

Teacher-Initiated Communication with Parents: Preferred Types and Channels to Facilitate
School-Home Relations and Enhance Student Performance and Motivation

by

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A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of
Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Pascal El Cid, 2018

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Abstract

Parent-teacher communication involves teachers relating student academic- and school-information to students and parents through various means, including in-person dialogue, emails, and report cards. The literature on home-school communication and its impact on teachers, parents, and students is associated positively with more engaged and motivated learners, which may be valuable knowledge for both teachers and parents alike. While this is an important construct in terms of school and home dynamics, there is debate about the best platform teachers should use to implement open lines of communication, as well as the particular messages that are most appropriate for teachers to convey to parents and students. This review explores what kinds of information teachers should be communicating with parents in order to have a positive impact both in the classroom as well as in home and school relationships. Studies involving teacher-parent communication in both primary and secondary schools were examined. This investigation was hindered by the limited research on the impact of teacher communication, the changes to how teachers and parents prefer to communicate given time restrictions and cultural preferences, as well as different interpretations of what is being communicated, especially through grades and report cards. The research (a) reviews some of the empirical research literature on parent-teacher communication and (b) discusses the impacts this had on school-home relationships, student performance, and student motivation. The purpose of this research, therefore, is to better

understand how teacher-initiated communication can be utilized as a tool to promote student learning and enhance home-school relationships.

Keywords: communication, report cards, parent involvement, teacher-initiated communication

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Introduction

This review examines some of the existing empirical research literature on parent-teacher communication. Entrusted with the education, care, and protection of children and youth, enough cannot be said about the merit of teaching. As such, the information that teachers communicate with parents regarding their children's academic achievements, behavioural predispositions in a social setting, and the development of their skills and talents, plays a crucial role in the overall development of that child. The relationship between teacher-parent communication, the home-school relationship, student motivation, and student academic performance is worthy of further investigation. Initial evaluations of current research suggested that the channels being used for communication vary across schools (Hancock & Starker, 2013); typically taking the form of in-person discussions, telephone calls, emails, or even online applications or software that can be accessed through mobile devices (Jiang, Zhou, Zhang, Beckford, & Zhong, 2012). In addition, the information being communicated by teachers can vary from one to another (McMillan, 2001), ranging from the simple transmission of student grades (Sirvani, 2007) to comprehensive narratives that highlight areas of difficulty for the student (Sousa, Luze, & Hughes-Belding, 2014). Ultimately, the impact that this teacher-initiated communication with parents has on students is significant. For instance, it is shown to be associated with improved student attendance (Kraft & Rogers, 2015), enhanced student academic achievement (Castro et al., 2015), and increased student motivation in their schoolwork (Sirvani, 2007), as well as more proactive involvement by parents to support their child's learning (Olmstead, 2013). Therefore, a closer look at what teachers are communicating with parents should be considered given its impact on home-school relations, as well as its potential for enhancing student learning. In the following, I begin by grounding this study in my personal interest. I will then provide research

studies that will examine the preferred types and channels of teacher-initiated communication and how it can be used to facilitate school-home relations and enhance student performance and student motivation.

Personal Interest

As a junior-high science teacher, the method I use to report student performance on assessments to parents is primarily achieved through an online technology application known as PowerSchool (2017). In addition to this platform, parents have traditionally received information on their child's progress three times a year in the form of a report card. This current school year, however, my school has been selected to pilot a project where we are phasing out the three-times-a-year report card, and instead, introducing two report cards with modified online reporting. This online reporting includes the addition of evaluating students for each assessment that is directly linked with a particular student learner outcome; that is, our communication with parents will now be outcomes-based in terms of academic performance.

With all of these changes to our online gradebook platform, many teachers have expressed concern over the extra work and time required to directly evaluate each student on individual outcomes for all summative assessments. For example, if a test or project covers three or more outcomes, teachers must then break down the individual questions or components into the corresponding outcome, survey the student performance for each outcome, and then report on each individual outcome. In other words, if a student achieves an 85% on a test that encompasses three or four outcomes, this does not necessarily indicate that they demonstrate an "excellent" understanding of all the outcomes as they must be individually considered and evaluated.

Furthermore, many teachers in my school now feel they need to reconsider the validity and reliability of assessments they have created (i.e., tests, projects, composition assignments,

etc.) in order to determine whether these assessments will provide accurate evaluations of the student's ability for the given outcome. For instance, some summative assessments may encompass outcomes beyond a given subject's Program of Study, which is the government-mandated curriculum in the province of Alberta (Alberta Education, 2018), such as in the case of cross-curricular projects. In addition, many assessments may incorporate other aptitudes and abilities, such as creativity or problem-solving, which are not necessarily assessed directly. Unfortunately, these skills may not be explicitly communicated through PowerSchool unless the teacher recognizes this and directly and unambiguously communicates this to parents.

In my school's discussion on reporting assessment, I began to realize how significant communication with parents can be to the experiences of our students. For instance, will reporting learner outcomes allow me to better understand and implement the Programs of Study in my teaching, and will this ultimately have a positive impact on student learning? Will the process of associating assessments with outcomes allow for greater transparency between school and home, and will doing so enhance a greater understanding of both teacher and student shortcomings? Will reporting student progress on particular learner outcomes direct student motivation for their own learning? By explicitly reporting to parents the specific areas of difficulty that students face, will parental support and involvement increase? If yes, will this increased support outside of the classroom have a greater impact on the student's motivation or academic achievements in the classroom? Will this new system of reporting effectively bridge the gap between assessments and accurate evaluations of a student's learning? Is outcomes-based reporting the best method for connecting parents to the learning that happens in a classroom? Is the communication of grades and student performance on particular outcomes sufficient in terms of how much is being shared between school and home, or should teachers be connecting with

parents – and subsequently, students – in other ways? It is my hope that my research in this area will provide me a better understanding of how communication and reporting could impact teacher planning, student learning, and home-school relationships.

Background

Upon researching the relationship between parent-teacher communication, and its impact on students, three main themes emerged from the literature: (i) the kind of information that is being communicated; (ii) the channels that parents and teachers are communicating through; and (iii) the impact of teacher-initiated communication on student performance and motivation. These themes are expanded upon below.

Information types. The question of what kind of information is being communicated between home and school was a central topic in the literature I reviewed for this paper. Not surprisingly, an examination of the research that exists in this area of study reveals that attendance and grades, whether percentage-, letter-, or standards-based are the predominant pieces of information that teachers are communicating with parents (Kraft & Rogers, 2015; Sirvani, 2007; Sousa et al., 2014). Numerous studies demonstrated that most parental understandings of these grades are those of uncertainty or ambiguity (Deslandes, Rivard, Joyal, Trudeau, & Laurencelle, 2009; McMillan, 2001; Swan, Guskey, & Jung, 2014), especially given the inconsistency of different teacher grading practices (McMillan, Myran, & Workman, 2002). On the other hand, the culminating research strongly suggests that short, written comments or descriptions of challenging topics or areas with which a student is struggling are the most informative topic for teachers to communicate with parents with the greatest benefit for students (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Sousa et al., 2014; Swan et al., 2014). In addition, providing parents with suggestions for how to support their child in areas of growth is associated with more

engaged students who will be motivated to improve their learning (Fan & Williams, 2010), as opposed to communicating messages with negative connotations.

Communicative channels. The various channels through which teachers and parents are communicating are of significance when considering which means is the most preferred by parents and teachers. Parent-teacher communication platforms varied widely and are often not limited to a single source (Hancock & Starker, 2013). The platforms discussed included: in-person dialogue (Jiang et al., 2012); written notes, printed progress reports, and/or report cards (Sirvani, 2007; Sousa et al., 2014); emails and telephone calls (Palts & Kalmus, 2015); text messaging (Olmstead, 2013); and online databases, applications, and school or teacher websites accessible via computers or mobile devices (Blau & Hameiri, 2017; Selwyn, Banaji, Hadjithoma-Gartska, and Clark, 2011). Ultimately, the methods that teachers prefer to use in order to communicate with parents may not necessarily be the same means with which parents are the most comfortable, especially when interacting with parents in a multicultural society of differing socioeconomic statuses and different levels of exposure to technologies such as online software or email (Jiang et al., 2012). It is imperative, therefore, that as teachers endeavour to “make [parents] feel more comfortable to communicate” (Jiang et al., 2012, p. 77), they ought to recognize that parental preference for communicative platforms may vary.

