (2016) and Kormos (2018) suggested that teachers use communication software apps to connect with these families who may otherwise experience communication needs because of the digital divide and other equity concerns. The Pew Research Center (2019) confirmed this statistic by stating that as of 2019, 81% of Americans own smartphones and 71% of people who are economically disadvantaged (earning incomes of $30,000 or less per year) own a smartphone as well. These statistics revealed that although some
parents and teachers have trouble connecting over e-mail or a computer-based program, they could connect through smartphone apps such as Remind.

Although Marshall (2016) and Kormos’ (2018) findings appear promising, further research is needed in this area. Kormos (2018) revealed that urban teachers who would most benefit from smartphone communication apps had the lowest use of the software when compared to rural and suburban districts. Furthermore, some families chose not to participate in home-school communications.

Summary

Not all families are afforded the same access to technology. While teachers and school districts often push for home-school connections through technological concepts, not all families have equal access to these resources. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers and districts make connections with families in other ways and communicate using a variety of modes. A discussion of these modes, strategies for their use, and the importance of strong communication will be discussed next.

Parent-Teacher Communication

Parent-teacher communication on a frequent basis is imperative (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Bosch et al., 2017; Graham-Clay, 2005; McWilliams & Patton, 2015; Thompson et al., 2015). There are several benefits to doing so, and the various communication modes through the lens of Social Presence Theory, which pinpoints communication modes as ranging from warm or cold, and Media Richness Theory, which distinguishes modes on a spectrum of rich to lean, can be applied. Strategies exist for maximizing the potential of all communication types and for fostering positive relationships between parents and teachers, as this holds great importance in overall communication effectiveness.
Benefits of Parent-Teacher Communication

Parent-teacher communication describes the methods of speaking that parents and teachers engage in to promote academic success and support between home and the classroom. Frequent parent-teacher communication plays a positive role in the academic and social-emotional success of a child (Bosch et al., 2017; Symeou et al., 2012; Sirvani, 2007; Thompson & Mazer, 2012). Two-way parent-teacher communication often leads to increased parental involvement and student engagement, as well as higher grades (Kraft & Rogers, 2014). When parents and teachers are able to discuss assignments, grades, peer relationships, and classroom activities as soon as questions or misconceptions arise, both parties are better able to quickly resolve the situation (Dodd, 1998; Thompson et al., 2012).

Types of Communication

Graham-Clay (2005) observed that “communication may involve impressions created or words expressed” (p. 118). While parent-teacher communication usually occurs through direct modes, it also occurs indirectly through welcome signs hanging in the school, colorful displays of artwork, the cleanliness of the building, and smiling staff members (Graham-Clay, 2005).

Expressed communication can contain a one-way or two-way conversation. One-way communication occurs when one party sends a written communication that is read by a second party, but no direct interaction between the two parties takes place (Graham-Clay, 2005). Examples of one-way communication include classroom newsletters, report cards, school websites, and emailed newsletters (Graham-Clay, 2005). Two-way conversation involves a direct interchange between both parties. Examples of two-way communication include phone calls, conferences, home visits, and open houses or parent nights (Graham-Clay, 2005). Teachers and
parents should consider utilizing a combination of one-way and two-way conversations, as well as positive school and home impressions, when interacting with one another.

**Modes of Parent-Teacher Communication**

While parental involvement levels and opportunities differ between school districts and locations, parent-teacher communication is present in schools across the globe. There are various methods of parent-teacher communication, some of which are more prevalent based on different situations and circumstances. The modes in this section will be analyzed through Media Richness Theory and Social Presence Theory.

**Phone calls.** As landlines, and later cell phones, grew in popularity, phone calls began to rise as a prevalent parent-teacher communication mode. A phone call uses telephone networks (either a physical landline or wireless connection) to connect two parties in voice-based communication. Phone calls share many of the same benefits as face-to-face interactions. Phone calls allow busy parents to communicate with their child’s teacher from the comfort of their own home or work environment without having to schedule a time to meet face-to-face at the school or during school-specified hours. Phone calls are considered a rich mode of communication under MRT and are encouraged for emergencies and complex conversations (Thompson & Mazer, 2012). Thompson et al. (2015) highlighted, “Phone communication [best aligns] with the third tenant of MRT which focuses on facilitate[ing] natural conversation to assist in interpreting more complex messages” (p. 200). In Social Presence Theory, phone calls are on the warmer end of the spectrum as they allow both parties to hear voice intonations, nonverbal cues such as laughter, and to respond right away. While phone calls are not as warm as a face-to-face conversations that promote visual cues, they do allow for more auditory and social cues than other modes and thus allow for a stronger quality of communication.
Thompson and Mazer (2012) found that phone calls are frequently used when communicating serious behavior issues or urgent matters. For example, a teacher may make a phone call to a parent to check how a student is getting home for dismissal, or to ask about bringing a missing lunchbox to school. The call allows the teacher and parent to swiftly communicate with immediate feedback (Thompson et al., 2015). Love (1996) encouraged teachers to call parents unprompted to relay positive messages about students. It is best practice for teachers to log their phone calls with parents for future reference (Love, 1996).

**Face to Face Conferences.** Before the rise of computers and the Internet in the late 90s, literal face-to-face communication was one of the most common parent-teacher communication methods (Minke & Anderson, 2003). Literal face-to-face communication refers to when parents and teachers physically meet in a common setting to discuss student progress and concerns. While this communication mode is most prevalent as a scheduled conference or meeting to discuss special education services (e.g., an Individualized Education Plan [IEP] or 504 plan meeting under special education), it can also occur informally through a parent request (Minke & Anderson, 2003; Thompson et al., 2015). More recently, smartphones and Internet technology have transformed face-to-face communication to also include a digital aspect through the use of video-conferencing software (e.g., Skype, Zoom, and Facetime).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, online face-to-face methods rose as the prevalent form of parent-teacher communication in schools (Krome, 2020). In these situations, both parties are conferencing in from their own location but are able to see each other on a shared screen. Zoom was a popular choice for live, online classes because it was a free platform. Serhan (2020) described Zoom as a:
Web-based collaborative video conferencing tool that provides quality audio, video, and screen sharing, which makes it great for virtual conferences, online lectures, online meeting, webinars, and more… Instructors were able to use the different features of Zoom to create interactive learning environments. These features include a virtual white board with annotation capacity to explain concepts, breakout rooms to create small collaborative group work, polls for student feedback, chat to facilitate class discussions. In addition, zoom meetings can be recorded and made available for future reference. (p. 335)

Both digital and literal face-to-face communication are considered rich modes of communication under MRT because they allow parents and teachers to speak immediately with one another, thereby limiting any possible ambiguities that could occur during the conversation. In Social Presence Theory, in-person conferences would be considered the warmest mode of communication. Virtual conferences are a close second, but do not allow participants to demonstrate skills as well as in-person meetings. Thus, both MRT and Social Presence Theory predict that face-to-face conferences allow for the strongest quality of communication to occur.

Cheatham and Ostrosky (2013) identified the purpose of scheduled conferences to be a time for parents and teachers to update one another on a child’s progress and accomplishments, both at home and in school, as well as an opportunity to set goals for future educational milestones. Cheatham and Ostrosky (2013) recommend that conferences are planned in advance, and that a whole picture of the child is discussed, with input from both teachers and parents (Graham-Clay, 2005). Many school districts mandate that teachers hold conferences with the parents of every student at least once a year, with the possibility of more frequent meetings if there are academic concerns. Symeou et al. (2012) wrote about a school system in Cypress,
where teachers were required to meet with every parent weekly during a school-wide visiting period. Many parents enjoyed these set times for conferences because it allowed them to receive up-to-date information about where their child was academically and what they could do at home to better meet their child’s needs (Symeou et al., 2012).

In addition to set conference times, Thompson and Mazer (2012) found that many parents and teachers sought out these face-to-face meetings when they had a serious issue to discuss, such as bullying, fighting, teasing, emotional concerns, failing grades, or a serious medical condition. In these cases, parents and teachers attempted to resolve the problem more promptly by meeting face-to-face. Thompson et al. (2015) also revealed that many parents choose to communicate face-to-face if they started with a leaner mode of communication, such as e-mail, and did not receive the intended result. In these situations, the parents found it necessary to follow-up with an in-person conversation to ensure that the situation was resolved promptly and in the manner they were seeking. One parent commented that face-to-face communication, “is always best because there is no misinterpretation of the words used. Body language is extremely important in understanding the message being relayed” (Thompson et al., 2015, p. 198).

Therefore, for difficult conversations, or situations where one is worried the information may be relayed in an ambiguous manner, face-to-face communications methods are most appropriate.

**Home Visits.** Home visits occur when a teacher visits the home of their student’s family. Wong and Wong (2005) suggest making these connections early, so that parents can establish a rapport with teachers and teachers can learn more about a child’s background and family situation. Home visits are similar to a conference, but less formal and not academic-driven. These visits are considered a rich communication mode under MRT and a warm communication
mode under Social Presence Theory as a result of the face-to-face nature and ability to develop personal connections with families.

Home visits can also occur throughout the school year. While Johnson (2014) acknowledged that visiting a child’s parents in their home can be a daunting task, the researcher suggested bringing work samples, photos, and even a small gift to begin the conversation. Students may be needed to help translate language barriers, which provides them with confidence and establishes student trust as they realize that they are chosen to carry the conversation (Johnson, 2014).

**School Events and Parent Nights.** School-sponsored after-school family events (i.e. spring fairs, field days, bingo nights) as well as parent nights (often called Back-to-School Night or Meet the Teacher Night) help to establish close relationships between schools and families (Campbell, 2018; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Campbell (2018) suggested that teachers should begin Back-to-School Nights by: 1) introducing themselves as both a teacher and a person, 2) providing an overview of the curriculum that will be taught over the course of the year, 3) establishing classroom community expectations, and 4) showcasing a passion for teaching. Providing these four concepts at the start of the year helps to give families a sense of classroom expectations that set the year up for success.

Parent nights can occur more frequently than a one-time event at the start of the school year. Delgado-Gaitan (1991) interviewed a preschool teacher who held parent nights monthly at the school. The preschool teacher provided childcare and discussed a variety of topics about education, child development, and American culture (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). These parent meetings allowed parents to create a closer connection to the classroom and students were more successful in school knowing that their teacher and family were linked in a partnership of care.
This establishment of a home-school connection causes parent nights and school events to be considered rich, warm modes of communication under MRT and Social Presence Theory.

**Paper Communications.** While early classrooms used chalk and slates for daily lessons, paper and pencils became a more popular choice in 1900 when both products were more easily accessible (Addison, n.d.). When the photocopier was invented in 1959, multiple copies of handouts were able to be distributed to students (Addison, n.d.). These inventions allowed parents and teachers to begin communicating important information (i.e., upcoming events, grades, classroom assignments, or field trips) through paper methods (Graham-Clay, 2005). Symeou et al. (2012) stated that these paper communications “might take the form of memos, lists, forms, permission notes, report cards, calendars of the school year, and notices of special events sent to the home” (p. 66). Although all students received a copy of these paper notices, this mode of communication falls under indirect communication methods because the information communicated is often generic for all students in the grade level or school.

Paper communications can also be child-involved when the materials sent home are more personalized for the student and the child is able to take an active role in the parent-teacher communication process. Sirvani (2007) used this approach when sending home a math classwork monitoring sheet that parents signed biweekly. Students and parents used the sheet to stay on top of classroom assignments and tests. Students who used the sheet with their parents had higher levels of academic achievement than those who did not (Sirvani, 2007).

**Evolution of Paper to Electronic Communications.** Recently, many indirect and child-involved communications have occurred through technology. While many schools once sent home a weekly paper newsletter or flyers about school-wide activities, these districts are now choosing to communicate this information online, often in an attempt to “go green” (Carley,
Jaiswal (2018) highlighted various methods that teachers and school districts might use in the form of online communication. First, school websites provided a “picture of school activities, [a] welcome letter and school homework, [a] newsletter, [and a] school calendar” (Jaiswal, 2018, p. 1967). The website serves as a convenient, consistent location for families to access pertinent school information.

Additionally, many schools have sent an e-newsletter that informs parents about “school related activities, policies, news, schedule changes, student awards, updates, [and] events and community happening[s]” (Jaiswal, 2018, p. 1967). Instead of sending home paper notices about these subjects with a student, the e-newsletters allows all families to be informed quickly in an electronic format. Some districts have mobile apps that are available for download on smart phones that serve a similar purpose. These apps provided common district information such as, “student enrollment times, alerts, calendars, directories, news, reminders for holidays, and lunch menus” (Jaiswal, 2018, p. 1967). E-newsletters, district websites, and district apps can provide parents with video links to school-related content. Walsh et al. (2018) determined that video links helped to positively increase parent perceptions about teachers and schools, as parents preferred being able to watch the videos multiple times, and realized that they had more questions answered by being able to “see” events in the video.

While many schools still provide paper report cards, other districts have provided online access to student data. This allows parents to “monitor their child[’s] attendance reports, class test report[s] and other important activities in school” (Jaiswal, 2018, p. 1967). This data is usually available through a parent portal that only parents can access.

MRT considers paper and digital indirect and child-involved communication modes lean modes because the indirect aspect often leaves room for ambiguity and questions. Similarly,
Social Presence Theory lists these as colder modes because there is little to no visual, auditory, or social cues present in the communication. Therefore, MRT and Social Presence Theory reveal that there is a weaker quality of communication through this method. However, although parents often need to follow-up with teachers about what is posted on the website or sent home in paper form using a different communication mode, both indirect and child-centered approaches are still common practices in schools.

E-mails. In the early 1990s, e-mail became a prevalent choice with the creation of Hotmail’s free e-mail accounts (Hughes, 2016). Numerous studies have pinpointed e-mail as the most prevalent mode of communication between parents and teachers, and have encouraged teachers and parents to use it in schools (Thompson, 2008, 2009; Thompson & Mazer, 2012; Thompson et al., 2015). E-mail is a computer-mediated communication (CMC) that allows participants to send written text-based messages back and forth over the internet. All messages are time-stamped and saved in an inbox or folder where they can be accessed for later use.

Thompson (2008) suggested that “e-mail improves both the quantity and quality of parent-teacher communication and relationships by opening up a continuing dialogue between parents and teachers” (p. 202). MRT and Social Presence Theory consider e-mail a leaner and colder communication mode, which means that the quality of e-mail communication may be weaker than other communication modes. However, even though other modes of communication (e.g., face-to-face and phone calls) are viewed as richer modes that allow for immediate feedback and personalization at the time of the conversation, e-mail has risen as a frequently utilized communication method because of the ability to have open-dialogue and opportunity for timely responses that Thompson (2008) discussed.
Smartphones have enabled parents and teachers to communicate through e-mail at a faster rate than in the past. Parents can communicate with teachers quickly and from any setting (Thompson et al., 2015). Some parents perceive that they are better able to express concerns in writing, and thus utilize this mode for that purpose. Thompson et al. (2015) described how parents have commented on the benefits of e-mail:

Parents thought the asynchronous qualities of e-mail produced better messages, allowing parents time to return, reread messages, and think through the composition of a message so they could better articulate their thoughts, and in turn, craft more effective messages due to the time they could take to compose their response. (p. 198)

These features are not available to parents when communicating with teachers through rich modes such as face-to-face conferences or phone conversations.

E-mail also allows for the sharing of data and documents. Walsh et al. (2018) e-mailed video links to incoming kindergarten families that contained information about a typical day of kindergarten and activities incoming kindergarteners could do before arriving. The e-mail format allowed the links to be sent to every parent of an incoming kindergartener, as well as additional attachments of kindergarten entrance information.

Thompson (2008) revealed that e-mail was “primarily [used] for clarification purposes to find out about students’ grades, homework completion, and academic progress” (p. 216). In these situations, the parent-teacher communication usually led to higher levels of academic achievement, as demonstrated by student grades and homework assignment completion rates. Additionally, e-mail was frequently used to communicate minor issues or questions, such as scheduling questions, peer relationship concerns, and school activity reminders. Thompson and Mazer (2012) revealed that classroom behavior and child welfare (which are categorized as
health and socialization issues) also emerged as frequent e-mail exchange topics. Parents wanted to make teachers aware of health concerns, as well as monitor their child’s behavior at school. Furthermore, parents expected an e-mail if their child was upset or having trouble socializing so that the concerns could be addressed at home.

**Texting.** Texting (i.e., text messaging) first began in the 1920s when the telex service was introduced by RCA Communications (which is Verizon Wireless today) (Technopedia, n.d.). Today, “texting is a slang term that refers to the creation and transmission of short electronic text messages between two or more mobile device users over a network,” (Technopedia, n.d., para. 1). Most messages are short, with less than 100 characters, and contain the possibility of including voice memos, photos, memes, and videos (Technopedia, n.d.). Outside of school settings, texting is a frequently utilized communication mode that provides an alternative for times that two-way communication is “difficult, inappropriate, or undesired” (Technopedia, n.d., para. 3). Texting allows both parties to read and respond to messages at their convenience (Technopedia, n.d.). It can also provide families with a less expensive communication option than other modes (Technopedia, n.d.).

With the increase of families owning smartphones, the potential for texting between parents and teachers has emerged as a mode of parent-teacher communication. When interviewing parents who use this practice with teachers, Thompson et al. (2015) highlighted that they reflected on the convenience that texting allows. Text messages can be read quickly, in brief messages, from any location on a smartphone. It allows quick reminders to be sent to parents by teachers. Snell et al. (2018) found that many preschool teachers in the United States are using text messages with parents because it is a logically more feasible way to connect with working parents. Text messaging also allows parents and teachers access to translation services that are
built into the smartphone’s software (Snell et al., 2018). Snell et al. (2020) took texting one step further by having teachers text parents four vocabulary words from a picture book that could be practiced at home on a weekly basis. The researchers found that parents were receptive to these messages and used the weekly topics to promote student learning at home.

Texting can take place through personal cell phone numbers, or through private communication apps. It is considered a lean form of MRT and a cold mode under Social Presence Theory. Therefore, based on these theories, while texting would be less effective when communicating complex messages, it could serve as a convenient method for sending short messages to parents.

**Facebook.** Facebook is an online social network service that was created by Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes in 2004 and it is part of the Meta Platforms company (Hall, n.d.). After registering for a free account and creating an initial profile, Facebook users have the ability to upload photos to their Timeline, join or create groups, scroll through a News Feed of recent posts, share emotions and comments on posts, and browse profiles of friends they have connected to (Hall, n.d.). Users also have access to a private chat feature, called Messenger.

Some teachers have created classroom groups on Facebook that allow them to connect with parents and share photos and classroom updates through posts (Thompson et al., 2015). Parents have the option of responding to these posts, creating their own post, or private messaging the teacher through Messenger. Thompson et al. (2015) found that parents appreciated the Messenger feature, as it allowed them to receive quick feedback from teachers. While Facebook is considered a lean, cold mode under MRT and Social Presence Theory, the ability to
add visual cues in the form of classroom photos does give Facebook more standing than other lean, cold modes where visual cues are often nonexistent.

**Classroom Communication Applications (Communication Apps).** Communication apps were formed with the increase in global smartphones usage and the strong preference for texting (Snell et al., 2020). Communication applications such as ClassDojo, TalkingPoints, and Remind are first downloaded for free from an app store. The programs then allow teachers to communicate with families through instant messaging chat programs that can either send messages to the entire class, or a select group of parents (Snell et al., 2020). The messages are sent through the app, which allows participants to send the messages in a private, secure, confidential forum that does not disclose personal cell phone numbers like texting does (Snell et al., 2020). Some apps, such as TalkingPoints and ClassDojo, will translate the message into other languages. When Snell et al. (2018) interviewed parents who used these applications, parents reflected that they found the instead messaging features useful for positive messages and reminders, but not for more important concerns, such as behavior difficulties, or academic concerns.

**Remind.** Remind is an app that allows parents and teachers to quickly communicate information back and forth in the form of secure, private texting (Marshall, 2016). Instead of using private phone numbers to communicate through regular text messages, Remind enables messages to be sent through the app. The messages still appear on smartphones like a text, but are sent through private channels which allow for participant privacy.

According to the founders of Remind, “Remind is a communication platform that helps educators reach students and parents where they are” (Remind Help, n.d., para. 1). This occurs through three faucets. First, messages are sent quickly, in real time. Teachers can send them to an
entire class, a group of parents within a class, or have one-on-one conversations with a single parent (Remind Help, n.d.). Teachers also have the ability to create messages ahead of time and set a day and time for them to be sent (Remind Help, n.d.). Photos and files are able to be attached to messages (Remind Help, n.d.). Additionally, Remind is accessible, as message can be sent to any phone, even if parents do not download the app (Remind Help, n.d.). This allows families who do not use smartphones, such as flip-phone users, to still participate in the program (Remind Help, n.d.). Messages can be translated into over 90 different languages (Remind Help, n.d.). Finally, Remind allows teachers to view a read receipt of who viewed their message (Remind Help, n.d.).

**ClassDojo.** ClassDojo is listed as a school communication platform that can be used by parents, teachers, and students to build a classroom community. According to Williamson (2017), ClassDojo can also be viewed as a persuasive technology, as it works to reward and reinforce behaviors that align with facets of social-emotional learning. This behavior reinforcement occurs through a classroom page where teachers can share feedback with students. Teachers, students, and parents can post photos and upload assignment feedback to a student portfolio (ClassDojo, n.d.). Teachers can also select skills to focus on each week and students can earn points related to these skills that parents can access. ClassDojo contains videos for “Big Ideas” such as empathy and growth mindset that help shape student mindset (ClassDojo, n.d.).

ClassDojo is “actively used in 95% of all K-8 schools in the U.S. and 180 countries” (ClassDojo, n.d., para. 8). It allows teachers to post messages, photos, and documents to a class story page that is viewable by parents (ClassDojo, n.d.). Teachers have the option of enabling disabling commenting for families on this page (ClassDojo, n.d.). Teachers and parents can also send private messages to each other through a private chat messaging feature (ClassDojo, n.d.).
Messages can be translated into 35 different languages automatically and ClassDojo statistics claim that over 270,000 messages are translated per week in the United States (ClassDojo, n.d.). Teachers can also set “quiet hours” for their messages, so that parents know they are unavailable at certain times. Messages are delivered when the quiet hours period ends (ClassDojo, n.d.).

**TalkingPoints.** TalkingPoints was founded by Heejae, a Korean immigrant student, who saw the importance of her mother having a voice in her education (TalkingPoints, n.d.). She noted that there are, “challenges when it comes to supporting your child’s education if you’re an immigrant family – challenges that can include working multiple jobs to put food on the table, speaking limited English, and feeling overwhelmed by the US school system” (TalkingPoints, n.d., para. 6). Heejae set out to create a tool that would allow other immigrant families to connect with their child’s teacher.

TalkingPoints connects parents and teachers through a technology platform that allows parents and teachers to send messages through a private chat feature. The messages can be translated both ways in order for seamless communication to occur. The goal is to limit language barriers that prevent classrooms from connecting with parents (TalkingPoints, n.d.).

