Effective Practices in Home - School Communication

B

Background…

➢ Historically, most communication from school to home was done through letters, phone calls to parents, printed newsletters, weekly agendas and parent-teacher conferences.

➢ With advances in technology, online newsletters, emails to parents, websites and blogs are becoming increasingly more common to transfer information from school to home.

➢ Besides occasional letters and phone calls, there is often less communication from home to school, yet this two-way communication has been requested by many parents.

Key Findings….

L

Summary of what works:
- Establishing consistent and open two-way communication with parents is best done through family visits, informal conversations at students' out-of-school activities, and student led parent–teacher conferences
- Effective two-way school-home communication improves students' performance in school and increases parental satisfaction.
- Overall, parents prefer personal contact such as individual notes and phone calls home.
- While some parents value the convenience of internet communication such as websites and emails, it is not accessible to and used by all families.

A

➢ Written reports and newsletters are effective when they tailor their communication to individual families instead of sending large amounts of generic newsletters. Newsletters are able to reach parents who are hard to reach by phone or email.

➢ Schools should encourage parents to write letters to the teacher or school in order to bring up an issue, make a request or give positive feedback.

➢ Parental education newsletters should be used, as they have been effective in increasing closer monitoring of children, higher responsiveness and more parent/teen discussions.

M

➢ Websites should be used in addition to written notices. While there is accessibility issues for those of low socioeconomic status who do not have internet access, websites have been shown as effective for posting the school information (such as physical address), curriculum, classroom homework, and resources for parents.

➢ Email should not be used as the primary means of communication. While 37% of a surveyed parent population appreciated having email as an option, only 24% said they would use it.

➢ Newsletters should include information about how to contact the school and the names of students with excellent attendance. This is one of the most effective practices to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Invite two-way communication by asking parents what aspects of the home-school communication are satisfactory and which need to be improved upon. Instead of using a formal questionnaire, use informal conversations, telephone interviews, observation and group process techniques to help identify the parents' priorities. Give parents the option of online or paper newsletters, what content should routinely be present in the newsletters, how the teacher-parents conferences should be structured, etc.

Bottom Line Actionable Message

The following search terms were used to retrieve articles:

- "home school communication" or "home school relations" or "parent teacher communication" or "Parental Involvement"
- "newsletter" or "online versus paper newsletter"
- "systematic review" or" meta analysis"
- "best practices" or "effectiveness of" or "evidence-based"

References:
This list provides information for literature and resources used in preparing this BLAM.

➤ Allen, J. (January 2009). Effective Home-School Communication. *Harvard Family Research Project: Fine Newsletter, 1*(1). Retrieved February 2010 from: http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/fine-family-involvement-network-of-educators/fine-newsletter-archive/january-fine-newsletter-home-school-communication

This article details 3 main ways to revise existing methods of communication such as newsletters and conferences. Firstly, schools must create opportunities for students and families to learn together at home. One way to facilitate this is through the use of dialogue journals, which encourage family members to write about books that students read at home or how parents use math in their daily lives. Secondly, schools must establish respectful two-way communication through family visits, informal conversations at students' out-of-school activities, and student-led parent–teacher conferences. Lastly, learning about families' cultural and socioeconomic back helps create culturally relevant curriculum and incorporate family knowledge.

Allen also mentions challenges to effective communication, which includes one-way communication from teacher to parent, lack of empathy and negative tone and body language.

➤ Bogenschneider, K. and Stone, M. (April 1997). Delivering Parent Education to Low and High Risk Parents of Adolescents via Age-paced Newsletter. Family Relations, 46(2), 123-134.

Newsletters have proven a cost-effective conduit for parent education among parents of infants, adolescent parents and single parent families, and especially benefit high risk, hard-to-reach parents. A mail survey examines the effectiveness of parent education newsletters among Caucasian parents of 9th to 12th graders. Comparing the control with the treatment groups, parent education newsletters resulted in closer parental monitoring of their children's whereabouts and activities. The newsletters were as effective or more effective for parents who faced single or multiple risks than for those who faced no risk factors. Similarly, parents who read all of the newsletters reported higher levels of competence in adapting to the changes of adolescence. Also, they were more responsive to their children as measured by time spent attending to, talking with, and praising their adolescents.