Student performance and motivation. Finally, the impact that this communication is having on student performance and motivation was also investigated. While the information being communicated with parents by teachers can vary greatly, the general consensus is that communication with parents is associated with: improved attendance (Kraft & Rogers, 2015); better academic performance (Castro et al., 2015; Fan & Chen, 2001; Seitsinger, Felner, Brand, & Burns, 2008; Sirvani, 2007); and enhanced student motivation in regard to school work and

study practices (Jeynes, 2005; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Seitsinger et al., 2008; Sirvani, 2007). One study in particular found that students learned to associate grades as a form of “currency” that they could then exchange for desired goods or improve their relationships with their teachers or parents (Reynolds & Dwyer, 2003). Regardless, this information is directly applicable to the classroom setting and teachers ought to be informed of this relationship as it is in the best interest of serving students.

Specifically, as suggested in the preceding outline of the research background, the following questions succinctly guided the review.

1. How do different types of information communicated between teachers and parents impact student learning and academic performance?
2. Which channels for communication between teachers and parents are preferred for supporting student learning and/or facilitating communication?
3. What is the impact of teacher communication on student behaviour and academic performance?

Definitions

To maintain clarity about the key concepts discussed in this review, I would like to clarify my interpretations of a few terms that are repeatedly discussed in this paper, including *communication*, *report cards*, and *parent involvement*.

Communication. Communication refers to the dissemination of academic, behavioural, and other related information primarily from teachers to parents with the intent to promote “proactive parent involvement” (Olmstead, 2013, p. 28) outside of the school, but in the realm of “their children’s academic lives” (p. 28).

Report cards. One of the tools used to provide this guiding information is through the use of report cards, which “generally focus exclusively on academic or cognitive skills” (Swan et al., 2014, p. 290) that the student is able to achieve or perform at. Furthermore, report cards explicitly designate “specific grades or marks for product (achievement), process, and progress learning criteria” (Swan et al., 2014, p. 292), as well as “sections for teacher, parent, and student comments” (p. 292).

Parent involvement. Finally, while parental involvement can be broadly interpreted to refer to different ways that parents are involved with their child’s formal education, my use of the term here arises from an understanding that parent involvement primarily requires maintaining contact with teachers and possibly the school community, as well as facilitating student learning outside of a school setting, which can vary in its execution (Epstein, 1995).

Research Pathway and Questions

While the natural progression of my research ultimately led me to review the empirical literature on the impact of home and school communication, I was initially focused on the communication between teachers and parents as it pertains to report cards. Thus, my search terms first included queries such as: “student assessment and reporting;” “outcomes-based student reporting;” “authentic assessment and communication;” and “reporting student achievement.” In addition to reviewing the key terms listed in numerous articles, I also examined the references provided in numerous articles as a source of potential studies to further investigate. For instance, the references listed in a study by Deslandes et al. (2009) led me to expand on my initial searches with more in-depth search terms, such as: “home-school communication;” “parental involvement and student academic achievement;” and “parent teacher communication.”

One challenge I faced, in particular, was differentiating between qualitative non-empirical articles, and empirical research. I felt that some non-empirical articles contained more detailed descriptions of various practical educational practices, such as report cards, or home-school communication, despite a lack of a methodological study to provide supporting evidence. While I may not report on these articles specifically, I believe they provided a valuable anecdote about modern teaching and assessment practices, and felt they were of value to make note of for the purposes of this critical review process.

In summary, my research pathway began with a focus on home-school reporting and communication, followed by an in-depth look at valid and reliable assessment practices, including formative and summative assessments. Finally, my research culminated with an inquiry into parental comprehension of teacher-reported grades and student learning. I did feel that there is a significant lack in the literature; that is, I found very few empirical studies that provided an in-depth analysis of how modern-day online grade reporting may impact student motivation, parental understanding of their child's learning and/or shortcomings, and/or how it may relate to curriculum and teacher accountability. I believe research in this area could inform school districts about the seeming gap between teaching and learning strategies, and procedures for the reporting of student understanding. As a result, I turned my attention more so to any form of communication between school and home that informs parents of details about their child's learning, as opposed to solely the reporting of their grades.

Literature Review

Introduction

Academic professionals would be the first to argue that the proverbial village in which we raise and teach our children – including both where the learning takes place and by whom it is influenced by – encompasses more than just a teacher and the walls of a school. The role of parental involvement in the academic lives of students is an important factor for supporting students in their learning processes. It is intriguing, therefore, that as an educator, policies and practices for encouraging parental involvement in the education of their children are not necessarily as streamlined between schools or districts when compared to, say, assessment models or classroom management practices.

Establishing home-school connections is becoming an increasingly researched topic in the field of education as “emerging technologies facilitate better parent-teacher communication and parent involvement” (Olmstead, 2013, p. 28). In addition to the type of information that teachers are communicating with parents, advancements in technology are creating new and diverse opportunities and channels to allow for communication, all of which has the potential to impact student achievement and motivation. With this in mind, it is disconcerting to imagine that educators may be forgoing – albeit, unintentionally – a potential source and wealth of knowledge that could impact student behaviour and academic achievement. As such, a review of the literature indicates “that schools are failing to fully engage parents and provide them with information about what their children are learning and how they are performing in school” (Kraft & Rogers, 2015, p. 49). Likewise, the literature on this topic “is less clear about what schools and teachers can and actually do to facilitate such involvement” (Seitsinger, Felner, Brand, &

Burns, 2008, p. 479). As I progress through the literature review, I will seek to answer the following research questions:

1. How do different types of information communicated between teachers and parents impact student learning and academic performance?
2. Which channels for communication between teachers and parents are preferred for supporting student learning and/or facilitating communication?
3. What is the impact of teacher communication on student behaviour and academic performance?

This portion of the paper will focus specifically on the research that exists regarding what kind of information is being communicated with parents, what channels teachers are using to facilitate this communication, as well as highlight findings about how this teacher-initiated communication is impacting student academic performance and motivation.

Types of Information

The obligations, time, and workload required of classroom teachers, seems to be ever-increasing, from timely reporting procedures of assessments to teaching practices, attendance and subsequent application of professional development learning, and maintaining clear and open lines of communication with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. In particular, I was interested in determining what the research suggests regarding my first research question: How do different types of information communicated between teachers and parents impact student learning and academic performance? As a teacher myself, I am the first to admit that it becomes almost too commonplace to overlook students who are achieving at proficient or excellent levels and focus my attention on the students who are struggling, misbehaving, or otherwise in need of parental contact. Given the many demands for a teacher's time and

attention, it is not enough to simply expect that teachers spend more time communicating with parents, especially if there is nothing pertinent to bring to their attention amid other time-sensitive tasks. Research by Seitsinger et al. (2008) indicates that schools where parents are involved are more likely to be high-performing; however, the strategies and procedures that these schools and teachers have in place to support their students has not been extensively studied by researchers. In this section, therefore, I will consider communication that focuses on the following four content types: assignment and test grades; summative grades via report cards; student progress; and classroom and school news.

Assignment and test grades. A survey of the research indicates that a diverse range of topics for teacher-initiated communication with parents exists (Desimone, 199; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Seitsinger et al., 2008; Sirvani, 2007). For instance, “a monitoring sheet containing students’ homework grades and test scores” (Sirvani, 2007, p. 32) as they progress through the school year is one example of information that is often communicated with parents on a regular basis. This type of information may also necessitate further dialogue if the parental expectations of the child do not correlate to the student’s performance. Specifically, the research indicates that “contact about school performance occurs most often when the child is having trouble in class or with schoolwork, which is more directly reflected in grades than in cognitive test scores” (Desimone, 1999, p. 21).

Fan and Williams (2010) found “that parent-school communication concerning students’ poor performance and behaviour problems” (p. 68) was negatively associated with student motivation in mathematics and English. While I will discuss the impact of teacher-initiated communication with parents in a later section, I felt that it was important to highlight that poor academic performance appears to be a key component of school-home dialogue, as most teachers

will likely wait to seek parental input until they recognize that the issue cannot be resolved by the teacher and student alone.