**Learning Management Systems (LMSs).** A LMS aims to integrate multiple types of online learning within one platform for students (Bradley, 2021). The LMS allows instructors to upload content and then follow student progress as they work through goals and activities (Bradley, 2021). Students can check for updates, complete assignments, and check graded materials (Bradley, 2021). Thus, the goal of the LMS is to provide all aspects of a regular course in one location online. There are multiple Learning Management System platforms available to schools today with Schoology, Blackboard, Canvas, and D2L being the most common.
Canvas. “Canvas LMS is an open and reliable web-based software that allows institutions to manage digital learning, educators to create and present online learning materials and assess student learning, and students to engage in courses and receive feedback about skill development and learning achievement” (Instructure Community, n.d., para. 1). Canvas allows educators to create assignments, discussions, Modules, quizzes, and pages (Instructure Community, n.d.). Instructors can create outcomes and rubrics to highlight key information within a course, and then comment with feedback on student assignments (Instructure Community, n.d.). Additionally, instructors can interact with students and parents through a private message chat feature (Instructure Community, n.d.). Best practices for using Canvas with young learners in an elementary setting include keeping the pages as simple and consistent as possible, and adding links with pictures that will help remind students where to go (Canvas Team, 2021).

Strategies for Parent-Teacher Communication

In order for effective communication to take place between parents and teachers, both parties must utilize communication strategies for each mode. Similar strategies are often provided for written modes of communication, which are considered lean and cold modes under MRT and Social Presence Theory and two-way communication modes, which are considered warm and rich under MRT and Social Presence Theory.

Strategies for Written Communication Modes. There are several strategies for effectively communicating between parents and teachers. When using a leaner or colder written communication mode, especially e-mail, teachers and parents needed to be clear and concise in their wording to prevent misinterpretations (Thompson & Mazer, 2012). Teachers and parents monitored the tone of the e-mail and avoided showing emotions (Thompson, 2008). This
monitoring involved careful proofreading and editing, sometimes by a third party (Thompson, 2008). Additionally, Thompson (2008) suggested that teachers and parents keep messages short and factual, so that both parties know exactly what occurred and not the emotions that were involved.

Another recommendation for lean modes of communication was to focus on the positives, even when writing about something negative (Thompson, 2009). Beginning and ending with a positive, making a compliment sandwich, often eased the tone of the e-mail and helped the other party to reply more positively than critically. According to Thompson (2009), teachers suggested “fram[ing] e-mails as if they were asking for or offering assistance rather than being critical of a parent or student” (p. 21). Some parents and teachers ended their e-mails by thanking the other party for assistance provided so far (Thompson, 2009).

When parents and teachers are using written communication methods, they should be confident moving to richer communication modes if they sense the information caused a misunderstanding or ambiguity (Thompson, 2009; Thompson & Mazer, 2012). If an e-mail response required more than 3-5 sentences as a follow-up, a rich mode (e.g., phone calls or face-to-face interactions) should occur instead.

**Strategies for Two-Way Communication Modes.** When using a richer mode of communication (e.g., phone calls or conferences), both parents and teachers are able to listen to each other’s comments and brainstorm solutions in a timely manner. When a large amount of information needed to be shared, it was easier to hold a face-to-face or phone conversation than to type out an e-mail listing everything that needed to be discussed. Thompson et al. (2015) found, “Parents could get to know teachers better due to the more personal nature of the communication…It also allows parents and teachers to establish better rapport and allows for a
better partnership for everyone” (p. 199). Once teachers and parents get to know each other’s personalities better, they can comfortably switch to a leaner mode of communication that continues the conversation.

Richer modes of communication require active listening to take place. Symeou et al. (2012) highlighted that although teachers and parents may sometimes be frustrated about a negative situation, or even have incorrect information, involved parties should fully listen to what the other side has to say before providing a response. Active listening adequately acknowledges the other party and values their concerns and opinion, which causes them to be more willing to participate in a potential solution. Symeou et al. (2012) also emphasized the importance of giving and interpreting nonverbal communication and cues such as “eye contact, posture, gestures, and nonverbal prompts” (p. 72) and using open-ended questioning techniques that encourage description. When nonverbal communication becomes a factor, all parties involved are able to engage with ideas that would otherwise not be expressed in a lean mode of communication, and adapt in real time. Teachers are also encouraged to paraphrase what the parent is saying and to offer a brief reflection to create an empathetic understanding. Similarly, teachers should try to foster positive relationships with parents to promote successful communication between both parties.

Summary

Parents and teachers communicate through various modes that offer both written and two-way conversations. Each mode contains benefits and drawbacks to successful communication that can be combatted or reinforced with communication-based strategies. While teachers and parents often selected modes as a result of personal preferences, they sometimes
were forced into certain modes as a result of what was available in the school or the child’s household.

Summary

In this chapter, I focused on factors that influence parent-teacher communication and the importance of building strong connections with families. I began with a theoretical framework that blended Cuelessness Theory with Social Presence Theory and Media Richness Theory. I then investigated the history of communication between parents and teachers as well as parent-teacher relationships and their roles in school. I addressed the importance of strong parent involvement and highlighted how the digital divide prevents some families from participating in schools the same way as others. Finally, I shared how all of these factors impact parent-teacher communication by sharing the importance of strong, frequent communication with families, modes that can be used to communicate, and strategies for mode use. In the following chapter, I will outline the methodology used in this research study on parent-teacher communication modes.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine what modes of communication parents and teachers are primarily using to communicate with one another. In this chapter, I will outline the research methods used in the study. I will then provide my rationale for conducting a quan→QUAL mixed methods study that employs survey and case study designs.

Description of the Setting

Data collection occurred at a public elementary school in the suburbs of Philadelphia. For the purpose of this study, the elementary school will be referred to as Washington Elementary School. The total population of the school is approximately 620 students in grades 2 through 5. 78% of enrolled students are Caucasian, while 22% identify as African American, Hispanic, Asian, or another race.

All schools are mandated to follow federal U.S. Code 6318: Parent and Family Engagement Local Educational Agency Policy. This policy outlines procedures for what district communication must look like between families and schools, beginning with a written parent-teacher compact that must be submitted to the state and provided to all families within the district (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). At Washington Elementary School, the parent-teacher compact is posted on the district website, along with Title I and Title III family resources. Teachers are required to follow the family engagement policy by frequently communicating with parents and responding to parent emails within 24 hours of receipt on weekdays or within 48 hours on weekends.

Description of the Participants

Participants in this study were parents and teachers of third-grade students at Washington Elementary School who provided informed consent to participate. Throughout this research
study, the term parents refers to the child’s legal guardians who most regularly interact with teachers. This guardian could include a grandparent, aunt or uncle, foster parent, or another legal guardian.

**Informed Consent and Protection of Human Subjects**

I received permission to conduct this study through the Institutional Review Board at West Chester University (Appendix A). Parents (Appendix B) and teachers (Appendix C) each received a separate recruitment e-mail. The e-mail contained a copy of the consent form (Appendix D), which was signed at the start of the online survey. The consent form provided consent for all three portions of the research study (survey, interview, and artifact review). All participants were given a number upon consenting. Identifying information was redacted from open-ended survey questions, interview transcriptions, and artifacts to protect participant privacy.

**Teachers**

Teachers were general education teachers who had a third-grade homeroom during the 2021-2022 school year. Teachers of other subjects, such as special education and special area classes, were excluded from the study, even if they taught third-grade students. This allowed the study to focus on communication practices between teachers and parents within each homeroom. Seven teachers were eligible to participate in the research study.

Six teachers completed the quantitative survey. The majority of these participants (66.7%) were 31-40 years of age. All participating teachers identified as being Caucasian and held a Masters degree or higher. 50% of participants had been working in education for ten years or more. Table 3.1 provides this demographic information about the teachers.
Table 3.1

Teacher Participants

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<th>Time in Education</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-10 Years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more Years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table provides demographic information for teacher participants in the quantitative survey.

Teachers who participated in the quantitative survey completed a revised version of the Parental Academic Support Scale (PASS) (Thompson & Mazer, 2012), as well as scales pertaining to satisfaction of communication tools and the importance of supportive behaviors.

Four of these teachers then participated in one-on-one interviews and artifact reviews during phase two of the study. All of the teachers who consented to interviews and were available for interview scheduling within the study timeframe were selected to participate. Each teacher was randomly assigned a number to protect confidentiality of responses.

Parents

All parents who had a child in third-grade during the 2021-2022 school year received an e-mail inviting them to participate in the research study. Parents of students in second, fourth, and fifth grade were excluded from the study, unless they also had a child in third-grade. There was one third-grade parent who also had a child in my own second-grade classroom. This parent
was excluded from the research study in order to prevent possible bias. In total, about 300 parents of third-grade students were eligible to participate in the research study.

Parent participation varied on the quantitative survey. While 40 parents consented to the research study and submitted survey responses, six parents provided minimal data that could not be analyzed, and were thus excluded from participating. Seven additional parents submitted partial responses. Thus, the number of viable participating parents on the survey dropped from 34 to 27, with fewer participants completing the survey questions later in the survey. Mothers and step-mothers primarily completed the survey (76.5%), with 97% of participants falling within the age range of 31-50 years old. Table 3.2 shows additional data on parent participants.
Table 3.2

Parent Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to Student</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother/Step-Mother</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father/Step-Father</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother &amp; Father</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 or older</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Identity/Ethnicity</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American or Black</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Not to Say</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
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<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Degree of Education</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors Degree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed Full-Time</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Part-Time</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Opportunities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table provides demographic information for parent participants in the quantitative survey.

Similar to teachers, parents who participated in the quantitative survey completed the Parental Academic Support Scale (PASS) (Thompson & Mazer, 2012), as well as scales pertaining to satisfaction of communication tools and the importance of supportive behaviors.

While all twelve of the parents who indicated interest in phase two of the study were invited for an interview, only ten parents responded and participated in the one-on-one interviews. Each parent was randomly assigned a number to ensure confidentiality of responses.
Instrumentation

Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) encouraged triangulation to occur in mixed methods research. Triangulation reinforces the validity of the results if the various methods of data collection led to comparable findings. In this study, data was triangulated through parent-teacher communication surveys, semi-structured one-on-one interviews, and artifact reviews. Table 3.3 illustrates this triangulation.

**Table 3.3**

**Triangulation of Data: Number of Participants per Data Source**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>27-34</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* This table provides the number of parent and teacher participants for each data source within the research study.

The sections below further explain each source of data.

**Phase One: Quantitative Survey**

Invitations for online surveys were sent to seven third-grade teachers and about 300 parents of third-grade students through Qualtrics. After signing the consent form, which was listed on the first page of the survey, the survey contained both quantitative and qualitative questions. The survey was broken into several sections.

**Demographic Questions.** Parents (Appendix E) and teachers (Appendix F) were asked several questions that provided demographic information. This included questions about the participants' age range, level of education, ethnicity, employment status, availability of technology at home, and number of children in the family, as well as enrolled in the school district. The teacher survey included questions involving their number of years teaching, how much schooling the teacher had completed, their age, and their ethnicity. This section then asked
parents and teachers to provide the modes of communication they are already using to communicate between home and school.

**Perceived Quality of Connectedness.** The survey asked parents and teachers to perceive their level of connectedness with the other party when using each mode of communication. Connectedness with defined as having meaningful contact. Parents and teachers could indicate not at all connected (a rating of 1) through extremely well connected (a rating of 5) on a Likert-scale (Appendix G). MRT and Social Presence Theory predict that communicating parties have stronger communication through warmer, richer modes. This survey question aimed to pinpoint if that was the case with third-grade parents and teachers.

**Parental Academic Support Scale (PASS).** The survey then contained questions from the Parental Academic Support Scale (PASS) that was created by Thompson and Mazer in 2012. These questions contained a 3-pronged response. The PASS:

- Measures the frequency of parent-teacher communication across modes along five factors: academic performance (e.g., inquiring about how the child can improve a grade), classroom behavior (e.g., communication about students’ behavior), preparation (e.g., communication about a child’s academic or social preparation), hostile peer interactions (e.g., communication about aggressive encounters between students), and health (e.g., communication about medical issues affecting a child’s work). (Thompson et al., 2015, p. 190)

First, this 16-item measure gave parents (Appendix H) and teachers (Appendix I) a 5-point Likert-type scale and contained questions asking how often each type of support occurred. The choices were: not at all, once or twice, about once a week, several times a week, or about every day. Participants then responded to five factors that influence increased communication among
parents and teachers: academic performance, classroom behavior, preparation, hostile peer interactions, and health. For each of these questions, participants then rated the level of importance of each factor to their child’s success (Appendix J). Participants received a 3-point scale that contained: not important, moderately important, and very important. Finally, participants stated how they most frequently communicate each of these concerns by measuring various modes of communication. Thompson et al. (2015) used six modes of communication in their 2015 study: face-to-face, e-mail, phone, written communication, Skype/Facetime, and texting. This study added additional categories to include newer forms of technology. The PASS assessment has already been deemed a valid and reliable test, which is important because it is already demonstrated the ability to accurately measure what it was intended to measure.

Satisfaction of Communication Tools Scale. The survey then contained questions to assess the perceived quality of each communication mode (Appendix K). Parents and teachers were asked: “When thinking about each communication tool, how satisfied are you with the quality of communication based on the following parameters?” The scale read: very unsatisfied, unsatisfied, neutral, satisfied, and very satisfied against each mode of communication.

Open-Ended Responses. The survey concluded with three open-ended questions. The questions were adapted from Thompson & Mazer (2012).

1) What tips do you have for parents/teachers for making communication with teachers/parents easier?

2) How do you prefer to communicate with your students’ parents/child’s teachers and why?

3) What are you least favorite ways of communicating with parents/teachers and why?

4) Why do you choose certain communication modes over others for communicating about certain issues with your students' parents/child’s teachers?
Phase Two: Qualitative Interviews and Artifact Reviews

The quantitative survey concluded by allowing participants to indicate interest in participating in phase two of the study, one-on-one interviews and artifacts reviews. Interested participants provided their name and contact information. All participants were contacted through e-mail.

**Interviews.** The second portion of the study contained semi-structured interviews with 4 teachers and 10 parents who indicated interest during phase one of the study. Interview protocols for parents (Appendix L) and teachers (Appendix M) contained semi-structured interview questions, as well as possible follow-up questions. All interview questions reinforced the questions asked in the initial survey and provided a more profound explanation of why participants chose the answers they did. MRT and Social Presence Theory stipulate that communicating parties prefer warmer, richer communication modes because they allow for a stronger quality of communication to occur. Interview questions helped determine if parents and teachers were selecting warmer, richer modes and the perceived quality of communication through various methods.

Interviews occurred over Zoom and in a school classroom. Interviews were recorded using Zoom. Files were then transferred to a password-protected computer. The interviews were transcribed with fidelity and utilized member checking to ensure that each participant validated what was being said. Interviews were then stripped of identifying information and assigned a number to protect participant privacy.

**Artifacts.** On the initial quantitative survey, parents and teachers have an opportunity to indicate if they would like to provide artifacts, in the form of parent-teacher communication samples, to be used for research purposes. Strategies for parent-teacher communication through
different modes was the main focus of these artifacts. Parents and teachers who did not wish to provide samples had the option of providing templates of communication instead. All 10 parents and 4 teachers who participated in interviews provided artifacts. These artifacts were stripped of identifying information including student, parent, and teacher names. They were used to provide examples of strategies and benefits or drawbacks to modes that parents and teachers highlighted during interviews.

**Mixed Methods Research**

This mixed methods research study on mode preferences in parent-teacher communication utilized both survey and case study design. As Creswell & Plano Clark (2018) highlighted, mixed methods research allowed the quantitative research to provide a basic understanding of the phenomenon, while the qualitative data enriched the results with a more detailed understanding of the problem. Therefore, both the quantitative and qualitative research “provide[d] different perspectives” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 8) on parent-teacher communication in this study. Figure 3.1 outlines the components of this mixed methods study.
Figure 3.1

Mixed Methods Research Study Components

Note: This figure outlines the components of this mixed methods research study.

Thompson et al. (2015) conducted a study on parent-teacher communication mode preferences that contained a heavy quantitative focus. Although parents were asked to provide responses to some open-ended survey questions, the researchers noted that the lack of qualitative information was a limitation of the study, as it was difficult to note why certain mode preferences were made. Therefore, despite similarities between research topics and quantitative design, this research study contained a large portion of qualitative data that provided details as to why parents and teachers chose to communicate in specific ways. Thus, by utilizing a mixed methods approach that included data collection through survey design and case study design, a more complete picture of parent-teacher communication was able to be obtained.

Survey Design

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) stipulated that, “survey research designs are a set of research procedures in which investigators administer a survey…to describe the attitudes,
opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population” (p. 385). In educational research, survey designs are often employed to garner parent or teacher perceptions about various school processes (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Schweiker-Marra, 2000; Thompson, 2008, 2009; Thompson, Mazer, 2012; Thompson et al., 2015). This research study utilized a cross-sectional survey that collected data at specific point in time. That data was then used to “examine current attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices” (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019, p. 386) held by parents and teachers within the third-grade. Thus, this survey sought to determine the thoughts and practices of third-grade parents and teachers who communicated through various modes.

**Case Study Design**

Case study research is a thorough investigation of a bounded system. As Creswell and Guetterman stated, “bounded means that the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries” (p. 477). Merriam (1998) focused on educational research and specified that a case’s boundaries must concentrate on a precise situation, deliver an accurate account of what is being researched, and highlight the reflection behind the experience. In this research study, the boundary was set around third-grade and focused on the experiences and reflections of parents and teachers who utilized various communication modes through the use of one-on-one interviews, qualitative short-answer survey questions, and artifact reviews.

Yin (2018) highlighted the importance of first outlining how or why questions that can be answered through an in-depth exploration of the case. “How and why questions are likely to be favor using a case study” (Yin, 2018, p. 11). Although this study featured three sub-questions that began with ‘what,’ analyzing the ‘why’ of these questions provided more detailed analysis into parent-teacher communication. For example, Research Sub-Question 2 asked: What modes of communication do parents and teachers most frequently utilize to communicate different types
of concerns? By interviewing parents and teachers to ask why they utilize different modes for different types of concerns, a bigger picture of parent-teacher communication within third-grade was able to be established.

**Procedures**

In this study, I investigated what modes of communication parents and teachers primarily used to communicate with one another. In order to do this, I first used a quantitative survey to examine the case of the entire third-grade class. I then used interviews and artifacts to specify why participants were using the modes they selected. I assessed the impact of various communication modes on all participants.

**Data Collection Schedule**

Data was collected over a six-week period. The recruitment letter, and consent forms, and survey were first e-mail to participants. The survey was open for a three-week period and participants received a reminder to complete the survey half-way through the period. After analyzing initial data from the survey, interviews and artifact collection then took place for three more weeks. Figure 3.2 provides a visual that showcases the data collection period.

**Figure 3.2**

*Data Collection Schedule*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks 1-3</th>
<th>Survey Data was Collected from Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weeks 4-6</td>
<td>Survey Data was Analyzed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants were Contacted for Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeks 7-9</td>
<td>Interviews and Artifact Reviews were Conducted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This figure provides the data collection schedule for the study.*

In order to accommodate participant schedules and to avoid interfering with the school scheduled winter break, interviews and artifact reviews took place later than planned.
**Analysis and Coding Procedures**

After data collection, quantitative data was examined through descriptive statistics. Inductive coding was used to generate themes to analyze the qualitative data.

**Quantitative Analysis**

Participants first completed a five-point Likert-type scale that revealed their perceived quality of connectedness towards different communication modes. Descriptive statistics showcasing the mean and standard deviation for each mode were used to compare connectedness scores. The modes were then sorted into four categories (i.e., new vs. traditional communication methods and rich/warm vs. cold/lean communication methods). Averages were then calculated for these means and a paired samples t-test was utilized to compare mode categories for parents.

Participants were then provided with the Parental Academic Support Scale (PASS) (Thompson & Mazer, 2012). Participants stated their frequency of communication with 16 different types of concerns and provided the type of communication mode that they most often use to communicate that type of concern. These 16 concerns were then sorted into five main supportive behaviors: academic performance, classroom behavior, preparation, hostile peer interactions, and health. Descriptive statistics showcasing the mean and standard deviation for each mode were used to compare each type of concern. Modes used to communicate each type of concern were then listed and totaled. This data set yielded results for the most popular modes of communication for each type of concern.

Next, parents and teachers were then asked to rate the importance of each supportive behavior towards a child’s success. A three-point Likert scale containing ranges of not important (1), moderately important (2), and very important (3) was provided. Calculations generated an average for each mean and descriptive statistics showcasing these means and standard deviations.
were used to compare each type of concern. A paired samples t-test was then run to reveal correlations between the data, as well as provide a further examination of how important each supportive behavior was rated when compared to one another.

Finally, parents and teachers were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the quality of communication that each communication mode provided on a five-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics showcasing the mean and standard deviation were used to compare each type of communication mode.

**Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative data was provided from the open-ended survey questions, interview transcripts, and communication artifacts. All transcripts included member checking to ensure credibility and trustworthiness in responses from participants. Inductive coding utilizing thematic analysis was used to group the survey questions and interview transcripts into themes and codes. This ground-up method allowed codes to be developed from the data, instead of utilizing preconceived notions of what the data might reveal. As Marshall and Rossman (2016) highlighted, this “process helps the researcher see patterns and key ideas in the data (p. 222).” Dedoose was used to code the data and refine the categories until saturation was reached. Themes were then analyzed through the lens of Media Richness Theory and Social Presence Theory during the discussion. Artifacts were used to provide examples of themes that developed from the data.

**Threats to Internal and External Validity**

Potential threats to internal and external validity included researcher bias, participant sample size, and the data collection schedule.


**Researcher and Participant Bias**

One threat to validity in this study is the potential for researcher and participant bias. I have worked at the setting of this study for the past five years and am involved with school-wide events and after-school clubs. Additionally, I oversee the district’s libraries. The combination of these roles allows me to know teachers, students, and parents across multiple grade levels, including the third-grade. As a result, my role within the school and district may have impacted survey and interview responses from participants if they tried to guess what types of responses I was looking for, and therefore catered their answers in a specific way. Furthermore, I may have unintentionally viewed responses through a certain lens that I would not have otherwise used if I was an outside researcher.

**Sample Size**

Original IRB approval stated that the study would be sent to parents by third-grade teachers and administrators. This communication about the study was selected to increase parent participation, as parents are often more likely to complete a study that an administrator or teacher is reminding them about, instead of a teacher they may not know. As a result of administrator preferences, this was unable to occur and IRB re-approval was needed so that I could contact parents directly from my school e-mail address. The limitation of e-mail reminders from teachers, coupled with the absence of study validation from an administrator, may have negatively impacted sample size in this study. The study was sent to almost 300 parents, however only 34 parents completed the survey with answers sufficient for data analysis.

**Timeline of Data Collection**

Data collection on the survey was originally scheduled to begin in early November. As a result of changes with wording on the survey, IRB re-approval needed to be obtained which took
added time. This resulted in the three weeks of survey data collection to overlap with the Thanksgiving holiday. Students at this school have a week-long vacation during the Thanksgiving holiday when many families travel. Teachers hold two, 12-hour long days of parent-teacher conferences on the Monday and Tuesday before Thanksgiving. Following the Thanksgiving break is the close of the first trimester, which is when report cards are due. It is possible that a smaller number of parents and teachers participated in the research study as a result of these conflicts.

Additionally, the later start date resulted in the interviews being moved to the Christmas holiday and start of the new year. Students and teachers have an eleven-day break during this time, which made it difficult to schedule and conduct interviews. Multiple participants who indicated interest in interviews did not respond to the request when it was e-mailed. Other survey participants expressed interest in participating, but stated that the timeframe of the study conflicted with their availability. Overall, 10 parents and 4 teachers were able to be interviewed, but they were selected as a result of convenience, instead of purposeful sampling, as a result of these conflicts.

**Methodological Limitations**

This research study contains several methodological limitations. These limitations include the data collection schedule, restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and the potential for transferability to parents and teachers in other grade levels and schools.