➤ Bouffard, S. (July 2008). Tapping Into Technology: The Role of the Internet in Family–School Communication. *Harvard Family Research Project: Family Involvement Research Digests.* Retrieved February 2010 from: http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-

our-publications/tapping-into-technology-the-role-of-the-internet-in-family-school-communication

This is the first large-scale study to examine the usage and potential benefits of Internet-based family–school communication. The possible benefits of using internet technology include reducing scheduling barriers that pose challenges to traditional forms of family–school communication, conveying information to multiple families at once, and can efficiently sharing and archiving information about student progress, school policies and assignments, tips for family involvement, and other topics. This study showed that Internet-based family–school communication is associated with higher achievement and higher educational expectations.

However, websites and email contact can be difficult for schools to maintain, may intimidate some families, and lack visual and nonverbal cues (e.g., tone of voice or body language). Most significantly, many families do not have access to Internet technology. 36% of families reported that they had used the Internet to communicate with schools. About 10% had no access to a computer in any setting, while approximately half had access to a computer but did not use it to communicate with schools. More advantaged families are more likely to have access to the Internet and to use it to communicate with schools when they do have access. Parents of girls and Hispanic children were least likely to have access to and use internet technologies to communicate with schools.

➢ Sheldon & Epstein. (2004). Getting Students to School: Using Family and Community involvement to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism. *School Community Journal,* 14(2), 39. Retrieved February 2010 from:
http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ794822&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ794822

This primary research collected data from 39 schools on rates of chronic absenteeism and on specific family and community involvement activities that were implemented to reduce this issue. Results indicate that school, family, and community partnership practices can significantly decrease chronic absenteeism, even after school level and prior rates of absenteeism are taken into account. In particular, communicating with families about attendance, celebrating good attendance with students and families decreased chronic absenteeism from one year to the next. Communication practices included four items: conducting parent orientations to explain school expectations and policies regarding student attendance, sending home newsletters listing the names of students with excellent attendance, giving families information about how to contact the school, and providing access to children's attendance information on the internet. Educators also considered sending home newsletters listing excellent attendance as one of the more effective practices.

➢ Acquaro, P.D. & DeMarco, M. (May 2008). An Exploratory Case Study: What Makes a Good School Website: Investigation of Long Island School District Website Homepages Across Socioeconomic Status. Retrieved February 2010 from
http://iris.nyit.edu/~mdemarco/edpc691/thesis.pdf

This thesis outlines three main areas to focus on when designing an effective school website. Firstly, the content should include the physical location of the school, the listing of contact information for the school faculty and staff, and school calendar. An excellent site includes the school curriculum, classroom homepages, homework postings, and links and web resources for parents, students and teachers, and even a showcase of student work. Secondly, sites should have an eye-catching home page, be easy to navigate, have all live links, include credible information, have clear directions, host attractive visuals, be interactive, include contact information, have user control, and be fun to explore. Finally,

sites should be accessible to all and provide quality motivational materials for students, parents and teachers.

➢ Cattermole, J. and Robinson, N. (September 1985). Effective Home / School Communication: From the Parents' Perspective. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 67*(1), 48-50.

Parents prefer to receive information about what is happening at school directly from their children. They also place great importance on messages sent specifically to them, such as notes from the teacher or phone calls home. They also enjoy ways of learning about the school that involve face-to-face interaction such as parent-teacher conferences, open houses, personal visits to the school, and friendships with educators. Their third preferred source of information is newsletters.