As an educator, the realization that most teachers will not contact parents immediately is a reality of the busyness of day-to-day life. As a middle-school teacher, for instance, I see no fewer than 200 students on any given day; thus, contacting every parent for every minor concern or matter would hamper my ability to complete the other important tasks required of me. Since I would not likely seek to involve parents at the onset of minor problems or marginal academic challenges, I would instead first address any issues with the child directly, only involving the parents if initial measures prove to be unsuccessful, or if the particular situation necessitates parental involvement. The research also corroborates this strategy, indicating that many educators “may wait until problems worsen before taking steps to communicate about the problem” (Desimone, 1999, p. 21).

On the other hand, maintaining open lines of communication between school and home may actually help to combat problems before they escalate to bigger issues. Kraft and Dougherty (2013) found that in addition to discussing academic progress and achievement, teacher-initiated communication could allow educators “to provide specific advice about ways in which parents could support the academic achievement of their child” (p. 217). This dialogue is further enhanced by the possibility of teachers and parents empowering each other with information and knowledge about successful strategies and ideas already being used either at school or in the home that could be applied in the opposite setting, respectively, in order to help the child improve (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). For example, parents may be able “to suggest strategies for addressing inappropriate behavior that were successful at home” (p. 217) while teachers may

bring to light “an area in need of improvement” (p. 217) and provide concrete strategies and guidance for the parents to instill at home.

Report cards. In addition to individual assignments and test scores, teachers may also provide a summative grade for each subject or course on a few occasions throughout the school year using a report card (Deslandes, Rivard, Joyal, Trudeau, & Laurencelle, 2009). Some of the research called into question the validity of these single, summative grades (McMillan, 2001; McMillan, Myran, & Workman, 2002), especially when they are being used to communicate student progress and achievement in the report card. For instance, in a study by McMillan (2001), teachers were surveyed about their beliefs regarding grades and grading practices. Many teachers revealed that they strongly believed grades ought to be a reasonable reflection of “both student effort and achievement” (McMillan, 2001, p. 21). Furthermore, other surveys revealed that grading practices varied by the teachers within a single school (McMillan et al., 2002), suggesting that “individual teacher preferences” (McMillan et al., 2002, p. 212) are crucial to forming a teacher’s grading practices.

From the parent perspective, it is also apparent that many parents may not understand all of the information being communicated in a report card, or to what the letter or numeric grades being reported actually equate (Deslandes et al., 2009). As a result of this, the research indicates that many schools and school districts are moving away from this traditional report card towards incorporating “standards-based student report cards” (Swan, Guskey, & Jung, 2014, p. 290) that summarize the student’s “achievement and performance” (p. 290) in numerous areas, based on educational standards set in place by the governing educational body. Swan et al., (2014) found that rather than provide parents with one grade per subject area on a given report card, more information can be provided to parents through grades using alternative reporting measures,

since “standards-based reporting requires that teachers report grades or marks for each of the identified learning domains and process indicators in each subject area or course” (p. 298).

Progress reports. Grades, however, are not the only informative topic that teachers choose to report to parents. In one study by Kraft and Rogers (2015), teachers sent messages to parents of high-school students in a summer school program on a weekly basis. Parents were randomly sorted into groups where they either received positive messages about what their children were doing and should continue to do, or the messages focused on suggested areas of improvement. In another study focusing on parents of children who received “early childhood” (Sousa, Luze, & Hughes-Belding, 2014, p. 502) interventions, “such as an early childhood special education teacher, speech language pathologist, or physical therapist” (p. 502), the topics of the teacher- or interventionist-initiated communication “offered general impressions of progress” (p. 505) in the form of summative narratives that detailed “information about the child’s performance that day, the growth the child made since their last visit, and strategies for the parents to use at home to help their child progress” (p. 505).

Classroom and school news. Online technologies are also being used to share school and teacher “newsletters and information bulletins with parents, as well as to convey important messages regarding specific activities or developments” (Selwyn, Banaji, Hadjithoma-Gartska, & Clark, 2011, p. 317), as well as “recordings of school activities with parents (e.g. class presentations, assemblies, school trips)” (p. 317). Furthermore, Selwyn et al. (2011) found that with the advancement of modern internet-based, technological applications, it is not unconventional for parents to be provided with electronic access to their child’s homework assignments that may require the “use of discussion forums, blogs, and other collaborative applications” (p. 317), digital copies of students’ work, and reports of their child’s “attendance

and behaviour” (p. 318). The research, therefore, succinctly suggests that schools are increasingly engaging parents in their child’s education by providing regular, detailed “information, communication, and homework resources to parents” (Selwyn et al., 2011, p. 321), and it appears that this transparency of schools will likely continue over time as long as parents choose to be involved in the dynamics of their children’s education.

Summation and Discussion. I have discussed the numerous pieces of information that teachers are choosing to share with their students’ parents. It should come as no surprise that grades on individual assessments and summative grades on report cards both play a crucial role in maintaining open lines of communication as they are often used to monitor student progress and achievement (Sirvani, 2007). In addition to academic performance, other topics that are regularly communicated between school and home include behavioural issues (Fan & Williams, 2010) and the student’s ability to meet specific learning standards (Swan et al., 2014). In addition, strategies that have been successfully used at school to address a particular area of concern may also be suggested for the home environment (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013).

Ultimately, all of these information tools seek to engage parents in their child’s learning and day-to-day experiences beyond that of simply reporting how a student scored on a single test. For example, as a classroom teacher, I monitor students who appear to be struggling on a given topic through the use of formative homework checks or quizzes. I would put into place measures to help them find success, such as working with them one-on-one to clarify the topics with which they are struggling or provide in-class opportunities to work with their peers as they develop studying strategies. If these measures are not initially successful, I would approach the parents in order to voice my concern over their child’s struggles, describe strategies that are already in place to help their child find success, suggest ways the parents could support their

child's learning at home, and seek parental input as to whether they or prior teachers have found success with a particular strategy.

The research by Kraft and Dougherty (2013) brought to light the suggestion that teachers could initiate communication earlier in the time-frame than what I suggested above. For instance, in the scenario I mentioned about attempting to resolve an issue directly with a student prior to parent contact, what if the parents had already informed me that their child finds the most success when working in small groups, or when receiving one-on-one attention from the classroom teacher? In that case, I would already have built in the practices to support my students, before any learning has actually taken place. Thus, if parents are given the opportunity to empower teachers with the information needed to best help support their students, then perhaps this proactive measure may have an impact, not only on student performance, but also on the level of parental engagement in their child's education. Thus, in the following section, I will discuss various channels or platforms that teachers can use in order to engage with the parent community and facilitate more open lines of communication between school and home.

Channels for Communication

On top of the various types of information that can be presented to parents, the literature presents a diverse range of channels in which teachers are choosing to engage with parents in dialogue about their children's academic progress and other information pertinent to their education. Naturally, this led me to question: Which channels for communication between teachers and parents are preferred for supporting student learning and/or facilitating communication? In this section, I will explore the various channels that teachers have used to initiate dialogue with parents, including information sharing tools that allow for oral or written narratives of progress as well as technological platforms that have only recently begun emerging

in schools. I will also consider how preferences for particular channels may vary from parent to parent, as well as between teachers and parents (Sousa et al., 2014).

In particular, there tends to be a discrepancy about which communicative channels are preferred, as this can be affected by the cultural values and language proficiency of the parents (Sousa et al., 2014). Incidentally, these channels may not necessarily align with the actual method utilized by the school and teacher. The order of channel preferences of teachers and parents has also been shown to vary in urban school settings (Palts & Kalmus, 2015); therefore, teachers ought to develop a better understanding of their student and parent population and seek to understand which channel is best suited to meet that family's needs and the focus of the communication.