**Data Collection**

Since data collection for this study took place in November, parents and teachers had only been interacting with their class for a period of about three months. At the time of the survey, the first set of mandated parent-teacher conferences had yet to be completed in the
school, and the first trimester had yet to end. Parents and teachers were instructed on the survey to only provide information pertaining to interactions this school year (August – November 2021), so that case study research could be utilized to analyze the case of parent-teacher communication within third-grade. However, if this study had taken place at the end of the school year (with data collection in May or June of 2022), a stronger picture of year-long communication within the third-grade could have been collected. This may impact results as parents and teachers may be more likely to communicate certain types of concerns over various communication modes as they arise during the school year, and there is a strong possibility that as of November 2021, those concerns had yet to arise and were therefore not noted in the survey and interview responses.

**Transferability**

While this research study revealed the modes of communication being used within third-grade, this data may not be consistent with other grade levels and school districts. From my own experience, I have seen that different grade levels usually have specific subjects and concerns that need to be discussed with parents and teachers. While a third-grade parent may not have alarming concerns about their child’s score on a math test, this level of concern may increase by fifth grade when the material becomes more challenging and the student is heading to middle school. Therefore, while these results may be typical of third-grade practices, they cannot be directly transferred to other grade-levels, even within the same school district.

Additionally, many school districts mandate which types of communication parents and teachers can use to interact, or how frequently communication needs to take place. These communication practices may be inconsistent with practices found at Washington Elementary School. Specifically, the teachers at Washington Elementary School had access to a Learning
Management System, Canvas, that was provided by the school district. Other school districts may not have access to a Learning Management System, which will impact communication through that type of mode. Therefore, the results of this research study may not be transferable to other school districts and grade levels.

*COVID-19 Restrictions*

District-mandated COVID-19 restrictions may have impacted parent-teacher communication practices researched in this study. District policies restricted parent access to Washington Elementary School and cancelled multiple after-school events and family nights that normally take place. These restrictions caused less opportunities for parents to meet teachers and staff at the school through informal activities and family nights.

Additionally, last year was the first time that third-grade students attended Washington Elementary School, when they were in second-grade. The 2020-2021 school year began virtually, so students and parents met teachers and learned about the school over Zoom for the first half of the year. Even once students resumed in-person learning later in the year, parents were still unable to enter the school to meet teachers or visit classrooms. These restrictions may have impacted parents’ perceptions of the school, teachers, and district.

*Summary*

The purpose of this study was to determine what modes of communication parents and teachers are primarily using to communicate with one another. Through surveys, interviews, and artifact reviews, I collected data on communication mode preferences, as well as benefits, drawbacks, and strategies for various communication methods. I provided details for how the quantitative survey data would be analyzed using descriptive statistics and a paired samples t-test, and the qualitative data would receive inductive coding and thematic analysis. Additionally,
I outlined the participants, setting, and data collection schedule, as well as threats to internal and external validity and methodological limitations. In the next chapter, I will discuss the data analysis results.
Chapter 4: Results

The data collected throughout this mixed methods study will be highlighted in this chapter. The focus was to answer the overarching research question: What modes of communication are parents and teachers primarily using to communicate with one another? The sub-research questions guiding this study were:

1. How does the perceived quality of "connectedness" (defined as having meaningful contact) in parent-teacher communication differ between classrooms that use newer, technology-focused forms of communication and those that use more traditional methods? (quantitative)

2. What modes of communication do parents and teachers most frequently utilize to communicate different types of concerns? (quantitative)

3. What do parents and teachers in a suburban public elementary school perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of various modes of communication? (qualitative)

4. What strategies do parents and teachers in a suburban public elementary school suggest utilizing when communicating with one another through different communication platforms? (qualitative)

A survey yielded quantitative data that showcased how frequently parents and teachers communicated through various modes, which subjects they communicated about most often, and which modes provided the strongest connections between home and school. A portion of the survey contained the PASS assessment (Thompson & Mazer, 2015). Interviews and communication artifacts then provided qualitative information as to the benefits and drawbacks of various modes and strategies that can be useful for communication success.
Quantitative Results

All third-grade parents and teachers received a link to a quantitative survey through Qualtrics software. After providing consent to participate, participants began the survey with demographic questions. Participants then selected how they perceived their connection to the other party (parents or teachers) through various modes. The next series of questions focused on how frequently participants communicated about five supportive behaviors and the modes they most frequently used to communicate them. Next, participants selected how important they perceived each supportive behavior was to a student’s success, as well as how satisfied they were about each mode. Finally, participants had the option of completing three open-ended responses about mode selection preferences and strategies for use.

Survey questions were informed by Media Richness Theory and Social Presence Theory. Both theories predict a stronger quality of communication through warmer, richer communication methods. Therefore, survey questions contained modes that fell into both warm and rich, as well as cold and lean categories. A theoretical lens was used to analyze data for questions relating to perceived quality of connectedness and satisfaction of communication tools.

Participant Background Information

While 41 parents submitted survey responses, one parent indicated that they did not consent to participate in the study, and six parents provided such minimal responses that their data could not be used. Therefore, consenting parents with full responses or sufficient partial responses (N = 27 – 34) and teachers (N = 6) who completed the quantitative survey first answered demographic questions. Parents answered questions pertaining to their relationship to their third-grade student, age, racial identity and ethnicity, education, and employment status. Table 4.1 reflects this demographic information for parents.
Table 4.1

*Parent Participants in Data Collection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to Student</th>
<th>Parent Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother/Step-Mother</td>
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<td>2.9%</td>
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<td>Mother &amp; Father</td>
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<td>2.9%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Parent Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
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<th>Racial Identity/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Parent Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American or Black</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Not to Say</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Degree of Education</th>
<th>Parent Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors Degree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Parent Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed Full-Time</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Part-Time</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Opportunities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* This table provides demographic information for parent participants in the quantitative survey.

Teachers revealed their age, racial identity and ethnicity, highest degree of education, and amount of time in education. Table 4.2 shows the demographic information for participating teachers.
Table 4.2

Teacher Participants in Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Identity/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Degree of Education</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Plus 30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Plus 60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time in Education</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-10 Years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more Years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table provides demographic information for teacher participants in the quantitative survey.

Additionally, parents reported having one to six children, with 2-3 children being the most common (82% of participants), and 88% of parents described that they have 1-2 children currently enrolled in the school district. All of the surveyed parents indicated that English was the primary language spoken at home, with two families selecting both English and another language. The average number of technology devices within each home ranged from 1 to 9, with an average of 4.47. Finally, parents shared which teacher their child currently has for third-grade. Table 4.3 shows these findings.
Table 4.3

*Parent to Teacher Ratios in Data Collection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Teacher</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>11.8%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Parents identified which teacher their child has for third-grade this year. This table reflects which parents align with which teachers.

Teachers provided additional information about the makeup of their class. Teachers had an average of 25.8 students per class, with an average of 5.67 students with IEPs or 504 plans and 2.17 English Language Learners (ELL) per classroom.

*Perceived Quality of Connectedness*

In Research Sub-Question 1, I asked, “How does the perceived quality of ‘connectedness’ in parent-teacher communication differ between classrooms that use newer, technology-focused forms of communication and those that use more traditional methods?” For the purpose of this study, connectedness was defined as having meaningful contact. To answer this question, parents and teachers were asked to rate their perceptions of connectedness to the other party using each type of communication mode. Parents and teachers could indicate not at all connected (a rating of 1) through extremely well connected (a rating of 5) on a Likert-scale. One flaw in this area is that this scale should have contained an option for parents and teachers to select “do not use” for each communication mode; however, this option was unintentionally left off the survey. This limitation may have caused some participants to select a rating of 1 for these modes, as they perceive little connectedness towards methods that they do not use, or a rating of
3 for these modes, as they took a neutral stance toward a method they do not use. This flaw in study design may cause some answers to be skewed.

**Connectedness to Communication Modes.** Descriptive statistics were utilized to provide basic information (i.e., the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation) for each mode, as well as to reveal possible relationships between the variables. Table 4.4 contains this information.

**Table 4.4**

*Connectedness to Communication Modes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apps</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Calls</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Mails</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face Conferences</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoom Conferences</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Nights</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Messages</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Management Systems</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apps</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Calls</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Mails</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face Conferences</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoom Conferences</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Nights</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Messages</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Management Systems</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* This table provides descriptive statistics of connectedness scores for parents and teachers.

Mean scores per mode revealed that teachers perceived the strongest connections through face-to-face conferences (M = 4.33, SD = 0.52) and phone calls (M = 4.0, SD = 0.89) and weakest connection through Facebook (M = 1.67, SD = 1.03), while parents perceived the
strongest connection through e-mail (M = 4.18, SD = 1.03) and weakest connection through Facebook (M = 1.85, SD = 1.28).

**Connectedness to Communication Mode Categories.** Modes were then combined as new forms of communication (communication apps, LMSs, text messages, Facebook groups, and Zoom) and traditional modes communication (e-mail, face-to-face conferences, phone calls, paper messages, and parent nights). Additionally, modes were combined as warmer and richer or colder and leaner modes of communication through Social Presence Theory and Media Richness Theory. The leaner and colder modes contained: communication apps, e-mail, text messages, Facebook, LMSs, and paper communications. The richer and warmer modes contained: face-to-face conferences, Zoom conferences, phone calls, and parent nights. For these two categories, mean scores were first averaged by the number of communication modes per category. Descriptive statistics were then utilized to provide basic information and to reveal possible relationships between the variables. Table 4.5 contains these findings.

**Table 4.5**

*Connectedness to New vs. Traditional & Warm/Rich vs. Cold/Lean Communication Modes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Communication Modes</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Communication Modes</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm/Rich Communication Modes</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold/Lean Communication Modes</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Communication Modes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Communication Modes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm/Rich Communication Modes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold/Lean Communication Modes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This table provides descriptive statistics of connectedness scores for parents and teachers that are sorted by traditional vs. new communication modes, as well as rich and warm versus lean and cold communication modes.*
For traditional and new communication modes, the averaged mean scores reveal that both parents (M = 3.52, SD = 0.83) and teachers (M = 3.67, SD = 0.45) perceived a stronger connection to the other party when using traditional methods of communication, as opposed to parent (M = 2.68, SD = 1.04) and teacher (M = 2.63, SD = 0.50) perceptions of newer communication modes.

Additionally, parents (M = 3.45, SD = 0.91) and teachers (M = 3.88, SD = 0.31) showed higher perceived connectedness scores for modes that were considered warmer or richer under Media Richness Theory and Social Presence Theory, as opposed to parents (M = 2.86, SD = 0.94) and teachers (M = 2.67, SD = 0.38) who perceived connectedness for colder or leaner modes under Media Richness Theory and Social Presence Theory.

**Paired Samples t-test.** Although the sample size of teachers (N = 6) was too small to run additional analyses, a paired samples t-test was conducted on the parent (N = 34) data to examine the differences in mode types. A paired samples t-test is suitable when analyzing if there is a statistically significant difference between the means of two associated groups. Table 4.6 reveals the results of the t-test between traditional and new modes of communication, as well as rich/warm and lean/cold modes of communication. Both scores were significant at the .001 level.

**Table 4.6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples t-test: Communication Mode Categories for Parents</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rich/Warm vs. Lean/Cold Communication Modes</td>
<td>4.269</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New vs. Traditional Communication Modes</td>
<td>-6.104</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This table provides a paired samples t-test of connectedness scores for parents with traditional vs. new communication modes, as well as rich and warm vs. lean and cold communication modes. *Statistically significant at p<.001.
Parents (M = 3.45, SD = 0.91) perceived that connections in communication through richer and warmer modes was statistically significantly stronger than connections through leaner and colder communication modes (M = 2.86, SD = 0.94), t(33) = 4.269, p < 0.001. Additionally, parents (M = 3.45, SD = 0.91) perceived that connections in communications through traditional communication methods was statistically significantly stronger than connections through newer communication modes (M = 2.86, SD = 0.94), t(33) = -6.104, p < 0.001.

**Parental Academic Support Scale (PASS)**

In Research Sub-Question 2, I asked, “What modes of communication do parents and teachers most frequently utilize to communicate different types of concerns?” This question was answered through the modified Parental Academic Support Scale (PASS) that parents and teachers took on the survey. Parents and teachers first indicated their frequency of communicating sixteen supportive behaviors. These behaviors were then grouped into five concern categories. Participants then selected the primary modes of communication for communicating each concern type.

**Frequency of Communication.** The PASS had parents and teachers indicate the frequency of communication about various supportive behaviors during the third-grade school year. The frequency choices were: not at all (1), about once per trimester (2), about monthly (3), about weekly (4), and about daily (5). Parents indicated that they most frequently communicated about their child’s grades in the class (M = 2.68, SD = 1.09). Teachers reported that they most frequently communicated about questions pertaining to assignments (M = 3.67, SD = 0.52) and student behavior in class (M = 3.67, SD = 0.52).

The supportive behaviors were then sorted into five main categories of concerns: academic performance, classroom behavior, preparation, hostile peer interactions, and health.
Mean averages were calculated for each concern. Parents communicated about concerns related to academic performance (M = 1.59, SD = 0.65), classroom behavior (M = 1.31, SD = 0.65), preparation (M = 1.25, SD = 0.50), hostile peer interactions (M = 1.10, SD = 0.38), and health (M = 1.60, SD = 0.77). Teachers communicated about concerns related to academic performance (M = 2.71, SD = 0.81), classroom behavior (M = 3.00, SD = 0.82), preparation (M = 1.83, SD = 1.13), hostile peer interactions (M = 1.50, SD = 0.55), and health (M = 2.67, SD = 1.40).

Thus, the PASS revealed that parents most frequently communicate with teachers about academic and health-based concerns. This data is shown in Table 4.7. One caveat to this data is that only 30 of the 34 parents completed the majority of the PASS assessment, with only 29 parents completing the hostile peer interactions and health categories on the PASS.
Table 4.7

PASS: Frequency of Communication per Supportive Behavior for Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This school year, I communicated with my child’s teacher/my students’ parent about…</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Performance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…my child’s grades in the class</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…why my child has a missing assignment</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…how my child can improve his/her grade</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…why my child received the grade he/she did</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…why my child was not completing assignments</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…learning more about homework assignments</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…a question I had about an assignment</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Behavior</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…solutions to address my child’s behavior in class</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…my child talking back to the teacher</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…my child goofing off in class</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…my child’s ability to make/maintain friendships with peers</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…how my child was not bringing materials to class</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hostile Peer Interactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…my child being picked on by his/her classmates</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…a major classroom behavioral incident</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…a temporary health issue that my child is experiencing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…a major physical health issue that my child is experiencing</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Academic Performance Mean** | 30 | 1.59 | 0.65
**Classroom Behavior Mean**  | 30 | 1.31 | 0.65
**Preparation Mean**          | 30 | 1.25 | 0.50
**Hostile Peer Interactions Mean** | 29 | 1.10 | 0.38
**Health Mean**               | 29 | 1.60 | 0.77

*Note:* This table provides descriptive statistics that show parent scores for each concern category on the PASS. Mean averages were used for overall scores in the five concern categories: academic performance, classroom behavior, preparation, hostile peer interactions, and health.

The PASS revealed that teachers most frequently communicate with parents about behavior concerns. Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics and is shown in Table 4.8.
Table 4.8

**PASS: Frequency of Communication per Supportive Behavior for Teachers**

| Teachers | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Academic Performance** | | | |
| ...my students’ grades in the class | 6 | 3.17 | 0.75 |
| ...why students have missing assignment | 6 | 1.83 | 1.31 |
| ...how students can improve their grade | 6 | 3.00 | 0.63 |
| ...why students received the grade they did | 6 | 2.33 | 1.21 |
| ...why students were not completing assignments | 6 | 2.50 | 1.38 |
| ...homework assignments | 6 | 2.50 | 1.76 |
| ...questions pertaining to assignments | 6 | 3.67 | 0.52 |
| **Classroom Behavior** | | | |
| ...solutions to address my students’ behavior in class | 6 | 3.67 | 0.52 |
| ...my student talking back to the teacher | 6 | 1.83 | 1.33 |
| ...my student goofing off in class | 6 | 3.50 | 0.84 |
| **Preparation** | | | |
| ...my students’ ability to make/maintain friendships with peers | 6 | 2.00 | 1.27 |
| ...how my student was not bringing materials to class | 6 | 1.67 | 1.03 |
| **Hostile Peer Interactions** | | | |
| ...my student being picked on by his/her classmates | 6 | 1.50 | 0.84 |
| ...a major classroom behavioral incident | 6 | 1.50 | 0.84 |
| **Health Mean** | | | |
| ...a temporary health issue that my student is experiencing | 6 | 2.67 | 1.37 |
| ...a major physical health issue that my student is experiencing | 6 | 2.67 | 1.63 |

### Academic Performance Mean
6 2.71 0.81

### Classroom Behavior Mean
6 3.00 0.82

### Preparation Mean
6 1.83 1.13

### Hostile Peer Interactions Mean
6 1.50 0.55

### Health Mean
6 2.67 1.40

**Note:** This table provides descriptive statistics that show teacher scores for each concern category on the PASS. Mean averages were used for overall scores in the five concern categories: academic performance, classroom behavior, preparation, hostile peer interactions, and health.

**Modes of Communication.** After indicating supportive behavior communication frequency, parents then selected which mode of communication they primarily used to discuss that concern. Parent responses for each mode and concern type were totaled, with e-mail being
the overwhelming choice in all concern categories. Additionally, one parent mentioned communicating academic concerns through IEP meetings.

Teachers selected all modes of communication that they used to communicate each concern. Teachers recorded using e-mail as the primary communication method for four of the five concern categories. When relaying academic concerns, teachers provided the most mode choices, including a higher number of phone calls, face-to-face conferences, and Zoom conferences than other concern types. When analyzing behavior concerns, one teacher noted in the “other” field for modes of communication that they send home a student’s daily behavior chart to the parent. Table 4.9 shows a summary of these findings.
Table 4.9

PASS: Frequency of Communication Modes per Concern Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Hostile Peer Interactions</th>
<th>Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apps</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Calls</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face Conference</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Night</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Message</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook Group</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Hostile Peer Interactions</th>
<th>Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apps</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Calls</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face Conference</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoom</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Night</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Message</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook Group</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: Behavior Chart</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table provides the modes of communication that parents and teachers used to communicate each type of concern category on the PASS.

There was a flaw in the design of this survey question which impacts the results. While both parents and teachers were instructed to select all modes of communication that they use to communicate each supportive behavior, parents only had the option of selecting one mode per behavior. While this sub-research question referring to mode preferences for different modes can still be answered with this data, modes cannot be compared equally between parents and teachers as a result of the selectable options for responses.
Importance of Supportive Behaviors Scale

Parents and teachers were then asked to rate the importance of each supportive behavior toward a child’s success. Supportive behaviors are actions and habits exhibited by students that may require assistance from a teacher in school. This survey contained 16 supportive behaviors that focused on factors related to a student’s academic performance, classroom behavior, preparation, hostile peer interactions, and health. The three-point Likert scale contained ranges of not important (1), moderately important (2), and very important (3). Descriptive statistics, as well as a paired samples t-test were used to analyze this data.

Importance of Supportive Behaviors. Averages for the mean of each supportive behavior type were calculated and descriptive statistics were run to compare means and standard deviations. This data is shown in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10

Importance of Supportive Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Performance</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Behavior</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile Peer Interactions</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Performance</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Behavior</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile Peer Interactions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table provides descriptive statistics that reveal parent and teacher scores for how important they find each of the five supportive behavior categories.

While parents and teachers ranked all categories highly, parent data revealed that the most important supportive behavior was academic performance, (M = 2.51, SD = 0.52). The
categories of health (M = 2.46, SD = 0.75) and preparation (M = 2.43, SD = 0.79) were in close proximity. Teachers, however, ranked academic performance (M = 2.36, SD = 0.35) and preparation (M = 2.33, SD = 0.26) as the lowest categories. Teacher data revealed that hostile peer interactions (M = 2.92, SD = 0.20) was the most important supportive behavior.

**Paired Samples t-test.** A paired samples t-test is suitable when analyzing if there is a statistically significant difference between the means of two associated groups. In this question, a paired samples t-test was conducted on the parent data to first determine the correlation between supportive behaviors (Table 4.1), as well as the differences between each supportive behavior type (Table 4.2). The sample size of teachers (N = 6) was too small to run an additional analysis on that data set.

**Table 4.1**

*Correlations of Supportive Behaviors: Parents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Academic Performance</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.014*</td>
<td>.006**</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.042*</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Classroom Behavior</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Preparation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hostile Peer Interactions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Health</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This table provides correlations that reveal parent scores for supportive behaviors.*

*Statistically significant at p<.05, **Statistically significant at p<.01, *** Statistically Significant at p<.001.

Correlational data revealed that in almost every instance, with the exception of academic performance correlated with hostile peer interactions, parents who rated one category highly also rated another category highly. However, t-test data showed that the means themselves were not statistically significant.
Table 4.12

$t$-test of Supportive Behaviors: Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Performance &amp; Classroom Behavior</td>
<td>1.254</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Performance &amp; Preparation</td>
<td>0.619</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Performance &amp; Hostile Peer Interactions</td>
<td>0.831</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Performance &amp; Health</td>
<td>0.323</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Behavior &amp; Preparation</td>
<td>-1.649</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Behavior &amp; Hostile Peer Interactions</td>
<td>-1.017</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Behavior &amp; Health</td>
<td>-1.503</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation &amp; Hostile Peer Interactions</td>
<td>.618</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation &amp; Health</td>
<td>-.348</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile Peer Interactions &amp; Health</td>
<td>-1.095</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.284</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table reveals that while each supportive behavior was statistically correlated with other supportive behaviors, there is no statistical significance.

Satisfaction of Communication Tools Scale

Finally, parents and teachers were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the quality of communication that each communication mode provided. The five-point Likert scale ranges included: very unsatisfied (1), unsatisfied (2), neutral (3), satisfied (4), and very satisfied (5). Each mean was converted to a percentage that indicates the average percentage of the score relative to the total score. It should be noted that this scale should have contained an option for parents and teachers to select “do not use” for each communication mode. However, this option was not presented. This may have caused some participants to select a rating of 1 for these modes, as they perceive little satisfaction towards methods that they do not use, or a rating of 3 for these modes, as they took a neutral stance towards a method they do not use. This flaw in study design may cause some answers to be skewed. Table 4.13 contains the data for teacher and parent mode satisfaction scores.
### Table 4.13

*Satisfaction of Communication Modes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>N= 27</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apps</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Calls</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Mails</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face Conferences</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoom Conferences</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Nights</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Messages</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Management Systems</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>N= 6</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apps</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Calls</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Mails</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face Conferences</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoom Conferences</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Nights</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Messages</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Management Systems</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* This table provides descriptive statistics that show parent and teacher scores for how important they find each of the communication modes.

Findings showed that parents were most satisfied with e-mail (M = 4.37, SD = 0.84) and face-to-face communication (M = 4.37, SD = 0.88) and least satisfied with Facebook (M = 3.11, SD = 0.75). Teacher data revealed that teachers were most satisfied with face-to-face conferences (M = 5.00, SD = 0.00) and least satisfied with text messaging (M = 2.50, SD = 0.84). Teachers also ranked phone calls (M = 4.50, SD = 0.55) and Zoom conferences (M = 4.50, SD = 0.55) as well as e-mail (M = 4.33, SD = 0.52) highly. With the exception of e-mail and communication apps, teachers and parents indicated more satisfaction through warmer, richer
communication methods than colder, leaner methods under MRT and Social Presence Theory. Qualitative interview data was later used to further explain these findings.