➢ The Parent Involvement and Communication Charter at Anne Arundel County Public Schools. Writing Effective Newsletters. Retrieved February 2010 from http://www.aacps.org/aacps/boe/tech/webguidlin/newsletters.htm

This website offers a brief summary of how to write effective newsletters. Their 5 main suggestions are:

1. Include a Calendar of Events
2. Keep Parents in Mind! Offer information to keep them informed
3. DON'T post student names if you are duplicating your newsletter online
4. Consider doing 2 versions of your newsletter (paper vs. online)
5. Write Clear Headlines

Additional Resources:

This list provides information for additional literature and resources on the subject of school uniforms. List references for all literature used in preparing the BLAM, except for the articles summarized above.

➢ Barth, R. (1979). Home-Based Reinforcement of School Behavior: A Review and Analysis. *Review of Educational Research, 49*(3). 436-458.

➢ Caspe, M. Home-School Communication—What's All the Commotion? *Harvard Family Research Project.* Retrieved February 2010 from: http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/home-school-communication-what-s-all-the-commotion

➢ Christenson, S.L. (2003). The Family–School Partnership: An Opportunity to Promote the Learning Competence of All Students. *School Psychology Quarterly, 18(*4), 454–482. Retrieved February 2010 from: http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ683435&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ683435

➢ Communicating with your child's school through letter writing- A parent's guide (October 2002). *Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities.* Retrieved February 2010 from: http://www.nichcy.org/InformationResources/Documents/NICHCY%20PUBS/pa9.pdf.

➢ Dyson, L.L. (2001). Home-School Communication and Expectations of Recent Chinese Immigrants. *Canadian Journal of Education, 26*(4), 455-476.

➢ Education World's webpage devoted to best practices in school newsletters: http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/columnists/pawlas/pawlas003.shtml

➢ Epstein, J.L and Dauber, S.L. (Jan 1991). School Programs and Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement in Inner-City Elementary and Middle Schools. The *Elementary School Journal, 91*(3), 289-305.

➢ Epstein, J.L (May 1995). School/family/community partnerships: caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan* , *76*(9), 701-713. Retrieved February 2010 from http://www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst;jsessionid=LFcVQ1WHtXVCQRnLRvrhwQZ782BhwdJ8M0VpS4YbnW8KDMr8JHLW!-1659539997!-867442119?docId=5000295700

➢ Epstein, J.L. et al (Fall 1999). Strategies for Improving Home-School Communication About Homework for Students with Disabilities. *Journal of Special Education*, *33*(3).

➢ Epstein, J.L. (1987). Parent Involvement: What Research Says to Administrators. *Education and Urban Society, 19*(2), 119-136. Retrieved February 2010 from http://eus.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/19/2/119

➢ Forsberg, L. (2007). Involving parents through school letters: mothers, fathers and teachers negotiating children's education and rearing. *Ethnography and Education, 2*(3), 273 — 288. Retrieved February 2010 from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17457820701547252

➢ Hiatt-Michael, D.B. (2001). Preparing teachers to work with parents. *ERIC Digest.* Retrieved February 2010 from: http://www.ericdigests.org/2002-3/parents.htm

➢ Lazar, A.M. and Weisberg, R.(Nov 1996). Inviting Parents' Perspectives: Building Home-School Partnerships to Support Children Who Struggle with Literacy. *The Reading Teacher, 50*(3), 228-237.

➢ McAffe, O. (1987). Improving Home-School Relations: Implications for Staff Development. *Education and Urban Society, 19*(2), 185-199.

➢ Riley, D., Meinhardt, G., Nelson, C., Salisbury, M.J. and Tedi Winnett (July 1991). How Effective Are Age-Paced Newsletters for New Parents? A Replication and Extension of Earlier Studies. *Family Relations, 40*(3), 247-253.

➢ Stevenson, D.L. and Baker, D.P. (Oct 1987). The Family-School Relation and the Child's School Performance. *Child Development*, *58*(5), 1348-1357.

➢ Walker, S.K. and Riley, D.A. (Apr 2001). Involvement of the Personal Social Network as a Factor in Parent Education Effectiveness. *Family Relations, 50*(2), 186-193.