Student Progress. Overall, similar platforms for communication were used in various studies, ranging from phone calls to handwritten notes or letters, conversations in person, including both during informal settings and formal parent-teacher meetings, as well as weekly or monthly newsletters (Hancock & Starker, 2013; Jiang, Zhou, Zhang, Beckford, & Zhong, 2012). For instance, in the study by Sirvani (2007), parents were provided with a tracking sheet twice a week that detailed students' grades on homework assignments and tests. Other research highlighted that in-person conversations were commonplace. In addition to face-to-face dialogue, many parents in the study by Sousa et al. (2014) highly valued the teacher's "written summary of the child's progress" (p. 505). In other words, the "parents want the story of their child's progress in writing so they can reread it at a later time" (p. 505). Sousa et al. (2014) reported that the parents in their study viewed graphic and other "visual supports" (p. 506), such as "the visual aids of the graph and rubric" as too prescribed or formal. Essentially, they felt that these means

do not adequately provide clarification of their child's progress since "their quantitative nature" (p. 506) lends them to be too far removed from their children.

Likewise, Hancock and Starker (2013) found that in-person conversations and weekly narratives or letters even resulted in increased parent volunteers in some elementary classrooms because these "parents felt welcomed to assist" (p. 5). This sentiment is echoed in research on Chinese immigrant parents, which found that in addition to "teachers' demands for involvement" (Jiang et al., 2012, p. 62), parents can be "motivated to be involved if they feel they are welcomed and valued by their children and teachers" (p. 62). Thus, it appears that both written descriptions and oral conversations can have the potential to create an environment in which parents feel comfortable enough and welcome to develop and maintain a relationship with the teacher, including volunteering in their classroom, as well as tracking their child's learning by comparing one narrative of their child's progress to another over time.

Digital Tools. A survey of the research also suggests that numerous digital and internet-based technologies are increasingly becoming a go-to resource to enhance teacher-initiated communication. For instance, teachers are sharing educational websites and blog links, online educational games, personal websites, school websites, and even digital copies of textbooks with parents (Olmstead, 2013). Furthermore, the use of email to communicate with parents has opened the possibility of easily accessible "two-way communication" (p. 30) for when parents "need to pull information or respond when needed" (p. 30).

In addition to the listed digital channels, Olmstead (2013) also calls on teachers and schools to maximize other electronic communication, such as through the use of "voice-calling systems" (p. 30) and "parent portals" (p. 30) on school websites. Interestingly, this author found that parents who were surveyed showed great interest in utilizing text messaging as one strategy

for staying up-to-date with “quick, direct access to teachers” (p. 36); however, this would be difficult to incorporate into teaching practices as many teachers are “not willing to use this type of communication” (p. 36). I must, therefore, consider some of the potential drawbacks to technological advancements for communication. Some research did bring attention to the potential negatives of digital communication, including “communication problems and fears, such as the fear of the digital footprint” (Palts & Kalmus, 2015, p. 67) where teacher-parent interactions are recorded and preserved online. The pervasiveness of constant digital connectivity, therefore, has the potential to blur the boundaries between a teacher’s personal life and their work or public life (Agger, 2011; Palts & Kalmus, 2015). This understanding must be taken into consideration when teachers and schools are seeking strategies to enhance teacher-parent dialogue. In addition to concerns about privacy and ethical issues, many teachers find that communication that involves digitally written messages tends to be valuable, “but very time-consuming” (Palts & Kalmus, 2015, p. 77) as teachers spend a lot of time and energy on carefully wording their messages so that their message is not misconstrued in any way by the parents. Olmstead (2013) recommends schools set aside time specifically for teachers to learn about tools and resources that can help them connect with parents in a way that overcomes the barrier of limited time. Another study suggested that perhaps instead of contacting parents at regular intervals (i.e., a phone call every week), utilizing teacher-initiated communication when there is authentic and meaningful information to discuss with parents will increase its effectiveness, “because calls would become more genuine and merit greater attention” (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013, p. 218).

Another digital platform that was highlighted in the research was the application of digital school databases, accessible on both mobiles, tablets, and computers. These databases

provide teachers and schools the ability to control “online data management” (Blau & Hameiri, 2017, p. 1233), and provide parents with “ubiquitous mobile data access and pedagogical communication” (p. 1233). Similar to the aforementioned PowerSchool (2017) used by all schools in ECSD, the application investigated in Blau & Hameiri’s (2017) study is two-fold in nature: one version of the application utilizes a secure school-based interface where teachers and schools can input information about the student’s grades, attendance, behaviour, and other logistical information; the second version is a family application that parents and students can use to view the student data, and be provided with the means to communicate with the school and teacher, if necessary. In particular, this channel keeps parents instantaneously informed about their child’s attendance and allows parents the opportunity “to immediately catch up on the child’s academic progress” (Palts & Kalmus, 2015, p. 67). This digital channel may additionally be paired in tandem with the distribution of summative reports of the student’s academic progress and attendance through the use of report cards at various intervals throughout the school year, as is done in ECSD. Because of the digital technologies available nowadays, teachers and schools can also view how often parents and students log on and access these online databases (Blau & Hameiri, 2017; Selwyn et al., 2011). This information may help form conversations with parents about the details to which they have access, and how they can become more involved in their child’s education, especially if the parents of culturally diverse students are not accustomed to the digital platforms or are unable to make sense of the information that is available to them.

Choosing a Communicative Channel. Ultimately, teachers and schools ought to employ any one or combination of the above communicative channels strategically in a way that is best suited for the situation at hand, and parental preference, if already known. This suggestion will be further explored in the discussion that follows. Essentially, each of the pathways for

communication ought to be used to build trust between school and home, since “building trust is a foundation for productive partnerships and communication with parents” (Hancock & Starker, 2013, p. 9). Sousa et al. (2014), for instance, suggested that families from cultures that value transmitting information in oral transactions may not respond agreeably to “databased graphic measures of progress” (p. 500). In terms of building trust, therefore, one crucial suggestion is to ensure that the communicative method “be culturally meaningful” (Sousa et al., 2014, p. 500) to the parents.

On top of culturally preferred channels, the research also highlighted the importance of teachers critically selecting the appropriate channel to share information with parents according to the subject matter at hand (Olmstead, 2007); however, the parents’ proficiency in the English language, either orally or “with written digital communication” (Palts & Kalmus, 2015, p. 76) may act as a barrier to encouraging parents to respond to or become involved with their child’s education. An additional barrier to teacher-parent communication could be “when parents are employed outside of the home, and/or when parents are living in poverty” (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007, p. 490). These factors may all contribute to creating an environment that is not open to some channels of teacher-initiated communication. One study even found that parental access to online digital databases of their child’s attendance and academic progress is only one form of communication, “albeit in a largely passive and reactive manner” (Selwyn et al., 2011, p. 322). If these technologies are viewed publicly as platforms for schools to “demonstrate their professional competence and expertise” (Selwyn et al., 2011, p. 322) formally and visibly to parents, it is necessary for teachers to employ other strategies in order to allow for parental input, and effective and efficient engagement of parents in their child’s education.

Summation and Discussion. Like many other teachers in classrooms across Alberta, my classroom is multicultural and diverse. It would be safe to speculate, therefore, that several of my students and their families may come from cultures that value these comprehensive narratives and face-to-face conversations as opposed to formal rubrics or graphic aids, while others would prefer more numeric or visual pieces of information. Hancock and Starker (2013) found that “parent involvement was most effective when multiple forms of communication were used” (p. 7), which varied between written text, phone calls, in-person dialogue, or any combination of these three channels. In my experience, ECSD teachers are discouraged from distributing their personal cell phone numbers to students or parents in the school community. Alternatively, teachers could seek to establish a computer- or mobile-based application, such as Remind, which allows teachers to contact individual students and/or parents, or a group of individuals through text messages within the application, without otherwise distributing any phone numbers or personal contact details to each other (Remind, n.d.).

Essentially, this teacher-initiated communication should evolve into beneficial dialogue that is “frequent, bidirectional and on-going” (Jiang et al., 2012, p. 63). Thus, communication does not necessarily need to be formal interviews and meetings; in contrast, many parents would likely prefer communication “in informal settings, where teachers conversed in friendly manner and the atmosphere is warm and welcoming” (Jiang et al., 2012, p. 64). With this in mind, and in light of the research on the advancement of electronic means and digital technologies that can bridge the gap between school and home, it is evident that developing an understanding of the cultural backgrounds of my students may prove to be invaluable when choosing to connect with the parent community in a meaningful way. Moreover, one would hope that these positive school-home connections would ultimately translate to a constructive influence on the students

themselves. In the next section, I will investigate just how these school–home connections can impact student achievement and motivation.