**Open-Ended Survey Responses**

Parents and teachers were asked four open-ended response questions at the conclusion of the survey. The first open-ended response asked parents and teachers for advice on communicating with one another. Teachers shared that communication should be consistent and comfortable for both parties. It should begin at the start of the school year and continue with brief weekly messages or newsletters that keep parents informed at regular intervals. Additionally, teachers should work to build relationships with families early on by establishing themselves as a resource and showing a willingness to work towards every child’s success. Parents reflected on best practices that involve reading e-mails frequently, promoting open communication between home and school, asking questions that lead to student success, being proactive, and being upfront and honest and with the teacher.

The second two open-ended response question asked parents and teachers to relay their communication preferences and aversions. While none of the teachers listed their least favorite communication modes, teachers did praise ClassDojo, Remind, and e-mail for sending regular announcements. As one teacher noted, many parents frequently check their phone, so they see the messages quickly. Additionally, another teacher noted the importance of using the phone to communicate more serious matters. Parents primarily shared a preference for e-mail communications, as a result of the ability to send and receive messages from anywhere that a smartphone can be used. Furthermore, parents reflected on the inconvenience of using some newer forms of technology, such as apps and learning management systems that required a
certain program to be installed on their device, or a username and password that could be forgotten.

Finally, the final open-ended response question asked why parents and teachers chose certain communication modes over others for communicating certain issues. While none of the teachers answered this question, parents cited factors such as convenience, ease of use, the ability to save responses through e-mail, and modes that provide a quick response from the other party.

Qualitative Results

In order to fully explore the benefits and drawbacks of different parent-teacher communication modes, as well as the strategies for using each type, qualitative data was collected in the form of semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers as well as an analysis of communication artifacts. MRT and Social Presence Theory indicate that there is a stronger quality of communication through warmer, richer modes compared to colder, leaner modes. By interviewing parents and teachers to discuss their mode preferences, connections were drawn between why certain modes were chosen and concepts relating to strong communication quality among both theories.

In total, four teachers and ten parents participated in interviews with the researcher via Zoom. Interviews were transcribed and then coded for themes using inductive coding. Data was first grouped into three main categories of mode benefits, mode drawbacks, and strategies for use. Specific themes were then developed within each category that were labeled with the mode of communication utilized. Appendix N contains a table that shows a breakdown of each communication mode and the themes classified for each benefit and drawback. Participants had the option of providing communication artifacts to show their communication styles and
strategies at the conclusion of each interview. Examples of these artifacts are included throughout each section.

**Benefits and Drawbacks of Parent-Teacher Communication Modes**

In Research Sub-Question 3, I explored the question: What do parents and teachers in a suburban public elementary school perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of various modes of communication? Overall, benefits focused on the convenience various modes had to offer, the helpfulness of reminders, ways to address misconceptions in written message formats, and the effectiveness of personalized student-specific messages. Drawbacks were often the opposite of each benefit, and mainly focused on delayed responses, misconceptions, unhelpful materials, and the way in which teachers presented concerns. Most participants shared benefits and drawbacks related to e-mail, conferences, and phone calls, although other modes such as communication apps, Canvas (i.e., a Learning Management System), paper messages, Facebook, and newsletters were also mentioned.

**Benefits and Drawbacks to E-mail.** Quantitative data revealed that e-mail was the preferred method of parent-teacher communication throughout the third-grade grade level. Both parties perceived the strongest connections through e-mail, and the PASS (Thompson & Mazer, 2012) assessment displayed that e-mail was primarily used to communicate different types of student concerns. Since e-mail is considered a lean mode of communication under Media Richness Theory because of its inability to showcase tone and its potential to allow for ambiguities, it was important to follow-up with participants through the qualitative interviews to learn why e-mail was considered a preferred communication method. Participants shared benefits and drawbacks of e-mail that caused them to gravitate toward this preferred communication method.
Benefits of E-mail. All fourteen teacher and parent interview participants commented that e-mail was their primary communication method because it was fast, convenient, and efficient to use (Interviews, Parents 1-10 & Teachers 1-4). By receiving e-mails on a smartphone, teachers and parents could send, respond, and check messages from almost anywhere, at any time (Interviews, Parents 1-10 & Teachers 1-4). Parents and teachers could also take their time when editing and reflecting upon responses, which sends a more polished, professional message than other communication modes that utilize instant communication (Interview, Teacher 4).

E-mail also provided an opportunity to deliver closure to questions and concerns. One parent reflected that their issue was always resolved in a timely manner when communicating through e-mail (Interview, Parent 5). The parent highlighted this in an e-mail exchange that took place with a third-grade teacher when their child was out sick and the parent had questions pertaining to make-up work while at home. Parent 5 began by writing:

I am taking her to get tested as soon as I can. If there is anything that she can do while home, please let me know. I will have her read because I know that she is behind with that!

Thanks so much,

(Parent Signature)

This short e-mail to the teacher explained the problem (the child was sick and out that day) and that the parent was aware that she would need to receive a COVID PCR test before returning to school. The parent also asked what work needed to be completed while at home, and acknowledged that their daughter would read while waiting for the teacher’s response. The teacher responded immediately, providing this response four minutes later:
Perfect- I will assign her the practice test in Pearson for her math test on Monday. iReady reading is great for reading. This week’s element is character traits so if she reads a book at home or if there are any characters in her iReady reading she can write about what that character is like.

I will put books in the vestibule at my prep at 2 in case you think she will be out tomorrow too.

This response shows another quick message. The teacher first acknowledged the first e-mail was received and then answered the question pertaining to make-up work at home. Additionally, the teacher provided a time for material pick-up and gave updates about classroom units and projects. This exchange was fairly short, but sufficiently answered the parent’s questions in a timely manner.

The teacher and parent exchanged additional e-mails until all questions were addressed appropriately. The teacher added some comments about how much the student was missed in class, as well as offered information about an upcoming classroom activity. While the parent and teacher were able to have a quick conversation, they were also respectful of time constraints as a result of the parent being out or the teacher teaching. None of the messages were pressing and allowed for a delayed response from the other party. A copy of this full exchange is located in Appendix O.

Participants reflected that they often send an e-mail when they think of it and know that the other party will respond whenever they have time (Interviews, Parents 1, 4, 5, & 9). To clarify this stance, Parent 9 stated:

I like that I can [send e-mails] when I think about it. Like, if it is 10 o’clock at night and I say, ‘Oh my gosh (student) has an appointment tomorrow and is going to have to leave
[school early],’ I can just e-mail her [teacher] and know that [the teacher will] see it at some point. And, most likely, (student) will go in and say, I have to leave at this time, but [I like sending an e-mail] to just kind of validate what she is saying. So, I think it is more of a convenience thing on my end and also not wanting to disrupt [the teacher’s] day with a phone call or anything along those lines (Interview).

In other words, this narrative showed that e-mail is viewed as a convenient method that quickly gets information to the other party, while allowing for a delayed response. On the contrary, when using a different mode, such as phone calls, parents shared concerns that they were bothering the other party and asking for an immediate response as a result of the sense of urgency that is concurrent with these modes (Interviews, Parents 1, 4, 5, & 9). E-mail allows for messaging to take place at any time of day, with an expectation of a delayed response while the e-mail is read and a sufficient response is written.

Multiple parents reflected that these student-specific e-mails were more beneficial than class-wide messages (Interviews, Parents 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10 & Teacher 2). While class-wide e-mails kept parents up-to-date on classroom events and reminders, parents reported that they e-mailed teachers directly about their child when there was a classroom question or concern that needed to be addressed (Interviews, Parents 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, & 10). For example, one interview participant reflected on contacting a teacher about the masking policy when their child complained that he could not breathe during the school day (Interview, Parent 10). Similarly, two different parents e-mailed their children’s teacher to inquire if their students could eat a snack during instruction when the children remarked that they were hungry and unfocused during class (Interviews, Parents 7 & 10). The ability to send these direct e-mails is a benefit for parents, as the e-mails allow parents to ask clarifying questions about policies that impact their child’s growth.
Additionally, both parents and teachers reached out to each other via e-mail when they wanted to keep the other party “in the loop” about a specific behavior or event (Interviews, Parents 3 & 10). One parent reflected on e-mailing the teacher when their son’s dog died so that the teacher would understand why their child might be crying or not acting like himself (Interview, Parent 3). Other parents remarked that their child has an IEP or 504 plan that warranted stronger connections between home and school (Interviews, Parents 3, 8, & 10). For example, one child received medication for ADHD and the parent relied on the teacher to provide feedback about his daily behaviors in the classroom so that his medication could be adjusted accordingly (Interview, Parent 10).

Teachers also appreciated the benefits of student specific e-mails because they allowed a closer home-school connection. Teacher 2 noted that they liked to send positive e-mails about what they notice in class when they stated:

Today I sent an e-mail because I noticed that [a student was] doing fine with me, but then, when they work independently, they’re not able to do it independently, so I want the parent to know that…I can e-mail when I see it.” (Interview)

Parents seemed appreciative of these student-specific messages showcasing student strengths and weaknesses. As Parent 3 noted, “It has been really interesting to just hear from my third-grader’s teacher about some of the difficulties that he’s having with prioritizing things…just his ability to attend to while doing activities” (Interview). The ability to frequently and conveniently send and receive student specific messages, in addition to class-wide updates and reminders, is therefore a main benefit of e-mail communication. Coupled with the familiarity that e-mail brings, it was the preferred method of parents and teachers in this research study.
**Drawbacks to E-Mail.** Parents and teachers reported that their biggest drawback with e-mail was that miscommunications can occur with tone and wording. On a phone call or in a conference, a parent can assess the teacher’s point of view by looking at facial expressions and tone of voice; however, understanding the tone and wording that the other party portrayed is not always possible with a written message (Interview, Parent 3). Parent 3 emphasized this when stating, “E-mail can just be so weird if it is not worded in the right way,” which can lead to feelings of being “brushed off” by teachers if the response is less than adequate (Interview). This “brushed off” feeling caused frustration from parents when their e-mails went unanswered or delayed response from a teacher did not fully address their concern (Interviews, Parents 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10).

A few parents noted a difference in responses from teachers in the early elementary grades, as opposed to teachers of third-grade students (Interviews, Parents 3, 7, 8, & 10). For example, these parents reflected that kindergarten and first grade teachers seemed to send child-specific e-mails, or e-mail responses, on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Last year, when students were in second grade, there was less specific communication from teachers, however most of the school year was hybrid or virtual, which allowed parents a glimpse into their child’s school life. Consequently, this year these parents reflected that the specific information they have received about their individual children is much less. Therefore, these parents noted that they have been contacting the teachers for updates more frequently, but are not receiving detailed responses that fully answer their questions and concerns to the extent that previous grades had (Interviews, Parents 3, 7, 8, & 10).

E-mail content can also be too lengthy or wordy at times (Interviews, Parents 6 & 7). As Parent 7 specified, “no one reads three paragraphs anymore. Just give me the information that I
need to know and I’m good” (Interview). E-mails that look too long may be ignored by parents. Parent 6 admitted this when stating, “I’ll open it, see that it’s a long message, and I’ll say that I’ll come back later to read it. [But I don’t.]” (Interview). In other words, messages that are not short and sweet often get missed.

Parents and teachers also admitted that the other party may not be seeing or opening the messages to begin with (Interviews, Parents 2, 5, & 10 & Teacher 3). One parent commented that e-mailed messages often go to spam and do not make it to the intended recipient (Interview, Parent 5). Other parents and teachers stated that they receive such a high volume of e-mails per day, from a variety of sources, that it is difficult to keep up (Interviews, Parents 2, 10 & Teacher 3). This causes messages to be missed and the home-school connection to be lost.

Although using e-mail contains multiple drawbacks, parents and teachers still chose it as the preferred mode of communication, perhaps because both parties shared strategies that can be useful for ensuring success when communicating through written methods. These strategies will follow a discussion of benefits and drawbacks to other communication modes.

**Benefits and Drawbacks to Conferences.** This year, parents had a choice of conferencing with teachers over Zoom, the phone, or face-to-face. Teachers stated during interviews that most parents chose to conference with them either over Zoom or in-person. Quantitative data revealed that parents and teachers viewed conferencing as a preferred communication mode that helped them experience stronger connection to the other party. Qualitative analysis of interview transcripts showed that this may have been as a result of the personal touch conferencing enables, as well as the opportunities for collaboration and chances to view each classroom and work samples. There were only a few drawbacks mentioned for this
mode, such as hearing concerns for the first time and technology challenges when conferences were held over Zoom.

**Benefits to Face-to-Face Conferences.** Face-to-face conferences have a more personal nature than written communication modes (Interviews, Parents 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 & Teacher 3). Several parents reflected that with COVID-19 protocols still in place, their ability to speak to the teacher in-person throughout the year has been severely limited, and that they used in-person conferences this past November as a chance to see their child’s teacher face-to-face (Interview, Parent 7). This created a “more present” way of communicating that allowed parents to “get an idea of who [their] child is spending seven hours with every day” (Interview, Parent 7). In other words, face-to-face conferences allowed parents to get a better read on the type of person their child’s teacher was.

Only one parent shared that they do see their child’s teacher on a more regular basis, and that is as they are entering and exiting the school from YMCA before and after school care (Interview, Parent 2). When these interactions occurred, the teacher always took the time to speak about the child and built a personal connection with the family (Interview, Parent 2). Thus, importance of “informal hellos” was highlighted when discussing the personal connections built by face-to-face interactions.

These home-school connections are also established through opportunities to see the classroom set-up and academic work samples (Interviews, Parents 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10). With COVID-19 safety procedures still in place, parents noted that the only time to see the school this year was through in-person conferences that allowed access to the school building. Parent 8 remarked that seeing her child’s work hung in the hallway, allowed her to compare his
achievement to other students in the grade-level (Interview). That visual then caused her to ask informed questions about her child’s progress when meeting with the teacher.

In addition to asking and answering questions about a child’s progress, Teacher 4 reflected that conferences are the ideal time to have honest, difficult conversations about behavior and grades (Interview). These conversations allowed parents to see that teachers are coming from a place of concern and provided an opportunity for them to hear the teacher’s tone of voice while looking at their facial expressions (Interview). Teacher 4 went on to explain that conferences are a chance to “give parents what they need, while also giving them what they need to hear, but not sugarcoating anything” (Interview, Teacher 4).

Several parents remarked how conferences were the first time they heard their child was struggling academically and needed support from a reading specialist or were going to go through the Child Study Team (CST) process for possible special education testing (Interviews, Parents 3, 6, & 8). One parent commented that these honest, yet tough, conversations were vital, as she had experienced several miscommunications with her child’s teacher through e-mail earlier in the year and the conference allowed an opportunity for clarity (Interview, Parent 3). Before conferences, the parent had sent numerous e-mails on a weekly or biweekly basis asking for updates on their child’s progress in class, and specific questions about the school day. The teacher often responded with short replies that did not fully answer the parent’s questions. This led to the parent expressing concern that the teacher did not fully understand their son’s needs or why she was sending the frequency of e-mails per week. During the interview, this parent detailed this experience by stating:

I went in person…because I wanted her to see and hear everything correctly and not through an e-mail that doesn’t convey tone. And I think that helped actually because I
think she now knows why I send [the e-mails]. Hopefully she understands now where they’re coming from. And it seems that way, based on responses. There’s been a different kind of language and tone. I think she realizes I’m not coming at you; I’m trying to collaborate with you (Interview, Parent 3).

Parents found that having a face-to-face conversation with their child’s teacher helped to bring both parties closer together through collaboration and a revelation that everyone is on the same page.

This idea of collaboration can be taken one step further by allowing for multiple parties to be present at the conference (Interview, Parent 3). For a child with an IEP or who is receiving other additional services, conferences allow a time for all teachers to come together with the parent and share what they are seeing as a team (Interview, Parent 10). The conferences therefore indicate a yearly checkpoint that enables parents to assess academic goals and IEP supports for their child. This ensures that teachers and staff are following all of the document’s specifications and are on the same page with addressing each child’s needs.

**Drawbacks to Face-to-Face Conferences.** While most parents and teachers had only positive feedback about conferences, they also noted several drawbacks. Two parents reflected on times that new information about their child was presented during a conference when it should have been noted sooner (Interviews, Parents 3 & 6). One parent expressed that by the time conferences occur, it is much harder to change the behavior or academic concerns, as it is harder to change behavior that goes against established routines (Interview, Parent 3). Another parent commented that they had asked the child’s teacher to keep them updated on the daughter’s reading ability at the start of the year but was not told until conferences that the daughter was struggling and seeing the reading specialist for extra support (Interview, Parent 6). Thus, both
parents reiterated that conferences should not be a time to share new, concerning information, and that these conversations should instead occur as needed throughout the school year so that both parties are on the same page at all times.

**Benefits to Zoom Conferences.** While most parents and teachers spoke about the benefits of face-to-face conferences, two individuals spoke about the convenience that the cloud-based video conferencing software, Zoom, provided (Interviews, Parent 1 & Teacher 1). Parent 1 recalled their time as a working parent and how their work always frowned upon leaving early to attend a child’s parent-teacher conference (Interview). Parent 1 reflected that if Zoom had been an option at the time, their work would have allowed more flexibility during the day to join the conference from the office. Zoom also provided flexibility for parents who would otherwise need a babysitter to attend in-person conference nights (Interview, Teacher 1). Thus, enabling parents and teachers to connect for conferences over Zoom allowed for greater flexibility in scheduling that is otherwise difficult to achieve during set in-person conference time periods.

**Drawbacks to Zoom Conferences.** Although Zoom conferences offered greater flexibility than in-person conferences, Zoom sometimes made logistics more complicated for the involved parties. Teacher 1 reflected on Zoom conferences held this year that ran into difficulties with technology challenges (Interviews). When the internet was down, the program would cut out or freeze. Additionally, some families had trouble with lighting for their Zoom, which made it hard to see the participants in the fame. Similarly, Teacher 4 highlighted this technology challenge in regard to interpreters, as their room contains many English Language Learner (ELL) students whose parents need an interpreter present at the conference to ensure thorough communication. Due to the parent, teacher, ELL teacher, and interpreter were on the Zoom call. The meeting had to be set up through the ELL teacher’s Zoom account, instead of the homeroom teacher’s account,
since that account allowed for unlimited access to extended Zoom features. Additionally, since the interpreter did not have direct access to Zoom, they were connected by phone which often caused delays and connection issues. The teacher found that they had to repeat several topics so that the parent was relayed the correct message, and this repetition was frustrating and time-consuming (Interview, Teacher 4). The teacher reiterated during the interview that they were glad the parent was able to attend and that an interpreter was present to allow for information to be conveyed in the home language, but noted that improvements could be made to difficult conference set-up.

Another parent spoke about the logistical difficulties with seeing paper test scores and writing assignments via Zoom (Interview, Parent 4). During conferences, teachers often show samples of a student’s work in class. While an in-person conference allows both parties to look through the work samples, a Zoom conference typically results in the teacher holding up the work on camera, thus making it more difficult to see, especially if a parent has a direct question about a score or response. Sometimes teachers have paperwork that they are sending home as well, such as a sight word list or additional activities to practice. Parent 4 stated that the teacher often says that they will send home the materials that they are speaking about, but that there is a delay in receiving the materials (Interview). Fall conferences normally occur right before Thanksgiving break and students have the entire week off. Therefore, when a teacher sends home materials after a conference, they are not being sent home until the following week. By then, the parent has often forgotten to check for the materials, or has difficulty remembering what each handout is for (Interview, Parent 4). Thus, the parent pointed out that it would be more helpful to receive Zoom conference materials ahead of time so that they could be reviewed at home as the teacher was speaking. This would give the parent an opportunity to take notes directly on the
handouts and to analyze student work samples up close in order to receive specific feedback when the teacher is speaking about the child’s progress. While there are possible strategies for preventing these logistical challenges via Zoom, some parents and teachers would rather avoid the stress and use a different communication mode to connect.

**Phone Calls.** When interviewing parents and teachers, parents stated that they often do not call a teacher and teachers stated that they only call a parent when necessary. More teachers were able to share benefits for phone calls than parents, with the most common benefit being a chance to address misunderstandings of wording or tone that could otherwise be misconstrued in a written message. When analyzing drawbacks to phone calls, most parents and teachers cited “phone-tag,” or a difficulty reaching the other party, as their largest concern.

**Benefits to Phone Calls.** The biggest benefit that emerged for phone calls was the importance of addressing misunderstandings (Interviews, Parents 2, 9 & Teachers 1, 3, 4). By being able to clarify situations and talk things out more clearly, parents and teachers had a better chance of being heard and ensuring that information was not taken in the wrong way. Teacher 3 synthesized these ideas when stating:

I do like meeting face-to-face and I do like talking over the phone, but I guess I like those for tougher conversations…so I feel more comfortable kind of being able to talk through, you know, whether it’s a behavior issue, whether it’s struggling and things…I rather kind of have them hear my voice and see my face so that they have a better understanding. I feel like sometimes a lot of those things are lost in an e-mail or they might take it the wrong way, so anytime I have to have a difficult conversation, to feel more comfortable. [I like] talking over the phone (Interview).
Phone calls enable parents and teachers to have difficult conversations in a manner that is more receptive to the others party’s tone and wording than a written response would allow. This allows them to discuss more complicated issues, such as behavior or an academic concern.

Phone calls also allow both parties to problem solve solutions to challenging behaviors (Interview, Teachers 1, 3). Teachers expressed that when they word their concern in an e-mail, the words can be taken the wrong way and sound judgmental or rude toward a parent or child. However, when speaking with parents about a concern over the phone, they are able to troubleshoot the problem with the parent and collaborate on a home-school solution. Thus, phone calls enable parents and teachers to work together and provide consistency for the benefit of the child.

**Drawbacks to Phone Calls.** Most interviewed parents admitted that they rarely speak to a teacher on the phone, and most teachers stated that they only call a parent in difficult or emergency situations. Over half of the parents and teachers interviewed noted that calling the other party can be difficult because they have trouble reaching the other party (i.e., “phone tag”) (Interviews, Parents 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 11 & Teacher 1). One parent specified:

I feel like I know [teachers] have phones in the rooms, but I feel like phone calls end up being, like, a back and forth, so I feel like it is not [practical] and then, you know, you're so busy as a teacher that you don't have the time to [respond] (Interview, Parent 10).

This sentiment was consistent in other parent interviews, in which parents stated the difficulties in receiving a phone call with a teacher during work hours when they are unable to pick up (Interviews, Parents 1, 5 & 8). Some parents even went as far as specifying that they would not answer the phone if the call came from an unknown number or if they did not know about the call in advance (Interview, Parent 8).
Other parents and teachers focused on the immediacy that seems to come with phone calls, highlighting that if you receive a call there is a sense of urgency to it that seems to warrant a response right way (Interviews, Parents 3, 4 & Teacher 2). However, a fast response is not always practical in the span of the school or work day, as parents and teachers cannot pick up the phone to answer while working. To counter this, one teacher stated that they only “call [parents] if absolutely necessary and if I can't get ahold of them, or if it's an emergency situation” (Interview, Teacher 2). Thus, teachers appeared to call parents sparingly and only in situations where a response was needed right away.