Student Academic Performance and Motivation

Researchers have offered several types of parental involvement, which include parenting, communicating, supporting school, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Connors & Epstein, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). My focus in this paper is on: parenting, which includes voicing parental educational expectations of their child and implementing household rules that promote students to be engaged with their school work; communicating, which references teacher-initiated contact related to the child’s academic progress and any other related concerns; and learning at home, which includes academic support outside of school and extracurricular educational opportunities (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Essentially, teacher-initiated communication may serve as one of the conduits through which parents can gain knowledge about their child’s abilities and progress over time. In particular, my final research question seeks to address this concept: What is the impact of teacher communication on student behaviour and academic performance? In order to answer this question, parenting, communicating, and learning at home are focused on in this portion of the paper as the research predominately looks at how these three specific types of involvement impact student learning and motivation at school. Thus, I will apply these understandings in this section as I examine the relationships that researchers have found between teacher communication and parental involvement, as well as subsequent student performance.

When considering how parents can participate in their child’s education, it is clear that regardless of different interpretations, involving parents in their child’s education incorporates a sense of parents physically becoming involved in numerous “aspects of their children’s social,

emotional, and academic development” (Castro et al., 2015, p. 34). Parental involvement, as it was referred to in the majority of the research studies presented here, concerns itself with the extent to which parents communicate their expectations of their child’s academic achievements, behavioural tendencies, and related variables directly with their child (Castro et al., 2015). A clear pattern that emerged from the studies suggests a dichotomy in parental involvement, where parents can either be reactive or proactive in their involvement (Castro et al., 2015; Olmstead, 2013). For instance, when teachers contact parents in order to communicate details about their child academically, they are seen to be engaging the parents in their child’s learning, which is a proactive measure (Olmstead, 2013). Thus, while there is “a positive association between a greater parental involvement and better academic results” (Castro et al., 2015, p. 38), the content of the communication is especially noteworthy since it can dramatically impact the subsequent involvement of parents. A meta-analysis of research, for instance, found that when a student’s school “attendance and participation in school activities” (Castro et al., 2015, p. 38) is the focus of discussion, academic achievement is not significantly affected. On the other hand, parents who read to their children, parents who show interest in school activities, and individual parenting styles are all factors that play an important role in influencing student achievement (Castro et al., 2015; Fan & Williams, 2010). Another study by Seitsinger et al. (2008) illustrated this same finding; that is, when teachers regularly communicate with parents of middle-school students, students report that parents become more engaged in their educational experiences and interested in supporting their academic achievement, as well as self-reports of “higher levels of academic efficacy, aspirations and expectations” (p. 501). Evidently, one of the strongest associations with high academic achievement is the parents’ “aspiration for their children” (Castro et al., 2015, p. 39). Fan and Chen (2001) also discussed how parental expectations of

their child's academic achievement is strongly associated with overall achievement. Teacher-initiated communication, therefore, has the potential to proactively reinforce positive and constructive behaviour, encourage children and their parents to set reachable goals, improve the child's sense of capability, and assertively promote a greater intrinsic motivation in the child to improve (Fan & Williams, 2010; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013).

In terms of gender differences, the research indicated an interesting analysis when investigating the roles of cultural background, as well as the gender of the parent with whom the teacher initiates contact with, and socioeconomic status. For instance, teacher-initiated parent involvement is especially "associated with higher achievement for students of racial minority" (Jeynes, 2005, p. 246). This author found that this positive relationship transcends gender, indicating that students, especially those belonging to a cultural minority, stand to benefit by the involvement of their parents in their education. Furthermore, Desimone (1999) found that dialogue between a mother or both parents is positively associated "with achievement, whereas talk with the father usually predicted a decrease in test scores" (p. 23). This information would be useful to teachers, as they may often have to choose one parent to contact according to the method they use. This will be further considered in the discussion that follows. In terms of socioeconomic status, parental aspirations for their child's future was only positively correlated with students belonging to the middle class, but inconsequential for students coming from low-income families (Desimone, 1999). On the other hand, even after taking into consideration socioeconomic status and previous academic performance, a study by Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo (2010) found that "schools that reported more positive partnership climates had higher levels of math achievement" (p. 39). Once again, this information is crucial to understanding

how different communicative techniques may be required of teachers in order to facilitate effective dialogue with parents and families who come from diverse backgrounds.

Academic Performance. Interestingly, parents who supervise their children while they complete their schoolwork at home may be surprised to learn that most studies find this has no statistical significance with their child's academic achievement (Castro et al., 2015, p. 39). One study by Desimone (1999) even found that supervising homework completion was statistically significant in predicting decreased achievement in Asian families with middle-school aged children. On the other hand, other research suggests that parental involvement in some subjects, such as mathematics, could help more students to complete their homework, and combined with communicating the student's grade on the homework task could help students improve their marks (Sirvani, 2007). This study posits that regularly communicating a student's grade with their parents motivated the students to complete their schoolwork and prepare for quizzes and tests (Sirvani, 2007), which suggests that parents who hold students at home accountable for their behaviour at school can translate to improved efforts to find academic success (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). Therefore, parents who receive organized and effective suggestions for improvement by teachers who are taking proactive measures "to cultivate instructional partnerships with parents" (Olmstead, 2013, p. 29), are more likely to provide parents with meaningful information that parents can use to support their child. By fostering these valuable learning strategies at home and providing parents with concrete suggestions to improve their school-related parenting procedures (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007), teacher-initiated communication will have the greatest impact on student achievement and provide "a means of reducing the achievement gap" (Jeynes, 2005, p. 261) between higher-performing and academically struggling students.

Students whose parents received information from teachers on a weekly basis “judged their own school performance as substantially lower than” (Kraft & Rogers, 2015, p. 60) those who did not, despite outperforming them. As previously mentioned, this calls to mind that the perception of teacher-initiated communication still holds a negative connotation in the minds of some students, which would illustrate why teacher – parent communication is not always well-received by students (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). Some students may “perceive communication to be further monitoring and behavior management” (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013, p. 217), in which case, increased communication from teachers to parents may have a detrimental effect instead.

Student Motivation. A number of studies bring to a light a positive relationship between teacher-initiated communication and overall student engagement (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Kraft & Rogers, 2015). A study by Kraft and Rogers (2015) found that in addition to increasing the number of students who received credit for high school summer courses, sending parents weekly messages via telephone calls or emails also impacted attendance behaviours, whereby the attendance of high school students in a summer school program improved substantially with regular teacher-initiated parental contact. In addition, Kraft and Rogers (2015) found that sharing information related to what students could improve on rather than simply sharing positive details with parents “was more effective at inducing students to earn course credit” (p. 55).

Furthermore, students whose parents received information from the teacher about how the student could improve “reported that their parents spoke to them more frequently about what they needed to do better in school” (p. 57). It appears, therefore, that providing parents with concrete suggestions for improvement paved the way for parent-child conversations about their academic progress. This potentially stands to impact student achievement if conversations about actionable strategies are regularly communicated with parents, such as details about outstanding

assignments or study strategies. In addition to regular communication about schoolwork, teachers have also been shown to use communicative platforms to dialogue about in-class participation and “students’ overall performance” (Kraft & Rogers, 2015, p. 58).

One potentially negative impact of weekly messages from teachers being communicated to parents of high school students found that teachers perceived weakened relationships with students (Kraft & Rogers, 2015). On the contrary, a similar study found that due to increased communication, both teachers and students reported “stronger teacher–student relationships, expanded parental involvement, and increased student motivation” (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013, p. 216), and that because of these relationships, students were more likely to seek help from the teacher when it was needed. Subsequently, improved teacher-student relationships also help reduce the amount of time teachers must dedicate to classroom management or to address inappropriate behaviours in class (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). Despite the varied findings in the research, it appears that choosing to proactively discuss topics like this on a regular basis may also help alleviate the stigma associated with the perception that teacher-initiated communication with parents predominately takes place when there is “cause for concern” (Kraft & Rogers, 2015, p. 58) or when problems have escalated (Desimone, 1999; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013).

Ultimately, teacher-initiated communication with parents is the first step in proactively engaging parents in their child’s education but understanding that it is a reciprocal relationship between school and home will allow for maximum “communication and collaboration between the two” (Olmstead, 2013, p. 30). Thus, the focus should be on proactive measures rather than reactive details “that focus on problems in the classroom” (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013, p. 218), which is negatively associated with student engagement (Fan & Williams, 2010). In this way,

teachers will ensure they maximize the benefits of their time spent communicating with parents, as well as the effectiveness of that communication.

Summation and Discussion. The research about teacher-initiated communication with parents and its ultimate impact on student achievement and motivation should be taken into consideration by teachers and schools when developing communication strategies or procedures for school-home contact. In addition to cultural preferences for communication channels, it appears that some racial differences, gender roles, and varied socioeconomic statuses could potentially impact the effectiveness of that communication (Desimone, 1999; Jeynes, 2005). With continuously changing family dynamics in our modern age, this information would be valuable to teachers, especially when choosing to contact home, since for example, the teacher may be forced to select only one individual parent to contact in a given situation. Knowing how this contact may impact the student is a powerful reminder of how communication can influence a student's educational perspectives. For example, according to Desimone (1999), if I am seeking to contact a parent regarding their child's academic performance, I should select the mother instead of the father; however, the research does not indicate which parent the teacher should contact when dealing with inappropriate student behaviour or inconsistent attendance. Moreover, what if one of the parents struggles to communicate in English, or works outside of the home and is removed from their child's day-to-day life on a regular basis? This research leads me to wonder whether initial teacher-parent contact at the beginning of a school year, such as "Meet the Teacher" nights or introductory letters written by teachers to their students and parents should also be used to establish parental preferences for contact. Perhaps having parents decide whether one or both of them should be contacted initially will help facilitate the communication and improve school-home relations.

As a classroom teacher, I also wonder about the student perception of teacher-initiated contact with parents, and how the research did not fully agree on its impact on teacher-student relationships, suggesting that in some cases teacher-student relationships improved, while others deteriorated (Desimone, 1999; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Kraft & Rogers, 2015). I also wonder whether my relationship with my students would be impacted if I informed students early in the school year about my intentions for contact with their parents. If they are aware that I will be in regular communication with their parents, and not just when there is “something wrong,” so to speak, perhaps that knowledge will encourage and enhance the teacher-student relationship instead.

In summary, students who are aware of their parents’ expectations academically and behaviourally are more likely to be engaged with their schoolwork (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013) and attend school regularly (Kraft & Rogers, 2015). In addition, teacher-initiated contact may help facilitate parent-child discussions about education and expectations, which may positively reinforce the child’s mindset about schooling and education (Fan & Williams, 2010). Armed with the knowledge of how communication can potentially impact our students’ academic performance, teachers and schools could work towards developing communicative strategies that maximize its benefits. In addition, one can hope that with regular teacher-parent contact, the stigma associated with teachers contacting home as bad or negative news stands to be overcome.

Summary

My experiences with teacher-initiated contact with parents have led me to inquire about the role that communication can play in the school community. This literature review sought to address my three research questions related to teacher-initiated communication with parents. First, how do different types of information communicated between teachers and parents impact

student learning and academic performance? Essentially, the type of information that is regularly communicated with parents ranges from grades (Kraft & Rogers, 2015; Sirvani, 2007; Sousa et al., 2014) to written or oral narratives about progress, areas of achievement, and suggestions for parents to support their child to improve behaviourally or academically (Fan & Williams, 2010; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Sousa et al., 2014; Swan et al., 2014). Second, which channels for communication between teachers and parents are preferred for supporting student learning and/or facilitating communication? Numerous channels exist nowadays for teachers to initiate this contact, including both formal and informal face-to-face communication (Jiang et al., 2012), email and telephone calls (Palts & Kalmus, 2015), and report cards (Sirvani, 2007; Sousa et al., 2014). Also becoming increasingly popular are digital databases accessible through computer- or mobile-based applications (Blau & Hameiri, 2017; Selwyn et al., 2011). Third, what is the impact of teacher communication on student behaviour and academic performance? While some of the research varied according to factors such as race, gender, or socioeconomic status, teacher-parent communication was generally found to be associated with more consistent school attendance (Kraft & Rogers, 2015), improved overall and subject-specific academic achievement (Castro et al., 2015, Fan & Chen, 2001; Seitsinger et al., 2008; Sirvani, 2007), and more intrinsically-motivated students with fewer behavioural concerns in the classroom (Jeynes, 2005; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Seitsinger et al., 2008; Sirvani, 2007).

Thus, in the interest of best serving students, teachers must be provided with a better understanding of how to avoid some of the negative aspects or pitfalls of open communication lines in order to effectively facilitate teacher-parent communication, improve teacher-parent-student relationships, and foster a positive school climate. In the section that follows, I will explore my rationale for a communication plan that I will use when initiating contact with

parents. I intend to develop a model that addresses the numerous aspects of teacher-initiated communication discussed in this paper, and that seeks to facilitate information between school and home in a manner that maintains clear and open-lines of communication, reflects parental preferences for communicative channels and frequency, as well as encouraging a positive environment that promotes student academic growth.

Project Proposal

Rationale: From Research to a Project Proposal

I have discussed the various matters that teachers tend to initiate contact with parents about, highlighted numerous means through which teachers can facilitate communication with parents, and offered insight into the impact that this communication can have on school-home relationships and student academic performance. My personal experiences as a classroom teacher along with the information provided in my review of the literature have encouraged me to explore further how these communication practices could potentially be permeated in my teaching practice, as well as in my colleagues' practices. To establish these practices successfully, I must reconcile the various research findings in a way that provides a better understanding of how communication with parents can be used as a tool to establish parental awareness of their child's learning progress, to collaborate with parents so that they are better equipped to support their children in areas of growth, and to motivate students to become more engaged in the classroom (Fan & Williams, 2010; Kraft & Rogers, 2015). Furthermore, the literature also reviewed some issues associated with teacher-initiated communication, including time limitations and the potential drawbacks of teachers' digital footprints (Palts & Kalmus, 2015).

It is imperative to understand, therefore, how a balance between teacher workload and open lines of communication should be structured in order to maximize the benefits of the communication. These cumulative understandings have led me to the project proposal that follows. In short, I will develop a communication template for use when initiating contact with parents. This communication template will specifically reflect the findings from the literature and will seek to survey parents in order to establish their preferred communication preferences

including channels, frequency, and format. By catering to the parental preferences, teachers can provide information in a meaningful way to parents and foster a positive school-home relationship in a method that is respectful of the potential cultural differences and promotes regular, efficient contact between school and home.

The Project

Recall the three research questions that guided the literature review and formed the basis for this project:

1. How do different types of information communicated between teachers and parents impact student learning and academic performance?
2. Which channels for communication between teachers and parents are preferred for supporting student learning and/or facilitating communication?
3. What is the impact of teacher communication on student behaviour and academic performance?

Based on the review of literature, and the understanding that parental preferences for communication can vary from teacher perspectives (Jiang et al., 2012), it is important to determine the opinions of parents on communication practices. Boudah (2011) refers to this research method as descriptive, which relies “on responses of participants to specific written or interview questions” (p. 153). Although no formal research will be taking place here, I believe my research proposal could form “the basis for additional comparisons and experimentation” (Boudah, 2011, p. 153) that seeks to make connections between teacher-initiated communication and its impact on school-home relationships, and student behaviour and achievement. Thus, in order to establish a baseline of parent preferences for school-home communication, I will first begin by providing parents with a brief and concise outline of the various communication

platforms. More importantly, the descriptions of each platform will detail what types of information can be communicated through them, their frequency, and how this ultimately relates back to student behaviour and academic achievement. Second, I will administer a survey or questionnaire to parents in order to gauge their preferences and form my communication practices as a teacher. Finally, I provide a thorough discussion of how these communication practices could be theoretically implemented in a middle-school classroom.