Even if a phone call is warranted, parents are not always sure how to contact teachers directly (Interview, Parent 9). Parent 9 stated that they do not have a direct line to their child’s teacher and would need to contact the office, and leave a message for the teacher, which would take up more time or allow for the message to be misconstrued (Interview). When teachers were asked about phone calls, they stated that calls were rarely received and that parents had been encouraged to e-mail them instead at the start of the school year (Interviews, Teachers 1, 2, & 4). This push from teachers for other communication modes may explain parents’ confusion with how to contact teachers by phone.

**Newsletters.** Third-grade parents received an emailed third-grade team newsletter weekly, as well as a building-wide newsletter from their child’s principal. This newsletter arrived in the form of a Google Site link that was updated on a weekly basis. There were no paper newsletters being sent home in third-grade at this school this year.

**Benefits to Newsletters.** There were several benefits of both the school-wide and the third-grade weekly newsletters. The most significant benefit indicated for both of these newsletters was serving as a place to locate current academic and school-wide topics (Interviews,
Parents 2, 4, 5, & 7). In the school newsletter, parents often reported that they look for upcoming school-wide events and district announcements (Interviews, Parents 4 & 5). A few parents mentioned the calendar, which is shown as upcoming events, as being the first thing they look for each week (Interview, Parent 5). An example of the upcoming events list from the school newsletter is shown in figure 4.1 below.

**Figure 4.1**

*Upcoming Events in School-Wide Google Sites Newsletter*

![Upcoming Events](image)

*Note:* This clip for the school-wide principal’s newsletter shows a sample of upcoming events being offered at the elementary school.

In the upcoming events section of the newsletter, important school events are listed for the next month. These events may include after-school events, such as conferences, concerts, or school fundraisers, as well as during school events, such as spirit days, and school pictures. Other sections of the newsletter include students of the month per grade level, district reminders, a monthly lunch menu, and an update from the school principal. One parent noted that she likes to stay up-to-date with COVID polices by looking through the district news and principal report (Interview, Parent 2).
The third-grade newsletter contained similar information, but with additional sections that focus on third-grade curriculum and events. Parents expressed that the third-grade specific curriculum updates in the third-grade newsletter allow them to know what to focus on with their child at home (Interviews, Parents 1, 2, 5, 7, & 9). While a parent remarked that they use the newsletter goals to establish where their son should be academically per trimester, third-grade teachers stated that the newsletter helped them to stay on track academically, so that all classes are generally covering the same material per week and providing consistency across the grade level (Interviews, Parent 1 & Teachers 2, 3).

**Drawbacks to Newsletters.** While all parents and teachers stated that they skimmed or read the weekly school newsletter from the principal, two parents commented on the redundancy of certain topics making it difficult to read the new information (Interviews, Parents 1 & 7). The newsletter is set up as a Google Site that is updated weekly. It contains different sections such as monthly birthdays, students of the month, a calendar of upcoming events, a message from the principal, and various newsletters from different departments and schools (such as letters from the school nurse, student award applications, yearbook order forms, middle school fundraisers, and more). The principal keeps old information that is still relevant inside the newsletter, so parents often have to scroll past this repeated information to find the new material that was added. Furthermore, the location of each newsletter section often changes weekly, so parents mentioned that it can be difficult to locate the information they are looking for at first glance.

**Communication Apps.** Two third-grade teachers were using the communication app Remind and one teacher used the app ClassDojo to correspond with parents during the course of this study. Another teacher used the app TalkingPoints just to communicate with the parents of their ELL students.
During the interviews, several parents shared positive and negative experiences using these apps within third-grade, as well as in other grade levels. It should be noted that none of the parent participants in this research study were from ELL families, as all participants selected that English was the primary language spoken in their home. However, some parents offered insight into their own experiences using the apps with ELLs at their work. These perspectives offered additional positive and negative experiences with the communication apps that impact how the parents perceive the apps in their child’s school.

**Drawbacks to ClassDojo.** Although none of the third-grade teachers interviewed are using ClassDojo this year, one teacher explained why they do not use it in their classroom. They stated that they do not want to use the program because their perception of the behavior management point system goes against their practice of responsive classroom (Interview, Teacher 1). This teacher reflected that they would need to learn more about the program as a parent-teacher communication tool, but that the behavior management system alone dissuades them from doing so.

**Benefits of Remind.** The ability to send and receive short, fast messages through Remind is viewed as a benefit by both teachers and parents (Interviews, Parents 2, 7, & Teachers 1, 3, 4). One teacher remarked that in parent-teacher communication, there are often too many e-mails that can be extremely detailed, so Remind makes it faster and easier to send quick updates straight to the parents’ phone (Interview, Teacher 3). Parents and teachers usually use Remind for quick reminders about fun events. Figure 4.2 and 4.3 show two examples of these messages from Remind.
Figure 4.2

Remind Text Update One

Note: This image shows a Remind message that was sent by a teacher to the parents in their class. It is reminding them about ticket sales for a school event.

This Remind text is reminding parents that it is their last chance to purchase tickets to a school fundraiser. Additionally, it tells parents that tickets must be purchased in advance. Both of these reminders were also listed in the school-wide weekly newsletter, but the teacher sent an additional notification on the final day of ticket sales so that parents who forgot, or missed the earlier communications, still had a chance to participate.

Figure 4.3

Remind Text Update Two

Note: This image shows a second Remind message that was sent by the teacher to the parents in their class. It provides a reminder for parents and students about art class smocks.

This Remind text is reminding parents that students will need a smock for their next art class.

The third-grade newsletter had stated that students needed smocks that week during art, but the
text reminder the day before class helped to ensure that all parents received the message and sent in a smock for class.

When parents receive these messages, they often respond quickly with a short reply, if necessary. When one parent read that a teacher needed a crockpot for a school party and, they sent a quick text through the app saying, “Hey, I have a crockpot if you need it” (Interview, Parent 2). The ability to send and receive these quick messages are seen as a benefit for both parents and teachers.

The quick nature of Remind messages made the app beneficial during hybrid teaching as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic when one teacher used Remind to alert parents to technology problems (Interview, Teacher 3). During the interview, this teacher stated:

When Zoom crashed, I would grab my phone real quick and send a reminder message to the parents saying, “Hey my Zoom crashed. Tell the kids to sit tight while I restart” …I knew parents were going to see that right away. So it, kind of, just reassured [them] that the kids can’t just leave. (Interview, Teacher 3).

By being able to quickly inform parents what was going on during a school internet outage, this teacher was able to keep students and parents connected at home.

**Drawbacks to Remind.** While most feedback about Remind was positive, one teacher commented that Remind can be difficult to communicate with at times because it limits the character length of posts (Interview, Teacher 3). This causes the teacher to often have to write in short-hand or abbreviations, which may come across as being less professional to parents. Figure 4.4 shows an example of one of these messages where the teacher was reminding parents about a third-grade charity event called Caring and Sharing.
Figure 4.4

Remind Text Update Three

Caring & Sharing fundraiser begins on Mon. Students help to raise money for local families for Thanksgiving. Letter explaining coming home.

Note: This image shows a Remind text message sent by a teacher to the parents in their class.

The text contains abbreviations and shortened sentences as a result of limitations on characters in Remind posts.

In this example, limits to character length resulted in the teacher abbreviating words such as Monday, and to use an ampersand instead of spelling out the word ‘and.’ The teacher also had to make the final sentence a fragment by writing, “Letter explaining coming home,” instead of something more formal such as, “A letter with more details will be coming home shortly.”

Although a parent never mentioned the shorthand, the teacher was concerned that the abbreviations in their writing may cause them to look less professional to the parents in their class (Interview, Teacher 3). This perceived lack of professionalism may then cause parents to judge their teaching ability.

In addition to the problems with shorthand communication, Remind is not always checked as quickly as other communication methods. While most parents praised Remind for how quickly they can speak with their child’s teacher, one parent stated that they noticed their child’s teacher does not check Remind posts as frequently as other communication methods, which can often cause a delay in responses (Interview, Parent 2). The parent highlighted that they often communicate using other methods first, so that they can ensure a faster response time.
These drawbacks to Remind messages often deter parents and teachers from using the program in favor of other communication methods.

**Benefits of TalkingPoints**

The primary function of the communication app, TalkingPoints, is to translate messages from English into a family’s native language. Teacher 4 mentioned that some of their students are English Language Learners (ELL), and that their parents often have questions about the weekly e-mail communications, which are e-mailed in English (Interview). Through the TalkingPoints app, the teacher is able to send these parents the most pertinent information about upcoming events, so that the parents can read it in their preferred language. Additionally, Parent 7 works as teacher and is familiar with using the app through her own experiences of using it in the classroom (Interview). She viewed the message format as a benefit of the app because instead of sending a large, formal, thought-out e-mail, parents can receive the TalkingPoints’ messages straight to their phone which makes it faster to communicate concerns and reminders.

Parent 3 used the app with a teacher outside of third-grade. She also saw the quick text messages as a benefit of the program, and highlighted how pictures can be sent as well (Interview, Parent 3). She mentioned how earlier this year her daughter forgot an item for show-and-tell, and she was able to send a photo of the item quickly through the app so that her child did not have to miss out on the fun. Thus, similar to Remind, the TalkingPoints app allows parents and teachers to quickly communicate with one another, with the added bonus of translating messages into various languages.

**Facebook.** Although none of the third-grade teachers were utilizing a class Facebook page this year, there are Facebook pages set up for each school within the district through the Home and School Association. Additionally, the district has a Facebook page that posts pictures
of school events and reminders for school holidays and policy changes. Teachers did not contribute to the discussion on these Facebook pages, but parents had mixed emotions, with most citing more drawbacks to the pages than positives attributes.

**Benefits of Facebook.** Parents focused their comments on the Home & School Facebook page for the elementary school. Three parents made comparisons from the elementary page to a similar page at the K-1 Center within the district. These parents noted that a benefit of the K-1 page was that parents could collaborate with one another to ask questions and find resources for students (Interviews, Parents 2 & 4). In comparison, the current elementary school’s Facebook page does not allow for collaboration and is “locked down.” While parents may ask questions, a moderator will privately message them the response instead of allowing them to post the question and crowdsourced an answer.

Figure 4.5 shows a current example for the K-1 Facebook page where a parent is asking a question about the policies for club pick-up.
Figure 4.5

*K-1 Facebook Page Post by a Parent*

For club drop off- is that in carline?

**Note:** This image shows a Facebook post made by a parent at the K-1 school. Other parents and Home & School board members commented on the post to answer the initial question. The information from this conversation shows that parents and Home & School board members are able to help parents answer their questions without needing to contact a teacher directly. Parents are also able to coordinate events outside of school with the parents of students in their child’s class. Parent 4 shared that on the K-1 Facebook page, they were able to create a private Facebook page for just their child’s kindergarten classroom that parents used to purchase a
combined class gift for their teacher around the holidays, coordinate playdates, and manage birthday party invitations (Interview). When the parent tried to do this at the current elementary school, their post was not permitted by the site’s moderator.

The elementary school’s Home & School Facebook page used to operate in a similar manner, but was locked after parents repeatedly made comments that reflected attacks on teachers and grade levels. For example, a parent once posted a comment that they were upset with a teacher’s homework policy. Other parents then began to weigh in with their thoughts on the policy and comparisons to homework assigned by other teachers in the grade level. After repeated warnings that these types of posts violated the terms and conditions of participating on the page, the page was locked and is now only open for moderators to post and comment. One parent stated that they liked this feature because it allowed the page to be “drama free” (Interview, Parent 1). With the heightened state in the community surrounding politics, masks, vaccines, and other current events, this parent often strays from Facebook to avoid the drama on social media. Thus, knowing that parents could not post and comment about these ideas actually persuaded this parent to join the school’s page. Therefore, although most parents noted the idea of collaboration as the main benefit of Facebook, and stated frustration in how this is not permitted at the elementary school level, there were still some benefits noted for the way the current page is set up.

**Drawbacks to Facebook.** Two interviewed parents spoke about how they are against social media and wish that things were not posted on Facebook (Interviews, Parents 1 & 8). This mindset caused one parent to refuse to create a Facebook page. However, so that they do not miss important announcements posted on Facebook, they have a friend screenshot and send any important posts (Interview, Parent 8). Parent 1 has reluctantly created a Facebook page, but only
uses it to check on things for school (Interview). Both parents mentioned that the district and Home and School Association often post things on Facebook, such as photos of special school events, lost clothing from the lost and found, and updates about masking policies that cannot be found anywhere else. Thus, as much as they want to refrain from using social media, they reflected that they must be tied to these pages in some way to stay informed on school events and district policies.

On the contrary to what some parents perceived to be a benefit of the page, multiple parents shared their disappointment with the Home and School Facebook page when compared to the Home and School page at the K-1 Center because it is “locked down” (Interviews, Parents 4, 6, 7, 9, & 10). As one parent stated:

If you haven't already heard, nobody, none of the parents like the disabled page. Everyone loved the (K-1 Center) page and everyone enjoys being part of the (K-1 page) because most parents are able to say, ‘Hey when do I get notification of my son's teachers?’ You know it's…. they just signed up in July or August and they don't even know who their teacher is yet. So, they go to the (K-1) page and they say, ‘Hey when do notices come out? When's the first day of school?’ I've seen things on the (K-1) page saying, ‘I lost my kids homework assignment,’ or ‘can anybody just tell me what page on Canvas we are supposed to be doing tonight?’ There's a lot of parental support and communication and a lot of it managed and run by obviously the PTA, the parents who monitor that website… (Interview, Parent 3)

In other words, the K-1 Center uses a more open Facebook page where parents can post questions and photos of school events and spirit days. The page allows other members to comment with answers to questions or follow-ups to current discussions. Although the page is
monitored by school officials, it is mostly parent-run with the leadership of the current Home & School board. Contrastingly, the elementary school’s Facebook page is run differently. As Parent 4 continues:

Getting to the (current school) page…no I tried doing that, last year I tried to, as you know, go on there and create a Facebook page for (his class) because what a lot of parents do at the (K-1 Center) is they'll go in and they'll create their own personal Facebook page. And then other parents can go in there and they can sign on, and then, they can chat just with their homeroom. Sometimes a teacher was invited to join the class page like (example teachers). And when my kid was in kindergarten, I created a Facebook page for (teacher’s) kindergarten class and there was only maybe about seven or eight of the parents and wasn't all 20 parents on there. But we were going on there, and we were talking about, like, ‘Hey does anybody want to pitch in for a teacher gift for Christmas?’ or sometimes… ‘Hey you know Johnny's birthday party is coming up.’ For us at (current school) we don't have the opportunity. (Interview)

On the elementary school’s Home and School Facebook page, parents are unable to post anything independently. Instead, they may ask questions to the administrators, who are school staff members and Home and School board members, and they will receive a private message with the answer. If parents want to post pictures or a school shout-out, an administrator must approve the post first. Many parents do not like these differences between the pages and commented that they perceived stronger connections to other parents and their child’s school through the K-1 Center’s page, which was more parent-led. Two parents even went so far as to say that they find the page so unhelpful that they often forget to check it for updates (Interviews,
Parents 5 & 9). Thus, parents seem to rely on the Facebook page when there is a possibility for collaboration, but turn to other communication methods when that tool is stifled.

**Canvas.** Before the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were not using a Learning Management System (LMS) through the school district. The district was primarily a Google Suite school, that relied on Google Sites for teacher websites and Google Classroom for online student assignments and collaboration. When the district opted for virtual learning last fall, as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the school district purchased the LMS, Canvas, for all teachers and students. Teachers were directed to switch their regular instruction, including any Google Sites and Classrooms, to this platform. Students have access to their teacher’s page through a student portal. Parents have separate access to the teacher’s page and their child’s assignments and grades through a parent portal. Both portals have separate logins and passwords. Parents and teachers have a private chat feature within the program that they can use to contact the other party.

Most interviewees had to be directly prompted to speak about Canvas, which was telling of how infrequently the LMS was utilized this year. Teachers stated that they created a main page on Canvas with some general information about their class, a link to their Back-to-School night presentation, and directions to follow if a child is quarantining from home. None of the parents and teachers interviewed are using the LMS to directly communicate this year, however there was some discussion on the benefits and drawbacks to the LMS as a communication device.

**Benefits to Canvas.** Parents, students, and teachers have individual logins for the Canvas platform. Once inside, the LMS offers different settings for automatic alerts about student progress. Teachers have settings to enable e-mails each time a student submits work, and parents
have a setting to enable automatic e-mails every time a child’s grade is added or updated (Interview, Parent 10). While third-grade students are not receiving grades in Canvas this year, and, thus, this feature is not utilized by third-grade parents at this time, one parent spoke about how helpful it has been with their middle school son (Interview, Parent 10). They were able to track which assignments he is turning in and how he scored on each of them.

Canvas also allowed a space for the teacher to post classroom updates and lists of homework assignments for the week if students are quarantining (Interviews, Parent 2 & Teacher 1). Figure 4.6 shows what one of the third-grade teacher’s Canvas homepages looks like for students. The teacher has links to an “about me” page, a “parent portal,” and the “daily schedule.” The teacher also has a link taking students to a different page where they can see the weekly assignments if they are not able to attend school. This is shown in Figure 4.7.
Figure 4.6

Canvas Homepage for a Third-Grade Class

Note: This image shows the set-up of a Canvas page for a third-grade classroom during the 2021-2022 school year. It contains images that serve as links to other pages.
Figure 4.7

Canvas Weekly Assignments Display

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELA Activities</th>
<th>MATH Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*You can always work on any programs in the ssdstudentbookmarks folder - Ready, Xtrimath, Scholastic (Storyworks magazine), etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** This image shows the weekly English Language Arts (ELA) and Math activities for a third-grade classroom. Both parents and students have access to this page at home. Parents considered having a consistent place to check for assignments and classroom information a benefit of the LMS.

**Drawbacks to Canvas.** Most parents admitted that they rarely check Canvas this year and barely know how to log on to the software. Parents must toggle between their child’s account and their own account in order to see what is visible to both parties. While both students and parents have a private chat feature where they can talk to the teacher, there is no option for a three-way chat between all three. Parent 3 stated that this created problems with using the software as a parent-teacher communication tool last year (Interview). The parent had questions or would experience problems with assignments that their son was working on and would use their son’s account to send the teacher a message. This message would then come to the teacher as a message from the son, even though it was written by the parent. When the teacher
responded, the response would then go to the son’s Canvas page and not to the parent portal or the parent’s e-mail. This often caused the the parent to check all three locations, or send an e-mail follow-up, because they were unsure where to find the teacher’s response. Thus, this process made it difficult for the parent to locate the teacher’s response, or know if one had been sent. These frustrations with the program resulted in parents not utilizing Canvas as a preferred mode of communication.

**Paper Communications.** Since the school primarily uses a Google Sites newsletter to communicate, paper flyers are rarely sent home. None of the third-grade teachers sent home a paper newsletter during the year in which this study took place. However, teachers did send home homework logs, math tests that require parent signatures, and classroom event notifications in paper form. These papers went back-and-forth between home and school in a blue folder that contains a “return to school” side and a “leave at home” side to make it easier for parents to distinguish what to do with each paper. Since some teachers communicated information in a paper format, a few parents and teachers commented on the benefits and drawbacks to this mode.

**Benefits to Paper Communications.** Two parents referenced the benefits of tracking homework through the blue “take-home” folder, but one parent admitted that it was a technique previous teachers had utilized and was not taking place in third-grade (Interviews, Parents 1 & 7). Both parents appreciated having a log to track their child’s reading assignments throughout the trimester. Figure 4.8 shows a reading log that one of the third-grade teachers used this year.
Figure 4.8

*Monthly Reading Log for a Third-Grade Class*

*Note:* This image shows a calendar handout that is sent home with students as a monthly reading log.

This calendar is intended to be simple for parents and students to fill out for homework. Parents initial each day that their child reads on the calendar. Students who read at least 70 days before the end of the trimester receive a reading achievement certificate at the Trimester Assembly. Calendars are stored in the back, clear pouch of the blue take-home folder, so that it can be seen easily and filled out nightly. Students turn in their calendar monthly and receive a new one to work on. One parent commented that the monthly calendar made her child more accountable for finishing the work and getting the parent to sign off on its completion (Interview, Parent 1).

**Drawbacks to Paper Communications.** While none of the teachers are communicating through paper newsletters, they will send home paper homework assignments and tests that need
to be signed and returned. Two parents said that they rarely check for these assignments unless the teacher specifically tells them via e-mail that something is coming home that they should look out for (Interview, Parents 4 & 5). Thus, it should be noted that if teachers are sending home an important paper that needs to be returned to school, they may want to inform parents to be on the lookout for it.

**Parent Nights & In-Person Events.** Several parents and teachers commented on various aspects of the importance of building a classroom rapport and community between home and school (Interviews, Parents 2, 3, 4, 7, 9 & Teachers 1, 2). This often comes from parent support and participation in events outside of school hours.

**Benefits of In-Person Events.** Back-to-School Night is often the first chance to build a home-school connection, as it shows parents what is occurring in the classroom. Teacher 1 included a regular morning meeting during their Back-to-School Night presentation where parents greet each other, share, and complete an activity (Interview). Teacher 1 also suggested providing resources for parents who are looking for extra practice at home (Interview).

Another parent shared that their child’s teacher provided an Amazon wish list at Back-to-School Night that allows them to purchase materials in support of the classroom (Interview, Parent 4). This wish list provided an opportunity for the parent to be more connected to the classroom and more supportive of individual teacher needs. Finally, some parents spend time after school hours joining committees, attending events and Home & School Meetings, or attending school board meetings in order to stay updated on district policies and current events (Interview, Parent 2). In all of these instances, a rapport between home and school was established that allowed parents and teachers to connect in different forums about a variety of everyday school topics.
Other Communication Drawbacks. Several parents and teachers shared difficulties that they had with communication in general that did not pertain to a specific mode. Although these responses do not directly relate to Research Sub-Question 3 about the benefits and drawbacks of different communication modes, these themes factor into how each of the communication modes are utilized, and thus are important to include.

Mode Drawbacks in Light of COVID-19. Multiple parents and teachers reflected on aspects of their communication in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic (Interviews, Parents 3, 4, 6, 10 & Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4). One parent shared that they perceived themselves to be more out of the loop this year because their child was no longer on Zoom (Interview, Parent 3). The parent reflected that when their child was home last year as a result of virtual schooling, and they could see and hear what the teacher was doing and saying, the parent knew what to expect and what questions to ask their son. Without that constant involvement this year, coupled with fewer school events and infrequent e-mails from their child’s teacher, the parent identified that they were out of touch (Interviews, Parents 3, 4, 6, 10). COVID-19 has therefore contributed to a lack of home-school connections that used to play a stronger role in parent involvement within the school.

Other parents mentioned the COVID notifications and policies the school has communicated this year. These notifications and policies included sending e-mails each time a student was potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19 for contact tracing purposes, and sending Facebook updates about masking polices and vaccination clinics (Interview, Parent 10). A parent noted that this was too much information about COVID that did not fully concern them, with not enough information about school events, grades, and student specific concerns that they would rather hear (Interview, Parent 10). Additionally, one parent highlighted a
miscommunication as a result of their child exhibiting COVID symptoms and needing to stay home (Interview, Parent 4). Since the COVID polices kept changing, parents had a difficult time keeping up with current practices and therefore communicated more frequently with teachers and school staff for clarification.

**Inconsistent Communication Polices.** Similar to the inconsistencies with COVID-19 information being relayed to parents, some parents spoke about the challenges of different communication polices throughout the district. One parent mentioned how all five schools celebrate spirit days at different times (Interview, Parent 7). For example, the K-1 school might have a Friday spirit day where students need to wear their school colors, while the elementary school is having a spirit day that same Friday where students are encouraged to dress in sports team jerseys. Parent 7 commented that the inconsistencies made it difficult for working parents to keep track of the specific school events, and that they appreciated the reminders from teachers through e-mails and communication apps because it kept them on track (Interview).