Discussing the Types of Communication with Parents

In order for parents to develop an understanding of how teachers may seek to communicate with them, it is important for them to recognize the different platforms that exist, the purpose of each platform, and how the platforms translate to information about their child. I recognize that the dissemination of communication types and platforms – and clarifying why the different formats exist – is crucial to establishing a common understanding between home and school. While it is important to recognize that different school districts may have access to various communication platforms, one can see how this project proposal could easily be adapted to any school setting. Based on my experience as a teacher in the Edmonton Catholic School District (ECSD), my discussion will focus on the following platforms: PowerSchool, school website, email, Google Classroom, the Remind application, phone calls, and in-person conversations during either formal or informal meetings. The information provided in this discussion would need to be shared with parents at the beginning of the school year in order to establish a common understanding of school-home communication platforms and types. In addition, it is important that parents understand the rationale of why these different types exist, and how each platform can be used to improve school-home communication and collaboration in an efficient manner.

PowerSchool. PowerSchool is an online database or portal that allows parents to pay school fees, monitor their child’s attendance, contact teachers, and view the student’s class schedule. In addition, PowerSchool acts as an “online gradebook,” which parents can use to monitor their child’s progress on homework, quizzes, assignments, and tests. In addition to numeric scores for each assignment, teachers can also include written comments with the assessments that may provide proactive suggestions for areas of growth, targeted support for improvement, or comment on the student’s progress to date. In fact, a colleague of mine used to write suggestions for improvements on students’ quizzes and tests; however, now he includes the written comment in PowerSchool so that both the parent and the student can have access to his advice and can easily refer back to it in order to track the student’s progress. Because of its accessibility – through any mobile, tablet, or computer with internet access – and its regular weekly updates, both parents and students are encouraged to monitor the student’s progress academically throughout the school year. Furthermore, report cards are distributed online through this application. Parents are provided with a summative report card in January and June that they can view at their convenience. The report cards provide a numerical grade for each class based on the student’s academic performance, as well as a list of government-directed student learner outcomes and details of their progress in that outcome, as shown in Figure 1.

| Science 9 | | | | |
|--|---------|---------|------------|-------------|
| Mark: | S1 Mark | S2 Mark | Final Exam | Final Mark |
| | 87 | | | |
| Learner Outcomes: | | | | |
| Analyzes and evaluates mechanisms affecting the distribution of potentially harmful substances within an environment | | | | Exemplary |
| Describes and interprets patterns in chemical reactions | | | | Exemplary |
| Describes and represents elements, compounds and chemical reactions using formulas, symbols, models, etc. | | | | Approaching |
| Identifies and evaluates information related to an issue in which environmental chemistry plays a major role | | | | Exemplary |

Figure 1. Sample view of a student report card, including grade and achievement indicators

Note. Adapted from *Assessment of Learning*. Copyright (2018) by the Edmonton Catholic School District.

In addition, parents are provided with an explanation of the various achievement categories so that they can better understand how their children are progressing in their learning, as shown in Figure 2.

| Level of Achievement Indicator | Description/Criteria |
|---|--|
| Exemplary | The student... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates in-depth understanding of the learning outcomes from the program of studies • Applies concepts in a wider variety of learning situations, including new contexts • Uses required skills and strategies effectively |
| Proficient Meets grade level expectations for this point in the school year | The student... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates solid understanding of the learning outcomes from the program of studies • Applies concepts in most learning situations • Uses most required skills and strategies effectively |
| Approaching | The student... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates solid understanding of the learning outcomes from the program of studies, and may require additional guidance and support • Applies concepts in some learning situations • Uses some required skills and strategies appropriately |
| Beginning | The student... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates limited or incomplete understanding of the learning outcomes from the program of studies • Applies concepts in learning situations with repeated guidance and support • Uses required skills and strategies with repeated guidance and support |

Figure 2. Explanation of achievement indicators used on an ECSD report card

Note. Adapted from *Assessment of Learning*. Copyright (2018) by the Edmonton Catholic School District.

Studies show that parents who are proactively involved in their children's education are more likely to positively influence student academic achievement (Castro et al., 2015; Fan & Williams, 2010). Thus, parents are encouraged to monitor their child's academic progress, review any teacher comments and suggestions for improvement with their child, and contact the teacher if further information or clarification is needed. This proactive application of

communication that seeks to support students and parents with concrete suggestions or proposals for improvement is positively associated with more motivated students, improved classroom behaviour, improved academic achievement and more efficient collaboration between school and home (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Olmstead, 2013).

School website. The school website contains detailed information, including school calendars, school-wide events, athletics updates, monthly school newsletters, information about the school, and contact information for teachers. This is accessible through any mobile, tablet, or computer with internet access and is updated at least once a month.

While parent-child conversations about school activities do not directly impact academic achievement, studies have shown that when parents show interest in school activities, they are effectively endorsing the significance of education to their children and promoting the understanding that educational and academic success matters (Castro et al., 2015; Fan & Williams, 2010). This internalization may subsequently encourage children to become more intrinsically motivated to succeed (Seitsinger et al., 2008). Thus, parents are encouraged to be aware of school activities as one way of engaging their children in educational experiences and promoting their aspirations for their children's academic success.

Email. Email can be used for quick "check-ins" between teachers and parents. With the advent of online gradebooks like PowerSchool, the content of my email messages with parents tends to be less academically centered and instead focuses on other topics, such as behaviour issues, attendance, or general progress updates. This effectively maximizes the limited teacher time that can be spent on emailing parents on a regular basis. Both parents can be contacted via email when applicable, unless otherwise directed by the parents. In addition, students may use

email to contact teachers if they are absent from school in order to find out what they missed in class, submit outstanding assignments, if applicable, and any other general inquiries.

Studies have shown that email can provide an avenue for communication that is welcoming to parents and allows for a two-direction exchange of information when needed (Jiang et al., 2012). Email can be used for beneficial dialogue between school and home that is ongoing, regularly occurring, and allows for both teacher and parent input. It will provide parents with an accessible channel to initiate communication, even if they are away from the school or are unable to communicate with the teacher otherwise during school hours. Email, therefore, remains an open channel through which teachers and parents can respond to on their own time. This flexibility, when compared to other channels such as phone calls, allows teachers the time to think about their email messages or responses to parents and construct a meaningful and well-worded message to parents. Although this process can be considered time-consuming (Palts & Kalmus, 2015), limiting this method of communication to be utilized when there is a legitimate topic to dialogue with parents about will help ensure that parents recognize the importance of the communication (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013), and will encourage more effective parental input and engagement (Selwyn et al., 2011).

Google Classroom. Google Classroom is predominately used as a “digital classroom” that supplements in-class activities. In addition to sharing homework assignments, notes, and video links, teachers are also able to post announcements and share eTextbooks and other resources to supplement the in-class discussions and learning topics. Google Classroom is accessible through online applications on a mobile phone or tablet, as well as on a computer with internet access. Parents can be provided with a special link to join the classroom on their own digital devices that

will allow them to monitor their child's learning as well. Most teachers update the content in their Google Classrooms regularly, usually about one or two times per week.

Similar to the benefits of PowerSchool and the school website, Google Classroom can be used by parents to develop a better understanding of the day-to-day learning and allows parents to dialogue with their children about their educational experiences. For parents who may not be as familiar with the subject content, Google Classroom can also be used by parents to develop an understanding of the lesson content and support their child with difficulties when needed. Studies show that students will interpret these conversations as a reminder of the importance of education and will motivate students to improve academically (Fan & Williams, 2010).

Remind. Remind is a digital application that teachers can share with their students and parents. It is similar to a messaging application that can be used on mobile phones and tablets, but it does not require the release of personal phone numbers. This application is mainly used by teachers to share brief announcements and reminders with students and parents, such as reminders about picture day, or to wear proper footwear for the Science experiment the next day, etc. The application allows for easily accessible channels for communication with prompt responses. Students and parents can also privately message the teacher if they have any questions or inquiries. For example, one student who was away on holiday for an extended period used the Remind application to photograph his Science homework and send it in to me to review quickly and provide quick feedback about his progress, as well as to ask clarifying questions about challenging concepts. Ultimately, it simplified his transition back to school as he was able to maintain communication with me throughout his time away.