Similarly, another parent noted how the district’s website often places similar information in different places which makes it difficult to find (Interview, Parent 6). The parent reflected on a time last year when the school calendar changed and students were given an unexpected day off. The parent stated that the announcement was placed in a banner across the top of the school’s website and listed in the school newsletter to notify parents (Interview, Parent 6). The parent then remarked that a few weeks later there was another day off and neither of these places listed the schedule change in the same way. The school district website did not mention the day, and the school newsletter listed the day off but in a different location that was harder to find. The parent noted that if the school district and individual school could be more consistent in how they present this information, it would make it easier for working parents to keep up with important
information (Interview, Parent 6). Thus, inconsistencies with location and the lack of reliable postings make it difficult for parents to find important district policies and updates.

**Lack of Time.** Several teachers reflected on their practices and remarked that time was a huge factor in how frequently or infrequently they interacted with parents on a daily basis. All four interviewed teachers explained that if they had more time, they would share more communication with parents during the week. One teacher reflected on this concept of time in terms of positive messages, noting that if they had more time during the day, they would send more positive, individualized messages to parents about their child’s success in the classroom, as well as areas for improvement (Interview, Teacher 4). This teacher also reflected that, given more time, they would conference with parents outside of regular, school-mandated conference times, perhaps over Zoom (Interview, Teacher 4).

Teachers also shared that more time would allow them to familiarize themselves with newer forms of parent-teacher communication software. One teacher stated that they would like to begin using SeeSaw, a software application that allows students to share work in a digital portfolio with classmates and parents, in their classroom, but never have enough time to learn about the program or set it up in order to begin (Interview, Teacher 3). Thus, despite teachers’ plans for increased communication, time constraints prevent these interactions from taking place.

**Overload.** Finally, multiple participants reflected that they often experienced overload as a result of the amount of messages and the various utilized modes (Interviews, Parents 3, 7, 10 & Teacher 2). One parent highlighted this by explaining how district notifications are delivered to parents:

> We get a notification whenever they call…. Whenever they say it, I know it means to go to the [school district’s] app. So, I go on the app and my important notification is to
check my e-mail. Like, how much [expletive] time do you guys think we have here? Like do you think I just sit around, start watching my grass grow all day, and I need something to do? Like, I'm overloaded! (Interview, Parent 10)

In this quote, the parent is referring to important district notifications that often first go out through a phone call or text message. These messages often contain little information and direct parents to check the district’s app for more information. The district’s app contains links to the district’s social media accounts and school websites. It also has a district calendar, lunch menus, and contact information for district administration. Once on the app, parents are usually redirected to check their e-mail.

The parent reflected that it would make more sense to just send the e-mail and to cut out the other modes, as they do not relay the main message anyway. Other parents commented on this idea as well, and even reflected on last year, when school was virtual and there was an influx of e-mails from various teachers that made it difficult to keep track of student schedules and district policies (Interview, Parent 7). With the abundance of various communication modes, and teachers prioritizing different aspects of communication, parents often have trouble keeping track of what to use and when to use it.

**Summary.** Parents and teachers shared numerous benefits and drawbacks to eight different modes of communication, as well as some overall drawbacks to communication regarding their child’s education. Appendix N provides a table showcasing the specific interview responses for the benefits and drawbacks of each communication mode. Out of the eight communication modes, e-mail had the largest number of cited benefits, as well as drawbacks. Conferences and phone calls were slightly behind in terms of cited benefits and drawbacks. In
order to address the drawbacks of each mode, as well as ways to utilize mode benefits, the next section will share strategies for mode communication.

*Strategies for Utilizing Communication Modes*

The variety of available communication platforms allows parent-teacher communication to take place through both written and two-way communication methods. In order to use these methods properly, parents and teachers have employed various strategies for their use. Strategies were the focus of Research Sub-Question 4 which asked: What strategies do parents and teachers in a suburban public elementary school suggest utilizing when communicating with one another through different communication platforms? Interviewed parents and teachers reflected on the benefits and drawbacks of communication modes when providing strategies for communication success. Therefore, many of the strategies directly correlated with either creating a benefit or proactively addressing a drawback that could otherwise impact communication. Additionally, several strategies for overall positive parent-teacher communication were shared that were not mode-specific.

Strategies in this section are sorted into written communication methods, such as e-mail, communication applications, and newsletters, and two-way communication methods, such as phone calls and conferences. Suggestions that fall within these two methods are then grouped by themes under headings.

**Strategies for Written Communication Modes.** When reflecting on written communication modes, most parents and teachers spoke about strategies for using e-mail. In sub-research Question 3, participants stated that a drawback to using e-mail is the potential for message and tone miscommunication. Interviewed parents and teachers shared strategies they use to prevent these misunderstandings and allow for ease-of-access when using this mode.
“Paper” Trail. Parents and teachers reported that they often used the “paper” e-mail trail as a strategy for ensuring student success and as a reference point to refer back to for information. With so many things being communicated from school, parents and teachers highlighted the importance and ease of having a written trail that they can refer back to for dates, school events, and other important information (Interviews, Parents 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 & Teacher 2). One teacher reflected that the e-mail trail allows them to reread previous messages and to then check new messages before sending them to ensure clear conveyance of information (Interview, Teacher 2).

Parent 10 stated that they use an e-mail trail to ensure proper implementation of their middle school child’s IEP (Interview). Parent 10 is able to refer back to messages that stated what was going to take place to ensure that the IEP measures are being upheld at a later date. This parent also explained that since they experienced problems with proper implementation of their older child’s IEP, she now places everything in an e-mail, even for their third-grade child, so it is documented (Interview). If a miscommunication occurred, or if the parent decides to file a lawsuit against the district for improper services, they are then able to pull out the e-mails and specifically refer back to what was said, at what time.

Positive Messages. Teachers often utilize the strategy of sending positive messages to families through e-mail, written notes, or phone calls (Interviews, Parents 1, 5, 7 & Teachers 1 & 2). These messages may look like a short sentence or two describing something that the child is doing well at, or will describe something that happened at school and the child’s response. Parent 5 provided an example of these messages, by highlighting a time that she received a simple e-mail stating her daughter was doing well and was one of the teacher’s go-to students as a substitute helper if the teacher was out (Interview). The parent reflected that just hearing small
tidbits like that helped them experience more connectedness to their daughter’s classroom and provided them with context when speaking to their child about school-based assignments and activities.

Similarly, some parents reflected on the connection they experienced through positive messages around conference time. The school district mandates that teachers meet with the family of every child for a conference in the fall, but in the spring, teachers only meet with students showing concerning academic or social behavior. In the e-mail below, Parent 9 shared a positive message that she received from her child’s teacher last year highlighting strengths and growth in lieu of a conference.

Good Morning (parent),

(Student) doesn’t qualify for a spring conference because she doesn’t need external support and she is really making great progress- these are good things!! I just wanted to touch base on her strengths.

(Student) is continuing to make awesome progress in the second trimester. She is strong in all academic areas. She will continue to be pushed with more challenging texts in small group reading. I have received challenge math problems from our SEEK (gifted) teacher and (student) will be given them to push her critical thinking in math. The last two chapters we focused on just curriculum because it was challenging enough hah!! Now she can be pushed without pushing her too far!! Her writing is really blossoming- I selected one of her pieces for the Delaware County Young Author’s Contest! I am really proud of her!!

If you have any questions, concerns, or want to chat further don’t hesitate to let me know!

(Teacher Name)
A highlight of this message is that the teacher did not have to send it, as spring conferences are optional and most teachers just send home a letter saying that there is no need to meet. By providing context as to why there was no need to meet, as well as student strengths and enrichment activities, the parent indicated that they understood where their child stood academically and noticed the extra support that the teacher was providing for their child.

Teachers spoke about how these messages help to create a connection between home and school (Interviews, Teachers 1 & 3). As research shows, frequent, specific, communication between home and school is vital to student success (Auerbach, 2007; Bosch et al., 2017; Clement, 1980; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Graham-Clay, 2005; McWilliams & Patton, 2015; Sirvani, 2007; Thompson et al., 2015). In order to establish this connection, one teacher called home each month to relay positive messages. Teacher 1 stated, “I like to call to say wow, the great thing that your kid did today. When we did the random act of kindness, I wanted to call the parents to say, I took a video of your child. Your child wrote something, read it. You know, be looking for that on social media kind of thing” (Interview). By sending these types of messages, teachers were able to establish stronger relationships and more personal connections to families.

Additionally, Teacher 2 argued that sending monthly positive messages over e-mail helped to build a home-school connection and foster rapport with families (Interview). When this rapport has already been established with the family, it makes it easier to have more difficult decisions with parents later on. Teacher 2 reflected:

I don't like that sometimes parents don't know your tone, so that's why I try and send out so many positives. So, when I do have to be…not negative, but when I do have to say, a kid’s needs or something, they know that I’m for the kid, not against the kid. So, I always like to lead off with positives (Interview).
By beginning with positive e-mails home the first week of school, this teacher perceived that they have built stronger connections with families. The teacher reflected that since emphasizing positive student strengths with parents via e-mail, they have experienced less awkward and argumentative interactions than prior communications. Therefore, Teacher 2 noted positive, frequent parent interactions as a strategy to prevent future misconceptions as a result of tone.

**E-mail Setup.** Parents and teachers spoke about the importance of setting up e-mails in a manner that promotes readability and ease (Interviews, Parents 2, 3, 4 & Teachers 2, 4). One suggestion was to create a group of parents in the Outlook e-mail service that allowed the “to” field of the e-mail to be populated with all parent names in one-click (Interview, Teacher 4). This technique saves teachers time and takes away the worry of adding the wrong person, as Outlook prefills the recipients’ addresses.

While parents do not need to worry about addressing their e-mails to an entire class, three parents spoke about the importance of carbon copying everyone on to one e-mail when contacting a teacher (Interviews, Parents 2, 3, & 4). For example, Parent 2 reflected that when their child is out sick, they notify not only the teacher, but also the school attendance line and the YMCA where the child normally attends after-school care (Interview). In light of COVID-19, parents may also need to e-mail the nurse about the child’s absence in order to coordinate quarantine periods and to submit negative COVID tests (Interview, Parent 4). These parents remarked that when e-mailing everyone the same thing, at the same time, it appeared to cause less confusion between the different parties, as well as created fewer separate back-and-forth e-mail streams (Interviews, Parents 2, 3, & 4).
Listing the name, grade, and school of the teacher sending the e-mail in the e-mail subject line was also suggested. (Interview, Teacher 2). Figure 4.9 reflects this idea with a sample subject line that a teacher could use when emailing the entire class.

**Figure 4.9**

*Sample Subject Line for a Class-Wide E-mail*

Note: This image shows the formatting that teachers can use in the subject line of a class-wide e-mail.

This simple technique allows the parent to see which teacher is sending the e-mail, when, the grade level, and the school the teacher is from. The teacher’s school is important, as some parents have multiple students in the district and is confused about which teacher is reaching out. Teacher 2 began this subject line habit during virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Interview). Parents received e-mails from a high volume of teachers and administrators, at multiple schools (if they had multiple children within the district). This influx of messages caused confusion for many parents, since multiple messages made it difficult to stay informed.

**Wording and Length.** Keeping e-mails short and to the point is helpful for both parents and teachers (Interviews, Parents 5, 6 & Teacher 3). Teacher 3 thought about this in terms of prior conversations with parents:

I really try and keep [e-mails] short. I know when you're typing stuff out, it can be so easy to just do paragraphs and paragraphs. I do try and keep the emails, like, two bullet points and something super important is just short and sweet. The feedback that I’ve
gotten from parents on Back-to-School night and stuff, was that they just get so many emails that they're not going to sit there and read through a whole thing. And I think that's also one of the things that's nice about the link for the third-grade newsletter--they can quickly just click on it and it brings them right there if they're opening it on a smartphone or their computer. And if it is something that needs to be more thoroughly communicated, sometimes I do that as an attachment, but then I know parents don't always like the ups and downs, so I guess just keeping it as short as possible, but thorough (Interview).

In other words, parents just need to see a few bullet points of information per e-mail in order to stay informed. Including attachments or links in the body of the e-mail, or in the e-mail signature, is also helpful. A few third-grade teachers keep the link to the third-grade newsletter in their e-mail signature, as the newsletter uses one consistent link for the entire year (Interviews, Teachers 3 & 4). This technique allows parents to easily find the newsletter link in any e-mail they open.

**Two-Way Communication Modes.** Now that strategies for written communication modes have been provided, strategies for two-way communication modes will be shared. Research Sub-Question 3, which was about the benefits and drawbacks to various modes, found that when parents and teachers communicate through phone calls and conferences, they are often trying to clarify misconceptions that occurred during e-mail or another written communication form. Teachers and parents also found that this is often when they are bringing up larger concerns that need to be addressed with families. Therefore, when speaking about strategies for phone calls and conferences, most parents and teachers focused on ways to address misunderstandings or to address a concern during a two-way conversation.
**Addressing Behavior and Concerns.** When teachers have a difficult topic to share with a parent, a two-way conversation is often best (Interviews, Teachers 1, 2, 3, & 4). For behavior and academic concerns, teachers have found that coming from a place of concern is often the best way to begin the conversation (Interviews, Teachers 1 & 3). One teacher spoke about a phone call they had with a parent where the parent did not send in a note that their child was going home a different way for dismissal and the child ended up going home the wrong way, which angered the parent (Interview, Teacher 1). When the teacher reflected on how they spoke with the parent over the phone, they framed the problem as a concern about the child’s safety and the inconvenience for the school staff who may have to wait beyond regular school hours for the child to be picked up. Although the conversation began with the parent displaying anger with the teacher, the teacher noticed a change in tone and perspective when the problem was framed in this manner, which helped them reach an agreement on a policy for future dismissal changes.

Additionally, parents used this strategy as well when they were concerned that teachers read their emails without tone being conveyed (Interviews, Parents 3 & 10). The parents perceived that the two-way conversation allowed the teacher to see their perspectives and the need for a two-way partnership. As Parent 10 previously explained, “There's [now] been a different kind of language and tone [in e-mails since the in-person conference]. I think she realizes I’m not coming at you; I’m trying to collaborate with you” (Interview).

Teachers also considered their tendency to ask for parent suggestions a strategy when addressing a difficult topic (Interviews, Teachers 1 & 3). When speaking with a parent about a behavior that manifests at school, teachers specifically outlined the behaviors that took place. They then asked the parents why the behavior may be occurring, explained any techniques being used in the classroom to curb it, and inquired about suggestions for how to deal with it at school
(Interview, Teachers 1 & 3). For example, a concern to a parent might be worded in this manner, “If you've experienced [the problem behavior] at home, what worked for you because maybe that'll work for us at school” (Interview, Teacher 1). By presenting the concern from this angle, it allows the parent to offer support and become involved in the decision-making process. If the behavior is something that is being seen at home, and the parent has found a way to address it, that same solution can then be carried over to school.

Teacher 1 continued by adding that, “If (the parents have) never seen it at home, then it sounds like something that we just see at school, with the interactions with the kids and then I can say, well, these are some of the things that I’ve tried already, um, you know, again, do you have any suggestions for how your child might react if I try this idea?” (Interview). By putting the behavior back on the parents and listing solutions that were already attempted in the classroom, it shows the parents that a larger issue may be going on and that by partnering with the teacher they can reach a solution. Teacher 1 then pointed out that:

Sometimes there are things that's happening at home or was there some kind of traumatic event like someone passing or someone getting sick at home that maybe could have triggered this. And again, just trying to get a feel for what precipitated this was there, something that we could have, you know, done to prevent this from happening. Is this an isolated incident? Is this something that happens, more frequently? And again, just getting the picture of the whole child and trying to understand why it occurred and how we can prevent it, or you know how we can kind of curb it for the future. Those conversations are pretty positive with parents, if you tweak it that way, if you, you know, talk about like this happened in the classroom…has this happened at home and, if so, what did you do? (Interview)
When parents have an opportunity to take an active role in the conversation and acknowledge that the teacher is on the same side of trying to help the child be successful, they are more likely to partner with the teacher to come to a solution. Sometimes, parents and teachers create a school-to-home plan, where the child receives a reward for good behavior in school at home. This solution may look like a physical prize or reward, or may even be praise from a specific family member, such as a parent that the child only sees on weekends (Interview, Teacher 1).

**Defusing the Situation.** When a serious situation has happened, parents or teachers may experience anger or resentment about what occurred, which can make it difficult to have a calm, productive conversation. Teachers reported that these stressful situations usually begin with an angry e-mail or message from a parent. When these messages arrive, teachers suggested first taking a step away from the communication and calming down (Interviews, Teachers 3 & 4). To provide an example, Teacher 4 spoke about a time they received an angry parent e-mail about a medical situation that happened at recess (Interview). The situation had been a misunderstanding, but the parent carbon copied the school principal on the e-mail which caused the teacher embarrassment and concern that they might get in trouble for what had happened. If the teacher had responded to the parent in the heat of the moment, the response may have come across as unprofessional or angry, which may have made it more difficult to reach a mutual agreement.

Teachers then highlighted they normally respond to the parent by stating they will be calling them to discuss what happened (Interviews, Teachers 1, 3, 4). Sometimes teachers ask for a day, time, and phone number that would be best to call on, in order to avoid “phone tag” (Interview, Teacher 1). Teachers maintained that switching from a written communication mode, to a two-way communication mode allowed them to better defuse the situation because they
could use proper tone and address misunderstandings (Interviews, Teachers 1, 2, 3, & 4).

Explaining a full situation orally, rather than using written words, is often easier.

In situations where the parent is still upset during or after the two-way conversation, Teacher 1 suggested providing proof that outlines what occurred. This may be in the form of stating specifically what other teachers and students witnessed occurring or providing work samples (Interview). Teacher 1 spoke about a time that a parent questioned them on the ownership of a test (Interview). A student took home a test where the grade was lower than expected. The parent stated that the test did not belong to her child and was adamant that a mix-up had occurred with the tests. The teacher showed that the test could not have been switched, as there were no other tests available with the child’s name, or a blank name. The teacher also asked other teachers to help compare the child’s handwriting samples on the test to other assignments and workbooks from class. This proof helped to show the parent that the test in question did belong to her child. In situations where the parent is still adamant that there was no solution, Teacher 4 then suggested asking the parent what type of resolution they would like for the incident (Interview). This technique often stops the parent from continuing to spiral about the problem and encourages them to come to an agreement on how to best reach a resolution.

Making the Most of Conferences. Fall and spring conferences are normally scheduled for 20-to-30-minute periods after school. In the fall, teachers allow parents to choose a time slot that works for them through Sign Up Genius (Interview, Teacher 1). This year, parents also had the option of choosing Zoom, phone, or in-person for their conference choice. One teacher revealed that they normally tell parents that time slots are 20 minutes long, but really pencils each parent in for 30 minutes (Interview, Teacher 1). This allows for a time cushion if someone
is running late, has technology problems, or needs to speak longer than the allotted time because of a concern. Additionally, when referencing conferences, Parent 1 stated:

[One thing the teacher did] that I thought was really smart was when she sent home something about the conference in advance…it was like… there's something we need to return and on the piece of paper we have to return in advance of the conference it was basically like, do you have any concerns or questions because I want to be prepared to answer them and not spend time at the conference figuring that out. (Interview)

This technique allowed parents to be proactive in their conference discussions, which then allowed parents and teachers to make the most of conference time when meeting.

**Overall Communication Strategies.** While discussing communication, some parents and teachers highlighted strategies for communication in general, instead of for a specific communication mode. Although these suggestions do not directly correlate to Research Sub-Question 4, they are important to include because they serve as a prerequisite for using various communication modes.

**Setting the Year Up for Success.** Teachers recommended asking parents for their communication preferences at the start of the school year and highlighted the importance of reaching out early to make a connection, as well as continuing to reach out quickly as questions and concerns arose throughout the year (Interviews, Parents 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 & Teacher 3). Three parents sent e-mails at the start of the school year that provided teachers with more specific information about their children (Interviews, Parents 3, 9, 10). Parent 8 mentioned that she always writes a placement request letter at the start of each year to ensure that she receives a teacher who will meet her son’s specific needs, and then arranges a one-on-one Meet the Teacher Day for her son before school begins to lessen his anxiety (Interview).
Teachers also specified the importance of maintaining consistency in how their messages are sent throughout the year, as relaying information to parents in the same manner from September through June helped to alleviate classroom confusion (Interview, Teacher 3). This policy is especially important for long-term subs to maintain when taking over another teacher’s classroom for a length of time.

Maintaining boundaries between parents and teachers who are friends outside of school was also noted (Interview, Parent 5). In these situations, parents recommended that they should continue to message the teacher as their friend, but not bring up school-related content unless using a school-based communication channel, such as e-mail. Similarly, parents reminded teachers that they should verify their privacy settings on social media (Interview, Parent 7). These simple policies and changes on social media create boundaries between school-life and home-life for parents and teachers.

**Escalating to a Higher Authority.** Some parents and teachers mentioned the need to escalate concerns to a higher authority if necessary (Interviews, Parents 7, 10 & Teacher 4). Teacher 4 commented that in light of COVID-19, they have noticed a rise in questions about masking policies and quarantining regulations (Interview). The teacher stated that they send all of these questions directly to the school principal so that students and parents across the school are receiving consistent answers about district-based policies. Similarly, parents noted that when they have a concern the teacher cannot answer, they escalate their concern to the building level principal. These concerns may include special education services, or building-wide policies, such as allowing snack in the classroom (Interviews, Parents 7 & 10).

**Summary.** Parents and teachers used a variety of strategies when communicating with one another. When communicating through written forms of communication, parents and
teachers focused on ways to make the communication, short and to the point, as well as ways to provide positive feedback about individual students. In two-way communication methods, parents and teachers brainstormed ways to clarify miscommunications that may have occurred elsewhere. Additionally, they provided strategies for diffusing difficult situations so that issues could be fully resolved. Finally, parents and teachers listed additional ideas to promote healthy, frequent communication throughout the school year.

**Summary**

In this chapter, the results of surveys, interviews, and communication artifacts were presented to answer the question: What modes of communication are parents and teachers primarily using to communicate with one another? Quantitative data revealed that while parents and teachers showed a higher perceived connectedness score for modes that were considered richer or warmer under Media Richness Theory and Social Presence Theory, they are most frequently using e-mail, a lean and cold mode under MRT and Social Presence Theory, to communicate all types of concerns. Interview follow-ups and artifact reviews showed that parents and teachers primarily utilize e-mail because of the factor of convenience that it offers. In the next chapter, I will analyze these results further in terms of my research sub-questions and highlight the implications of these findings as they connect to future educational practice.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter IV revealed the results of this research study on parent-teacher communication preferences and strategies for use. This chapter provides (a) a summary of the study, (b) an interpretation of the data through theoretical frameworks, (c) a discussion of results with interpretations through relevant literature, (d) an explanation of study limitations, (e) a discussion of implications for future research, and (f) considerations for future educational practice.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine which modes of communication parents and teachers primarily used to communicate with one another. Researchers in the field of parent-teacher communication have found that teachers and parents often become comfortable using traditional communication modes, as research has demonstrated their effectiveness in helping students achieve academic success and social well-being (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Bosch et al., 2017; Graham-Clay, 2005; Lazar & Slostad, 1999; McWilliams & Patton, 2015; Thompson et al., 2015). By utilizing a mixed methods design, an online survey was employed for both parents and teachers, as well as semi-structured interviews and artifact reviews to determine communication preferences with parents and teachers within the third-grade in a suburban elementary school.

In total, 34 parents completed the quantitative survey, with seven parents providing sufficient partial responses. Ten parents were interviewed and submitted communication artifacts. Six of the seven eligible teachers completed the survey portion of the study, with four participating in interviews and artifact reviews.

Quantitative and qualitative results indicated that parents and teachers held a strong preference for e-mail communication, even considering new technology-based communication
methods available to them. Both parents and teachers cited convenience as the largest factor for e-mail preferences.

**Data Interpretation through Theoretical Framework**

This study was situated within the theoretical framework of Social Presence Theory (Short et al., 1976; Lombard & Ditton, 1997) and Media Richness Theory (Daft and Lengel, 1997). This framework highlighted the importance of establishing close personal connections that are drawn through social, auditory, and visual cues (Chen et al., 2015; Kemp & Rutter, 1982; Thompson & Mazer, 2012; Vickers & Minke, 1995). Theorists behind Social Presence Theory (Lombard & Ditton, 1997) and Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) suggested that communicating parties should choose communication modes that allow for richness and warmth to flow among participants. In parent-teacher communication, these modes included in-person conferences, Zoom conferences, phone calls, and parent nights.

When looking at quantitative survey data for perceived connectedness scores, findings revealed that both parents and teachers had higher average percentages for warmer and richer modes of communication than parents and teachers who perceived connectedness for colder or leaner modes. Thus, this data revealed that parents and teachers perceived a stronger sense of connectedness through meaningful connections with the other party when choosing modes that allowed for richness and warmth under MRT and Social Presence Theory. However, additional quantitative survey data, as well as qualitative interviews and artifact reviews, revealed that while parents and teachers may perceive stronger connections through warmer and richer modes, they are most frequently communicating through e-mail as a result of convenience. Since e-mail is considered a leaner and colder mode, and MRT and Social Presence Theory encourage warmer
and richer modes to be used for two-way conversations, it is important to further analyze these results through each theory.

**Social Presence Theory**

Social Presence Theory encourages the formation of connections between the use of technology media and the closeness, or warmth, that it allows (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). Therefore, media that allows for higher degrees of social presence are considered warmer and more personal than other modes. In parent-teacher communication, face-to-face conferencing is viewed as the warmest mode, as it allows participants to interact with social, auditory, and visual cues that limit misunderstandings and increase personalization. Additional two-way communications, such as Zoom conferencing, parent nights, and phone calls, are considered warmer than written communications, such as e-mail, texting, chatting through LMSs or communication apps, and paper sources that are viewed as being colder under Social Presence Theory.

Multiple findings from this research study were consistent with Social Presence Theory. Throughout the interviews, teachers and parents discussed the importance of building personal connections with one another through consistent communication, positive messages, and attendance at in-person events (Interviews, Parents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 & Teachers 1 & 2). This reliance on establishing meaningful relationships through various communication modes reveals that participants value creating personal connections. Additionally, participants relied on moving from colder modes to warmer modes when they perceived that written information was being misconstrued as a result of wording or tone (Interviews, Parents 3, 10 & Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4). The additional social, auditory, and visual cues provided in the warmer method allowed participants to clarify misunderstandings and diffuse difficult situations. Finally, quantitative data revealed
that while e-mail was the preferred method of communication among participants, warmer communication methods, including face-to-face conferencing, Zoom conferencing, parent nights, and phone calls, were ranked higher than colder communication methods, such as Facebook, learning management systems, and communication apps, thus indicating a potential preference for modes that create more warmth among parents and teachers.

However, participants also revealed strong preferences for e-mail communication. Under the lens of Social Presence Theory, e-mail is viewed as a cold communication mode, as it does not allow participants to speak face-to-face with facial and auditory cues that provide social context, and thus the ability to build warm, personal connections. While e-mail is encouraged for sending quick messages that do not require relational context, most parents and teachers cited convenience as their main factor for e-mail preferences instead of the context of the messages. Just because a mode is convenient to speak through, does it mean it will be understood by the other party and relayed in a way that provides understanding and warmth. This discussion is further explored through the lens of Media Richness Theory.

**Media Richness Theory (MRT)**

MRT highlights the importance of communication modes that offer greater opportunities for shared meaning to occur (Daft & Lengel, 1986). The more criteria that a mode has to offer, such as providing immediate responses, utilizing multiple social, visual, and auditory cues, allowing for personalization, and incorporating language variety, the richer the mode is considered under MRT (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Similar to Social Presence Theory, the concept of participants selecting richer modes after experiencing miscommunications with leaner, written modes are common in Media Richness Theory. In fact, both parties are encouraged to follow this practice to ensure the correct meaning is being inferred from a conversation. Additionally,
parents and teachers were more likely to select a richer mode for behavior and social concerns, as opposed to academic concerns that could often be resolved with a leaner communication mode.

Under MRT, e-mail is considered a leaner communication mode as a result of the wait-time associated with responses, the lack of conversational cues, and the increased possibility for wording and tone misunderstandings to occur. However, the primary finding in this research study was a strong preference from parents and teachers for e-mail correspondences because of the convenience the mode provides. While this finding was surprising under MRT, it did support assertions made by previous researchers. Thompson et al. (2015) also found that in the era of smartphones and instant technology, parents preferred communicating over e-mail. When analyzing this from a MRT perspective, Thompson et al. (2015) first noted, “Parents who rely on smartphones have discovered that communicating with teachers on modes available on these devices has worked effectively, [which] decreases the likelihood for selecting richer media” (p. 205). Since parents and teachers often selected e-mail communication simply because of convenience and mentioned the difficulties of setting up richer communication methods, it is possible that MRT does not take into consideration the level of effort that two-way communication requires in a busy society, as well as the ability for the factor of convenience to hold such weight. This study therefore corroborates the suggestion made by Thompson et al. (2015) that:

MRT may require further development and extension as the smartphone era has influenced how individuals go about selecting media. During the initial explication of MRT (Daft & Lengel, 1984), theorists may not have imagined the advancement of communication technology, which now enables communicators to interact across
multiple applications (e.g., text messaging, social media, Skype/FaceTime) on portable devices. In the present era, media choice is driven as much by convenience as it is by richness. We propose an extension of MRT to account for the role convenience plays in media selection because the richness of media now plays a lesser role in the modes communicators select. This represents a significant theoretical contribution, as studying real-world data in the instructional context illustrates that some elements necessary to explain and predict individuals’ media choices are presently not accounted for in MRT (p. 203).

In other words, findings from both studies highlighted the concept of mode selection being more frequently chosen for factors centered around convenience, as opposed to MRT factors that allow for greater social cues that create meaning in conversations. Parents and teachers provided a few reasons for this selection. First, participants noted the importance of having a “paper” trail that could be referred back to for specific information, or reread before sending another message. This concept of reprocessing impacted mode selection. Additionally, both parents and teachers highlighted the concept of mode overload, especially in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. E-mail provided a way for participants to sort messages for organizational purposes, as well as have time to process difficult student issues and concerns before meeting in a more direct manner. These factors often made a leaner mode, e-mail, more effective for broaching challenging topics before moving to a richer mode, if necessary.

Summary and Discussion of Results

This mixed methods research study sought to answer the question: What modes of communication are parents and teachers primarily using to communicate with one another? The
study contained four sub-research questions that provided the foundation for the data collection and analysis process of this overall question:

1. How does the perceived quality of "connectedness" in parent-teacher communication differ between classrooms that use newer, technology-focused forms of communication and those that use more traditional methods? (quantitative)

2. What modes of communication do parents and teachers most frequently utilize to communicate different types of concerns? (quantitative)

3. What do parents and teachers in a suburban public elementary school perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of various modes of communication? (qualitative)

4. What strategies do parents and teachers in a suburban public elementary school suggest utilizing when communicating with one another through different communication platforms? (qualitative)

Data from quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and communication artifact reviews provided a deeper understanding of why parents and teachers are communicating with certain modes.

**Quality of Connectedness**

Parent and teacher participants were asked to rate their connection to the other party when communicating through various types of communication modes on a five-point Likert scale. Results indicated that teachers perceived a stronger connection through face-to-face conferences and parents perceived a stronger connection through e-mail. When modes were grouped into new, technology-focused forms of communication and traditional communication methods, the mean scores revealed that parents and teachers perceived a higher quality of
connectedness to the other party when using traditional communication methods, as opposed to parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of newer communication modes.

These results highlight that even in an era of availability through newer forms of communication modes, parents and teachers still hold a stronger preference for traditional methods when wanting to maintain connections or have meaningful contact with the other party. This finding is consistent with the theories of Cuelessness (Kemp & Rutter, 1982), Media Richness (Daft & Lengel, 1986), and Social Presence (Lombard & Ditton, 1997) which promote social interactions with multiple social, visual, and auditory cues when communicating with others. Thompson et al. 2(015) also determined that parents prefer traditional communication methods, primarily e-mail, over newer communication modes that are still being established in classrooms. Research from this study reveals that, when provided with various communication options, parents and teachers prefer interacting through traditional methods that are more familiar to them.

While this data is not enough to determine why parents and teachers perceived that these communication methods provided increased connectedness scores, qualitative interviews with parents and teachers offered more specific perspectives of each mode that may be contributing to the overall connectedness scores.

Mode Selection of Concerns

The Parental Academic Support Scale (PASS) (Thompson & Mazer, 2012) allowed parent and teacher participants to select how frequently they communicated with the other party about different supportive behaviors, and to then select which modes were used to communicate those concerns. For parents and teachers, the data revealed that e-mail was the preferred communication method. This finding was consistent with other research which has pinpointed e-
mail as the most prevalent mode of communication between parties, as well as the mode most encouraged in schools due to factors of convenience, open dialogue, and the ability to clarify questions and concerns quickly (Thompson, 2008, 2009; Thompson & Mazer, 2012; Thompson et al., 2015).

As teachers addressed in qualitative interviews, when a major concern arises, they often first reach out to parents through e-mail to set-up a meeting or phone call, and then follow-up with a second mode that will allow them to handle the concern more directly in a two-way conversation. This reflection from teachers could offer an explanation for why e-mail was the preferred communication method for teachers, but other communication modes were separated by a small margin.

**Benefits and Drawbacks of Communication Modes**

Parents and teachers are often able to select which modes of communication they would prefer to use. Thus, understanding the benefits and drawbacks of different communication methods is important for making mode selections. Walsh et al. (2018) and McWilliams & Patton (2015) highlighted that data should be shared with families on a consistent basis. Similarly, Dodd (1998) and Thompson et al. (2012) shared the importance of addressing misconceptions that arise through strong communication between parties. Interviews with both parents and teachers revealed similar results, with participants highlighting features such as the helpfulness of weekly reminders about events and classroom updates, the ability to address misconceptions in written message formats, formats for sharing data with families, and the effectiveness of personalized student-specific messages serving as the main benefits to various communication modes. Drawbacks were often the opposite of each benefit, and mainly focused on delayed responses, misconceptions, unhelpful materials, and the way in which teachers presented concerns.
Two outside factors seemed to control opinions on these benefits and drawbacks. First, multiple participants mentioned that they were overloaded with communication from different sources. Classroom photos are often being posted on one site, district information on another, school specific information is delivered in an online newsletter, and teachers are sending their own messages. Therefore, parents noted that they have trouble keeping track of information from an abundance of sources. Additionally, COVID-19 policies made it more difficult for parents to interact with their child’s school and created a need for additional policies and reminders to be sent to families. Additionally, new communication platforms, such as Canvas, were purchased in light of COVID-19, but parents and teachers did not receive adequate training on the new programs. Thus, perceptions of mode benefits and drawbacks could be influenced by parent and teacher emotions toward different modes in light of overload and COVID-19. For example, a parent who previously communicated through face-to-face methods may have been forced to switch to Canvas or a communication application, which resulted in negative perceptions of the mode.

Overall, the most significant benefit noted for any mode, and especially e-mail, was the convenience that it allowed for both parties in terms of when messages could be sent and received, the ability to send messages from any location through a smartphone, and the possibility of providing delayed responses during working hours. These findings on e-mail benefits, drawbacks, and the importance of convenience were consistent with previous research (Thompson, 2008, 2009; Thompson & Mazer, 2012; Thompson et al., 2015).

**Strategies for Communication Modes**

When utilizing various communication methods, parents and teachers should consider employing strategies that set them up for successfully communicating with the other party.
This study found that most strategies correlated with producing a benefit, or preventing a drawback that would otherwise hinder communication for each communication mode type. This was perhaps a result of most participants focusing on e-mail, which has communication limitations as a written method. For example, several participants noted strategies for how to write and organize e-mails in an efficient manner. This may have been to counter negative drawbacks to e-mail, such as long messages not being read or delayed response times. Thompson et al. (2015) highlighted similar strategies for e-mail communication, such as the importance of creating a “paper” e-mail trail that could be referred back to, or serve as a continuing conversation.

Additionally, there was a significant focus on the strategy of sending positive messages through e-mail or phone calls that communicated a child’s successes in the classroom (Interviews, Parents 1, 5, 7 & Teachers 1 & 2). Research has shown that these types of messages helped to create a stronger connection between home and school by increasing parent involvement and promoting student success (Love, 1996; McWilliams & Patton, 2015; Thompson et al., 2015). Several parents and teachers in this research study noted the difficulties of navigating a regular school year after the COVID-19 closures. Parents have not been able to attend in-person school events and some feel disconnected from school after observing their child’s lesson through Zoom during hybrid and virtual learning. Therefore, there may have been an increase in positive messages as a result of teachers trying to prevent negative perceptions about school and to establish a working relationship with parents.
**Mode Selection for Parents and Teachers**

Overall, this research study revealed that parents and teachers are primarily using e-mail to communicate with one another because they like the convenience that it allows. For teachers, time constraints during the school day were a main factor in e-mail usage. While teachers did not have time to schedule a conference during their prep period, they could send a quick e-mail to a parent that explained a situation.

Thompson and Mazer (2015) conducted a similar research study, and found comparable results, however they also heard a willingness from participants to try new forms of technology. Although it took place seven years later, the current research study received the same results, even though new forms of technology have continued to emerge and parents and teachers have more experience with different communication forms. Additionally, the current research study took place amidst a global pandemic that perhaps pushed parents and teachers into using new technology. Washington Elementary School is paying for new expensive programs, such as Canvas, in light of the pandemic. Research findings revealed that not only was this LMS unpreferred by parents and teachers, but that there were several drawbacks towards using it. Therefore, e-mail allowed participants to conveniently communicate through a method that was familiar to them, while also helping to combat overload from multiple communication sources.

**Limitations of the Study**

This research study contained three specific limitation types: methodology, analysis, and generalizability. Potential limitations included sample size, parent involvement levels, the data collection timeline, tests used for analysis, and errors in quantitative survey questions.
Limitations in Methodology

The first limitation of this study was sample size. Although the quantitative survey was sent to over 300 parents of third-grade students, only 41 parents responded, with 14 parents providing partial responses and stopping the survey before reaching completion. The timing of when the survey was sent out may have impacted this response rate. The survey was sent on the Friday before Thanksgiving. Students at the school have a week-long break for the Thanksgiving holiday and many families travel during this time. Although multiple parents began the survey over the weekend before Thanksgiving, many parents did not complete it. If the survey had been sent out earlier, an increase in participant responses may have occurred. In addition, the survey was only sent through e-mail. Parents who do not consistently check school e-mails may not have seen the invitation.

Additionally, parent involvement levels were a limitation in this study, as parent responses indicated that participants had a more active role in their child’s education than other parents may be. During interviews, participants mentioned taking part in school board meetings, attending Back-to-School Night, coming to conferences in-person, and being involved with Home & School events (Interviews, Parents 2, 3, 4 & 8). These responses indicated increased levels of parental involvement which makes it difficult to generalize the results to all parents of third-grade students, as some parents are less involved than others. Therefore, a limitation of this study was not receiving responses from parents with less overall involvement in the school.

Limitations in Analysis

The small sample size greatly impacted how data analysis was conducted. The original plan was to pull specific classroom data so that case study research could be completed for the case of each third-grade classroom. Since each classroom only had two to eight parent
participants, and teachers reported that each third-grade classroom had an average of 25.8 students per class, it was not feasible to run data from the perspective of each classroom. Instead, case study research was employed to look at the case of the entire third-grade population.

Additionally, the small sample size made it difficult to analyze the quantitative data as planned. The original plan was to analyze the connectedness data using a one-way ANOVA, however descriptive statistics were employed instead because the small sample size would interfere with the power needed to get the significance of an ANOVA.

An error in question wording was also detected with three questions after the survey went out that impacted data analysis. First, on the survey question referring to perceived quality of connectedness, a “not used” option should have been available to participants. Since this option was unavailable, and this was a mandatory question, some participants rated modes they did not use as a 1, because they did not use it and therefore did not perceive connection, while others rated them as a 3, because they held neutral opinions towards the modes they did not use. Similarly, the final survey question containing a mode satisfaction scale contained the same flaw, as a “not used” option was not available. This error in survey design may have caused some participants to select a rating of 1 for unknown modes, as they perceive little satisfaction towards methods that they do not use, or a rating of 3 for these modes, as they took a neutral stance towards a method they do not use. While this flaw in study design may have caused a discrepancy in data for these questions for less-commonly used modes, it should be noted that these modes still presented with smaller means than the most commonly-used modes, revealing that parents and teachers do not experience as strong of a connection to them or satisfied with them when compared to other communication methods.
The second error in question wording was detected with the PASS (Thompson & Mazer, 2012) assessment data. For each supportive behavior, participants were first asked how frequently they communicated about it with the other party. Participants then were asked to select all modes used when communicating about this concern. On the teacher survey, teachers provided multiple modes used to communicate different types of concerns. However, on the parent survey, although the question asked for multiple modes to be selected, participants were only able to select one answer. This likely caused participants to select the mode that they most frequently use to communicate that type of concern rather than all applicable modes as intended. During qualitative interviews, multiple parents stated they primarily use one or two modes to communicate, whereas teachers reported using multiple modes to reach all parents. This reflection indicates that parents may not have selected additional modes, even if it were possible on the survey. When analyzing this data for parents, the most frequent mode selection for each supportive behavior was used instead.

Finally, inductive coding was used to code the qualitative data from interviews. Although data was first grouped by modes and then into three main categories of mode benefits, drawbacks, and strategies, it is possible that some themes were missed throughout the 14 parent and teacher interviews.

**Limitations in Generalizability**

The small sample size of parents and teachers in this study, coupled with the study taking place with just one grade level, in one suburban elementary school, makes it difficult to generalize this research to all parents and teachers of elementary school students. All schools have different policies and preferences for parent-teacher communication modes and frequencies. Additionally, involvement levels of parents may differ across school districts and
grade levels. Therefore, while this research can serve as a framework for mode selection and strategies for use, the results of this study cannot be generalized beyond this particular school and these particular third-grade classrooms.

**Implications for Future Educational Research**

Past research in the field of parent-teacher communication revealed that two-way communication in the form of face-to-face conferences (Minke & Anderson, 2003; Thompson et al., 2015) and phone calls (Love, 1996; Thompson et al., 2015) should allow parents and teachers to experience stronger connections to one another and provide less room for misunderstandings in tone or wording than other one-way communication modes. Praise for these two-way methods was consistent with Media Richness Theory (MRT) (Daft and Lengel, 1986, 1997; Thompson & Mazer, 2012) and Social Presence Theory (Short et al., 1976; Lombard & Ditton, 1997), which regarded these modes as rich, warmer modes that allowed for more personal connections to be established between participants. However, recent studies have pinpointed e-mail as the most prevalent mode of communication between parents and teachers (Thompson, 2008, 2009; Thompson & Mazer, 2012; Thompson et al., 2015). With the emergence of new technology-based communication modes, such as communication applications and Learning Management Systems, it was imperative to discover if teachers and parents now prefer utilizing these newer forms of parent-teacher communication modes, or if they prefer the traditional methods of phone calls, e-mail, paper, in-person school events, and face-to-face conferences. The current study adds to the existing body of research by assessing parent and teacher preferences of new and old communication modes.

Participants in this study revealed that even in the age of new technology, there was still a preference for traditional parent-teacher communication methods. This study specifically
examined the benefits and drawbacks that participants noted for each mode, as well as strategies that could be used when utilizing each mode type. Future research that focuses on parents of different involvement levels would provide a more inclusive account of communication preferences.

The small sample size of parents and teachers in this study, as well as the population restrictions to only one grade level within one elementary school, impacts generalizability. Future research that focuses on a larger participant pool across multiple school types and grade levels may expand results or validate the results of this study.

**Implications for Future Educational Practice**

Research on parent-teacher communication mode selection from Thompson et al. (2015) discussed the overwhelming parent preferences for e-mail communication. The current study determined similar results when surveying and interviewing parents of third-grade students at a suburban elementary school. Additionally, the current study looked at the teacher perspective to determine if teachers and parents prefer the same communication modes. Specifically, the current study provided benefits and drawbacks to preferred mode selections, as well as strategies for mode usage when communicating with parents and teachers.

**Implementing Practices with Parents**

Parents overwhelmingly favored e-mail communication for correspondences with teachers. E-mail allowed parents the ability to send and receive messages quickly from their smart device. Parents suggested communicating through a consistent e-mail chain that would allow for ease-of-access and a “paper” trail that could be used for future reference (Interviews, Parents 5, 6, 7, 8 & 10). Additionally, multiple teachers could be carbon-copied onto the e-mail, which allowed messages to be delivered quickly and consistently to all readers.
Parents hoping to implement stronger communication practices with teachers can start early and be consistent (Interviews, Parents 3, 4, 7, 8, & 9). Students are most successful when parents and teachers work as a team (Dye, 1989; Gellert, 2005; McWilliams & Patton, 2015). This involves parents sending updates about their child’s progress at home and any lifestyle changes that may impact student success. Additionally, parents highlighted reaching out for teacher clarification if there is a concern or student misunderstanding (Interviews, Parents 3, 4, 7, 8 & 9). A quick e-mail exchange is usually able to remedy the problem.

Finally, parents reflected on the importance of staying involved with school events and programs (Interviews, Parents 2, 3, 4 & 8). In-person parent-teacher conferences serve as a way for parents to better understand the teacher’s personality, as well as see the classroom set-up and student work samples. School and district events, such as Back-to-School Night and school board meetings provide a way for parents to stay involved in current school affairs that may impact their child’s learning.

**Implementing Practices with Teachers**

Quantitative data revealed that teachers prefer traditional communication modes, such as e-mail, face-to-face conferencing, and phone calls, over newer technology-driven methods. However, one exception to this was Zoom, which was also ranked highly by teachers as a preferred communication mode. Qualitative follow-up interviews showed that teachers’ first preference is to e-mail parents, however they often choose to follow-up their e-mails with phone calls and Zoom or in-person discussions (Interviews, Teachers 1, 2, 3, & 4). All teachers acknowledged that e-mail does not properly convey tone, and that misunderstandings and ambiguities can often occur with wording. Thus, moving the communication chain to a two-way
communication method is imperative to address wording misunderstandings and ambiguities. This finding was consistent with research from Thompson et al. (2015).

Teachers highlighted the importance to setting the school year up for success by allowing parents to dictate their communication preferences early and sticking to a classroom communication system that sends consistent updates. In agreement with Thompson et al. (2015), teachers noted the importance of building classroom rapport and community among parents through Back-to-School Nights, school events, and positive messages about student progress (Interviews, Teachers 1, 2, & 3). Multiple teachers indicated they send home paper copies of tests and student work for parents to evaluate and respond to, which was consistent with research by McWilliams & Patton (2015) on the importance of sharing data with families. Teachers reflected that working closely with families allowed them to see student progress and success.

Finally, teachers offered multiple suggestions for using e-mail with parents. E-mail subject lines contained information containing the teacher’s name, school name, grade level, and date of message (Interview, Teacher 2). Interviewees suggested that e-mails were kept concise, with just a few bullet points per message (Interviews, Teachers 2 & 3). One third-grade teacher kept consistent links to the third-grade newsletter and school newsletter in their e-mail signature for parents to quickly access (Interview, Teacher 4). These simple changes to e-mail wording and set-up allowed teachers to have more positive interactions with parents.

Summary

This study examined parent-teacher communication mode preferences with third-grade parents and teachers at a suburban elementary school in the northeastern United States. Survey data, as well as interviews with survey participants and communication artifact reviews,
highlighted a strong preference for e-mail as the main communication method as a result of convenience.

The findings of this study will contribute to research concerning parent-teacher communication practices in elementary schools. Specifically, parents and teachers can examine potential benefits and drawbacks to various modes and employ strategies suggested by participants.
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Appendix A: IRB Approval

Sep 16, 2021 11:20:06 AM EDT

To: Melanie Solano
Col of Education & Social Work, Literacy


Dear Melanie Solano:

Thank you for your submitted application to the WCUPA Institutional Review Board. Since it was deemed expedited, it was required that two reviewers evaluated the submission. We have had the opportunity to review your application and have rendered the decision below for Communicating Effectively: Exploring Digital Communication Methods between Teachers and Parents with Mixed Methods.

Decision: Approved

Selected Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Sincerely,
WCUPA Institutional Review Board

IORG#: IORG0004242
IRB#: IRB00005030
FWA#: FWA00014155
Appendix B: Parent Recruitment E-mail

Dear Third-Grade Parent or Guardian,

My name is Melanie Solano. I am a doctoral student at West Chester University, who is also a second-grade teacher here at (school name)! I have recently received permission from your superintendent to invite you to participate in completing an online survey for my research study. This study has been approved by the West Chester University IRB, Protocol FY2021-249. Below is a brief description of the study. A more detailed explanation of the study is provided at the start of the survey, which includes a place for you to provide consent to participate prior to beginning.

The purpose of this research study is to gain insight into teachers’ and parents’ opinions of, and experiences with, various modes of communication between home and school. You have been selected to receive this invitation based on your role as a grade 3 parent/guardian at (school name). You are being asked to complete a voluntary online survey. If interested, you will have an opportunity to further participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher and/or provide sample artifacts of communication if you indicate interest at the end of the survey.

Any parent/guardian who agrees to participate may withdraw from the study at any point and discontinue completing the survey. You will not be compensated for participating in the study, nor will you incur any costs. This study is NOT part of your child’s grade and is not a requirement of your child’s school. The knowledge gained in this study will be useful in helping school districts, teachers, and parents determine how to best communicate information between home and school in the future.

Please contact me if you have any questions regarding this study at (e-mail address).

The link to the survey is provided below and, if you are willing, I ask that you kindly complete it by Friday, December 3, 2021. If you elect to participate in the next phase of the study, you will be contacted shortly after that.

I appreciate your support in the completion of this research!

Sincerely,

Melanie Solano, M.Ed.
Second Grade Teacher, (school name)
West Chester University Doctoral Student
(e-mail address)
Appendix C: Teacher Recruitment E-mail

Dear Teacher,

My name is Melanie Solano. I am a doctoral student at West Chester University, who is also a second-grade teacher here at (school name)! I have recently received permission from your superintendent to invite you to participate in completing an online survey for my research study. This study has been approved by the West Chester University IRB, Protocol FY2021-249. Below is a brief description of the study. A more detailed explanation of the study is provided at the start of the survey which includes a place for you to provide consent to participate prior to beginning.

The purpose of this research study is to gain insight into teachers’ and parents’ opinions of, and experiences with, various modes of communication between home and school. You have been selected to receive this invitation based on your role as a grade 3 teacher at (school name). You are being asked to complete a voluntary online survey. If interested, you will have an opportunity to further participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher and/or provide sample artifacts of communication upon completion of the survey. Any teacher who agrees to participate may withdraw from the study at any point and discontinue completing the survey. You will not be compensated for participating in the study, nor will you incur any costs. The knowledge gained in this study will be useful in helping school districts, teachers, and parents determine how to best communicate information between home and school.

Please contact me if you have any questions regarding this study at (e-mail address).

The link to the survey is provided below and, if you are willing, I ask that you kindly complete it by Friday, December 3, 2021. If you elect to participate in the next phase of the study, you will be contacted shortly after that.

I appreciate your support in the completion of this research!

Sincerely,

Melanie Solano, M.Ed.
Second Grade Teacher, (school name)
West Chester University Doctoral Student
(e-mail address)
Appendix D: Informed Consent for Parents and Teachers

Project Overview: Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being conducted by Melanie Solano as part of her Doctoral Dissertation. The purpose of this research is to gain insight into teachers’ and parents’ opinions of, and experiences with, various modes of communication between home and school. You have been selected to receive this invitation based on your role as a grade 3 parent/guardian/teacher at (school name). Your participation will take about 20 minutes to complete an online survey. If you choose to also participate in the second phase of the study, consisting of one-on-one interviews and artifact reviews, this may take an additional hour to complete. There is a minimal risk of some participants feeling anxious when answering questions about their communication habits between home and school. If you experience discomfort, you have the right to withdraw at any time. This study has been approved by the West Chester University IRB, Protocol FY2021-249.

1. What is the purpose of this study?
   The purpose of this research is to gain insight into parent and teacher opinions of, and experiences with, various modes of communication between home and school. You have been selected to receive this invitation based on your role as a grade 3 parent/guardian at (school name).

2. If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:
   - Complete an online survey (this will take about 20 minutes of your time)
   - Complete an optional interview (this will take about 30-45 minutes of your time)
   - Provide optional artifacts (this will take about 15-30 minutes of your time)

3. Are there any experimental medical treatments?
   No

4. Is there any risk to me?
   Some participants may feel anxious when answering questions about their communication habits between home and school. If you experience discomfort, you have the right to withdraw at any time. Additionally, some participants may be concerned about privacy. All information within the interview will remain confidential between the participant and researcher. Participant names will be redacted and teachers and administrators will not have access to responses. All records will be destroyed after three years.

   If you become upset and wish to speak with someone, you may speak with researcher Melanie Solano at (e-mail address) or Heather Schugar at (e-mail address).

   If you experience discomfort, you have the right to withdraw at any time.

5. Is there any benefit to me?
While there may be no direct benefits to the participants, they may gain knowledge of how to best communicate between home and school.

6. How will you protect my privacy?
All survey responses will be encrypted and stored on a password-protected computer. Notes will be written during the interview and artifact review sessions and the sessions will be audio-recorded. If you do not want notes to be taken or audio to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in the study.

Your records will be kept private. Only Melanie Solano, Heather Schugar, and the IRB will have access to your name and responses. Your name will not be used in any reports.

Records will be stored in a:
- Password Protected File/Computer
- Locked Filing Cabinet

The researcher will not identify you by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and your confidentiality as a participant in the study will remain secure. No administrators from the school district will have access to raw notes or audio transcripts. This precaution will prevent any individual comments from having a negative repercussion.

Records will be destroyed three years after study completion

7. Do I get paid to take part in this study?
No

8. Who do I contact in case of research related injury?
For any questions with this study, contact:

Primary Investigator: Melanie Solano at (phone number) or (e-mail address).

Faculty Sponsor: Heather Schugar at (phone number) or (e-mail address).

9. What will you do with my Identifiable Information?
Your information will not be used or distributed for future research studies. Records will be destroyed three years after study completion. For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I have read the above information and I understand the statements above. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all
possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

Please click one of the following options:

- [ ] I consent to participate in this study.
- [ ] I do not consent to participate in this study.
Appendix E: Parent Demographic Questions

1. What is your relationship to your third-grade child at (school)? (If multiple family members are completing this survey together, please select all that apply.)

- ☐ Mother/Step-Mother
- ☐ Father/Step-Father
- ☐ Grandparent
- ☐ Aunt/Uncle
- ☐ Other Legal Guardian

2. What is the age range of the person(s) completing the survey?

- ☐ 18-30 years old
- ☐ 31-40 years old
- ☐ 41-50 years old
- ☐ 50+ years old

3. How would you describe your racial identity or ethnicity?

- ☐ African-American or Black
- ☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native/Indigenous
- ☐ Asian
☐ Caucasian
☐ Latino or Hispanic
☐ Multiracial
☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
☐ Prefer not to Say
☐ Identity Not Listed: _______________________________________________________

4. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?
☐ Some High School
☐ High School
☐ Bachelor's Degree
☐ Master's Degree
☐ Doctorate
☐ Trade School

5. What is your current employment status?
☐ Employed Full-Time
☐ Employed Part-Time
6. How many children do you have?
____________________________________________________________________

7. How many of your children are currently enrolled in (the district)!
____________________________________________________________________

8. What languages do you speak in your household?
____________________________________________________________________

9. How many computers, tablets, smartphones, and other smart devices are currently in your home that allow you to connect with your child’s teacher?
____________________________________________________________________

10. Who is your child's current teacher?

   ○ (Teacher 1)
   ○ (Teacher 2)
   ○ (Teacher 3)
   ○ (Teacher 4)
   ○ (Teacher 5)
   ○ (Teacher 6)
   ○ (Teacher 7)
Appendix F: Teacher Demographic Questions

1. Are you currently a third-grade homeroom teacher at (school name)?
   - Yes!
   - No (please explain): ________________________________

2. What is your age range?
   - 18-30 years old
   - 31-40 years old
   - 41-50 years old
   - 50+ years old

3. How would you describe your racial identity or ethnicity?
   - African-American or Black
   - American Indian/Alaskan Native/Indigenous
   - Asian
   - Caucasian
   - Latino or Hispanic
   - Multiracial
   - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   - Prefer not to Say
4. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Master's +30
- Master's +6
- Doctorate

5. How many years have you worked in education?

- 1-3 years
- 4-10 years
- 10+ years

6. How many students are in your class this year?


7. How many students with IEPs or 504 plans are in your class this year?


8. How many ELL students are in your class this year?


Appendix G: Perceived Quality of Connectedness Scale for Parents and Teachers

How connected do you feel to your child’s teacher/your student's parents using each of the modes you selected above? For the purpose of this survey, “connected” is defined as: having meaningful contact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Not at All Connected (1)</th>
<th>Slightly Connected (2)</th>
<th>Neutral (3)</th>
<th>Well Connected (4)</th>
<th>Extremely Well Connected (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Calls</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face to Face Parent Meetings/Conferences</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Zoom Parent Meetings/Conferences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Nights (such as Back to School Night)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Text Messages</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Facebook Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Management System (such as Canvas, Blackboard, or Schoology)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Newsletter, Handout, Handwritten Note</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Parent Parental Academic Support Scale

Since August, I communicated with my child’s teacher about…

1) …my child’s grades in the class (Academic Performance Question)
2) …why my child has a missing assignment (Academic Performance Question)
3) …How my child can improve his/her grade (Academic Performance Question)
4) …Why my child received the grade he/she did (Academic Performance Question)
5) …why my child was not completing assignments (Academic Performance Question)
6) …learning more about homework assignments (Academic Performance Question)
7) …a question I had about an assignment (Academic Performance Question)
8) …solutions to address my child’s behavior in class (Classroom Behavior Question)
9) …my child talking back to the teacher (Classroom Behavior Question)
10) …my child goofing off in class (Classroom Behavior Question)
11) …my child’s ability to make/maintain friendships with peers (Preparation Question)
12) …how my child was not bringing materials to class (Preparation Question)
13) …my child being picked on by his/her classmates (Hostile Peer Interactions Question)
14) …a major classroom behavioral incident (fight, racial slur) (Hostile Peer Interactions Question)
15) …a temporary health issue that my child is experiencing (Health Question)
16) …a major physical health issue that my child is experiencing (Health Question)
For each of the 16 behaviors, parents were then asked:

Which communication modes below did you use to communicate this behavior (behavior name) to your child’s teacher? Please select all modes that apply.

☐ Communication App (Ex. ClassDojo or Remind)

☐ Phone Call

☐ E-mail

☐ Face-to-Face Parent Meeting/Conference

☐ Zoom Parent Meeting/Conference

☐ Parent Night Event (Ex. Back to School Night)

☐ Text Message

☐ Class Facebook Group

☐ Learning Management System (Ex. Canvas, Blackboard, or Schoology)

☐ Paper Newsletter/Handout/Handwritten Note

☐ Other: ______________________________
Appendix I: Teacher Parental Academic Support Scale Items

Since August, I communicated with my students' parents (either individually or in a whole-class message) about...

1) …a student’s grades in the class (Academic Performance Question)
2) …why a student has a missing assignment (Academic Performance Question)
3) …How a student can improve his/her grade (Academic Performance Question)
4) …Why a student received the grade he/she did (Academic Performance Question)
5) …why a student was not completing assignments (Academic Performance Question)
6) …about homework assignments (Academic Performance Question)
7) …questions pertaining to assignments (Academic Performance Question)
8) …solutions to address a student’s behavior in class (Classroom Behavior Question)
9) …a student talking back to the teacher (Classroom Behavior Question)
10) …a student goofing off in class (Classroom Behavior Question)
11) …a student’s ability to make/maintain friendships with peers (Preparation Question)
12) …how a student was not bringing materials to class (Preparation Question)
13) …a student being picked on by his/her classmates (Hostile Peer Interactions Question)
14) …a major classroom behavioral incident (fight, racial slur) (Hostile Peer Interactions Question)
15) …a temporary health issue that a student is experiencing (Health Question)
16) …a major physical health issue that a student is experiencing (Health Question)
For each of the 16 behaviors, teachers were then asked:

Which communication modes below did you use to communicate this behavior (behavior name) to your students’ parents? Please select all modes that apply.

☐ Communication App (Ex. ClassDojo or Remind)

☐ Phone Call

☐ E-mail

☐ Face-to-Face Parent Meeting/Conference

☐ Zoom Parent Meeting/Conference

☐ Parent Night Event (Ex. Back to School Night)

☐ Text Message

☐ Class Facebook Group

☐ Learning Management System (Ex. Canvas, Blackboard, or Schoology)

☐ Paper Newsletter/Handout/Handwritten Note

☐ Other: _______________________________
Appendix J: Importance of Supportive Behaviors Scale

Thinking about this current school year (August 2021 through now), how important do you find each supportive behavior to be towards your students’ success?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Important (1)</th>
<th>Moderately Important (2)</th>
<th>Very Important (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...a student's grades in the class.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...why a student has a missing assignment.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...how a student can improve his/her grade.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...why a student received the grade he/she did.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...why my student was not completing assignments.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...providing information about homework assignments.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...questions about assignments.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...solutions to address a student's behavior in class.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>...a student talking back to the teacher.</td>
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<tr>
<td>...a student goofing off in class.</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>...a student's ability to make/maintain friendships with peers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scenario</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>...how a student was not bringing materials to class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>...a student being picked on by his/her classmates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>...a major classroom behavioral incident (fight, racial slur).</td>
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<tr>
<td>...a temporary health issue that a student is experiencing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...a major physical health issue that a student is experiencing.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K: Satisfaction of Communication Tools Scale

When thinking about each communication tool, how satisfied are you with the quality of communication based on the following parameters?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Unsatisfied (1)</th>
<th>Unsatisfied (2)</th>
<th>Neutral (3)</th>
<th>Satisfied (6)</th>
<th>Very Satisfied (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>App</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>or Conference</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Zoom Parent</td>
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<td>○</td>
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<td>Meetings or</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Conferences</td>
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<td>Learning</td>
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<td>Paper</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix L: Parent Interview Protocol

Interview Introduction: Thank you for participating in this portion of my study. Today’s interview will be approximately 45-60 minutes long and will contain questions about parent-teacher communication practices, habits, and strategies for success. Before we begin, I would like to remind you that this interview is being recorded. Only my advisor and I will have access to the recording. The recording will later be transcribed. Your name and identifying information will not be used in the transcription. Do you still consent to participate in this interview?

Date & Time of Interview:

Place of Interview:

Overall Research Question: In what ways do software communication apps and learning management systems (LMS) compare to other, more traditional methods of parent-teacher communication?

Interview Question One: Tell me a little about yourself.

Potential Follow-Up Questions: How many students do you have at (the school)/in school? Is your child enjoying school this year?

Interview Question Two: What modes of communication do you use to communicate with your child’s teacher and how often do you use each of those modes?

Potential Follow-Up Questions: Do you use (mode) as well? How often? Tell me more about (mode).

Interview Question Three: Are there certain modes that you go to for different types of concerns?

Potential Follow-Up Questions: Why do you go to (mode) for that concern? Do you use any strategies when communicating with (mode)?

Interview Question Four: What do you perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of different modes of communication?

Potential Follow-Up Questions: You mentioned ___ to be a benefit of (mode), have you also found any drawbacks to using it?

Interview Question Five: Describe one of the most impressive or controversial events related to your interaction with a teachers.

Interview Question Six: Please reflect on your communication strengths and needs.

Potential Follow-Up Questions: Why do you consider ______ a strength? Why do you consider _____ a need?
Appendix M: Teacher Interview Protocol

**Interview Introduction:** Thank you for participating in this portion of my study. Today’s interview will be approximately 45-60 minutes long and will contain questions about parent-teacher communication practices, habits, and strategies for success. Before we begin, I would like to remind you that this interview is being recorded. Only my advisor and I will have access to the recording. The recording will later be transcribed. Your name and identifying information will not be used in the transcription. Do you still consent to participate in this interview?

**Date & Time of Interview:**
**Place of Interview:**

**Overall Research Question:** In what ways do software communication apps and learning management systems (LMS) compare to other, more traditional methods of parent-teacher communication?

**Interview Question One:** Tell me a little about yourself.

**Potential Follow-Up Questions:** How many years have you been teaching? What is your current teaching assignment? Are there any past jobs or positions that you would like to share? What are your certifications?

**Interview Question Two:** What modes of communication do you use in your classroom and how often do you use each one?

**Potential Follow-Up Questions:** Do you use (mode) as well? How often? Tell me more about (mode).

**Interview Question Three:** Are there certain modes that you go to for different types of concerns?

**Potential Follow-Up Questions:** Why do you go to (mode) for that concern? Do you use any strategies when communicating with (mode)?

**Interview Question Four:** What do you perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of different modes of communication?

**Potential Follow-Up Questions:** You mentioned ___ to be a benefit of (mode), have you also found any drawbacks to using it?

**Interview Question Five:** Describe one of the most impressive or controversial events related to your interactions with parents.

**Interview Question Six:** Please reflect on your communication strengths and needs.

**Potential Follow-Up Questions:** Why do you consider ______ a strength? Why do you consider _____ a need?
# Appendix N: Interview Responses for Benefits and Drawbacks of Modes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode Benefits and Drawbacks</th>
<th>Number of Excerpts</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>E-mail Benefits</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast, Convenient, Efficient</td>
<td>40 total</td>
<td>22 total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Specific</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides Reminder</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E-mail Drawbacks</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response/Delayed/Brushed Off</td>
<td>39 total</td>
<td>29 total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misconceptions</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Reading Messages (Length, Spam, Too Many)</td>
<td>10 total</td>
<td>10 total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Child Specific</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conference Benefits</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Face-to-Face</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Personal Touch &amp; Opportunities for Collaboration</td>
<td>27 total</td>
<td>19 total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance to View Classroom &amp; Work Samples</td>
<td>25 total</td>
<td>17 total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure IEP is Followed</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zoom</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conference Drawbacks</strong></td>
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<td>Concerns Heard for First Time</td>
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<td>4 total</td>
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<td><strong>Zoom</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Zoom Interpreters for ELL Students</td>
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<td>3 total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delay in Receiving Paper Materials</td>
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<td>1 total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet/Lighting Problems</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Phone Benefits</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing Misconceptions</td>
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<td>7 total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-Solving</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Phone Drawbacks</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Phone-Tag</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urgency/Concerns</td>
<td>13 total</td>
<td>11 total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unsure How to Contact</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Newsletter Benefits</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Topics &amp; Consistency Across Grade-Level</td>
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<td>8 total</td>
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<td><strong>Newsletter Drawbacks</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Redundancy of Information</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Communication App Benefits</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Remind</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Short/Fast Reminders</td>
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<td>People Have Phone on Them</td>
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<td>6 total</td>
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<td><strong>TalkingPoints</strong></td>
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<td>Translation for ELLs</td>
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<td>4 total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal/Quick Reminders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication App Drawbacks</td>
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<td>3 total</td>
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<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ClassDojo</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavior Management Tool</td>
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<td><strong>Remind</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Limitations on Character Length</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delayed Responses</td>
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<td><strong>Facebook Benefits</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drama-Free</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Facebook Drawbacks</strong></td>
<td>12 total</td>
<td>9 total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anti-Social Media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unhelpful</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remembering to Check</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Canvas Benefits</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Automatic Alerts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework Assignment Listings</td>
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<td><strong>Canvas Drawbacks</strong></td>
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<td>2 total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficult to Use/Not Willing to Check</td>
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<td><strong>Paper Communication Benefits</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tracking Homework Assignments</td>
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<td><strong>Paper Communication Drawbacks</strong></td>
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<td>Forget to Check</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Night/In-Person Event Benefits</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Build Home-School Connection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Updates on Policies and Events</td>
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# Appendix O: Parent-Teacher E-mail Exchange

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Parent E-mail:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am taking her to get tested as soon as I can. If there is anything that she can do while home, please let me know. I will have her read because I know that she is behind with that! Thanks so much, (Parent Signature)</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Teacher Response:</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perfect- I will assign her the practice test in Pearson for her math test on Monday. iReady reading is great for reading. This week’s element is character traits so if she reads a book at home or if there are any characters in her iReady reading she can write about what that character is like. I will put books in the vestibule at my prep at 2 in case you think she will be out tomorrow too. (Teacher Signature)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Parent Response:</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A follow-up to what is going on medically)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Teacher Response:</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perfect. Her books will be there by 3…or do you want me to give them to one of her sisters?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Parent Response:</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you could get them to one of the girls, that would be very helpful (I'm not sure if I'll be able to get there in time)! They are both in with (teacher’s name). Thank you so much! (Parent Signature)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Teacher Response:** |  |
You can tell (student) her secret pal is (other student). That is probably the most important/interesting/best thing she missed today. I don’t want her to be out of the loop!

(Teacher Signature)

**Parent Response:**

She will be out again today (and possibly tomorrow). The place that gives results in 24 hours wasn't taking anyone without an appointment and we couldn't get an appointment until today. I took her to the pediatric urgent care and had her tested there. Those results just take a bit longer. She is home with her dad today and they have the list of things to work on.

She has her reading log ready to go. Do you want me to take pics of it and send it to you or can she just give it to you when she comes back?

Thank you so much for your help!

I hope that you have a great day:)

Thanks again,

(Parent Signature)

**Parent Response:**

(Student) work for today! I was hoping she would be here so I waited!

ELA- peg 96, 97, and writing on page 99

Math- we are taking our test- she can review with pages 286-290. She can go on Pearson for the practice test or practice lessons (yesterday it was down- fingers crossed its up today)
Go Blue Guided Reading - iReady 😊

Thanks!

(Teacher Signature)