While more detailed conversations will be reserved for email, phone calls, or in-person dialogue, any "quick" student or parent questions can be communicated and promptly responded

to using the Remind messaging application. While privacy is an issue that can often arise with sharing personal mobile phone numbers (Palts & Kalmus, 2015), this application respects each member’s privacy, and allows for prompt, two-directional conversation between teachers, parents, and/or students. In order to set-up parent and student accounts, instructions for downloading the application on their cell phone and joining the digital “teacher’s classroom” will be provided to parents and students in the form of a letter sent home, as shown in Figure 3. A sample letter for parents is provided in Appendix A, as well as instructions for parents and students to join using their personal mobile devices.

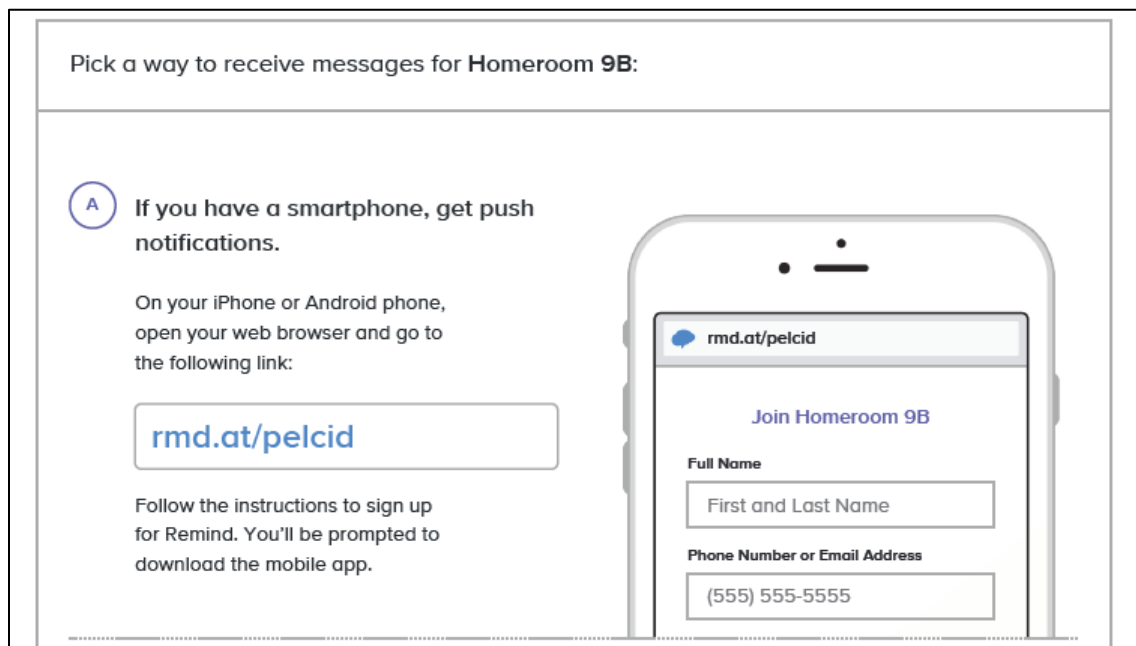


Figure 3. Sample instructions for parents and students to join the Remind application

Note. Adapted from *Remind Parent Letter*. Copyright (2016) by Remind.

Phone calls. When appropriate, phone calls will be used to discuss matters that are too intricate for email and that may require more involved parental input in order to adequately deal with any issues at hand. Drafting complex emails can often be time-consuming (Palts & Kalmus, 2015), and phone calls or in-person conversations may be a more time-efficient and convenient

method for school-home communication. Phone calls are made from school phone numbers, so they are limited to the daytime business hours. In addition, phone calls will be limited to times when there are authentic and meaningful updates or conversations required between teachers and parents so as to respect the limited time of both teachers and parents, and to ensure more genuine and proactive dialogue is occurring (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013).

In-person conversations. In-person dialogue remains available as a channel for communication with parents throughout the school year. It has been used in the past during informal meetings such as Meet the Teacher nights, or casual conversations before or after school. This dialogue has also been applied in more formal scenarios, such as one-on-one teacher-parent meetings to discuss student progress. Furthermore, these in-person conversations are always available upon teacher or parent request throughout the school year.

By attending school functions and meeting with teachers, parents are demonstrating the value of education to their children, which as previously indicated, may promote their children to become more intrinsically motivated in school and subsequently improve academically (Fan & Williams, 2010).

Summary. A sample letter that summarizes the information provided here is included in Appendix A, a preview of which is provided in Figure 4. The letter is intended to provide parents – and subsequently students – with a general understanding of the teacher’s communicative goals between school and home. Establishing the teacher’s communicative practices early in a school year is crucial to combat the widespread view that teachers only contact home when there is something “wrong” or where there is cause for concern (Kraft & Rogers, 2015), and ensures that students are aware that their teacher will be in regular, direct contact with their parents throughout the entire school year.

Dear parents and guardian(s),

My name is _____ and I am your child's _____ teacher this school year. It is my sincere desire to provide all of my students with a positive and stimulating educational experience throughout the year, and to ensure that your child's achievements as they progress through these experiences is regularly and clearly communicated with you.

I understand that your time is incredibly valuable, especially in the busyness of day-to-day life. As such, I can appreciate that this time must be spent wisely and efficiently. It is my goal that I will become a more efficient and effective communicator with you in order to ensure that the information being exchanged between school and home is meaningful and relevant, especially to you and your child. In order to best meet this goal, I would like to provide you with a list of the numerous channels for communication that we will rely on this year, including:

- PowerSchool
- School Website
- Email
- Google Classroom and/or Remind
- Phone Calls and/or In-person Conversations (either formal or informal meetings)

Each of these communication channels will be further broken down in the attached document, with a description of the types of information that can be communicated through each channel.

In order to promote an open, collaborative environment between school and home, I will also be seeking your valuable input in a future survey. I am asking for your help to ensure that I am well informed of any details or information that can be used to support your child in their learning experiences at school. In addition, it is my hope to provide you with information that can be used to support your child at home, and to encourage you and your child to become more

Figure 4. Cover letter for parents

While the cover letter provides the necessary background information regarding the communicative channels and effectively establishes the teacher's communication practices, it is also necessary for teachers to provide parents with a breakdown of the different platforms, how to access the information in these platforms, and the purpose of each platform. A sample informational document that can be attached to the cover letter is also provided in Appendix A and showcased in Figure 5.

| Platform | Accessibility | Details |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| PowerSchool | Mobile, tablets, or computers with internet access via internet browsers or downloadable applications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Online database for paying school fees, monitoring attendance, teacher contact information, viewing student schedules ● Main resource for tracking student academic progress, including student grades and viewing report cards (released in January and June) ● Regularly updated (once or twice a week) |
| School Website | Mobile, tablets, or computers with internet access via internet browsers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Online website containing school-related detailed information, including school calendars, school-wide events, athletics updates, monthly school newsletters, information about the school, and contact information for teachers ● Regularly updated (on a weekly basis) |
| Email | Mobile, tablets, or computers with internet access via internet browsers or downloadable email applications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mainly used for school-home communication regarding behaviour issues, attendance, or general progress updates, etc. ● Parents to establish preferences for primary and secondary contacts ● Used as needed |

Figure 5. Information for parents regarding communication types and platforms

After explaining the different channels for communication and the type of information that is provided in each one, it is important for parents to understand the rationale for each platform. In other words, they should be provided with a brief, yet concise view of the research provided in the review of literature in this paper. Specifically, by providing parents (and subsequently, students) with proactive measures to improve in challenging areas, parents can become more involved and supportive of their child's education.

Studies show that parents who are vocal about their expectations for their child's schooling and show interest in their child's education are more likely to have an impact on the academic achievement of their child (Jeynes, 2005; Olmstead, 2013). In other words, children of parents who show sincere interest in their schooling and provide supportive environments that enhance their learning preferences are more likely to set attainable goals, display positive and

constructive behaviour towards their learning, become more intrinsically motivated to succeed, and will improve academically over time (Fan & Williams, 2010; Ingram et al., 2007; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). Thus, in addition to the description of each platform, I will also include a summary piece regarding the purpose and potential impact that the teacher-initiated communication could have, as well as the overall motivation behind this information piece. A sample of this is shown in Figure 6.

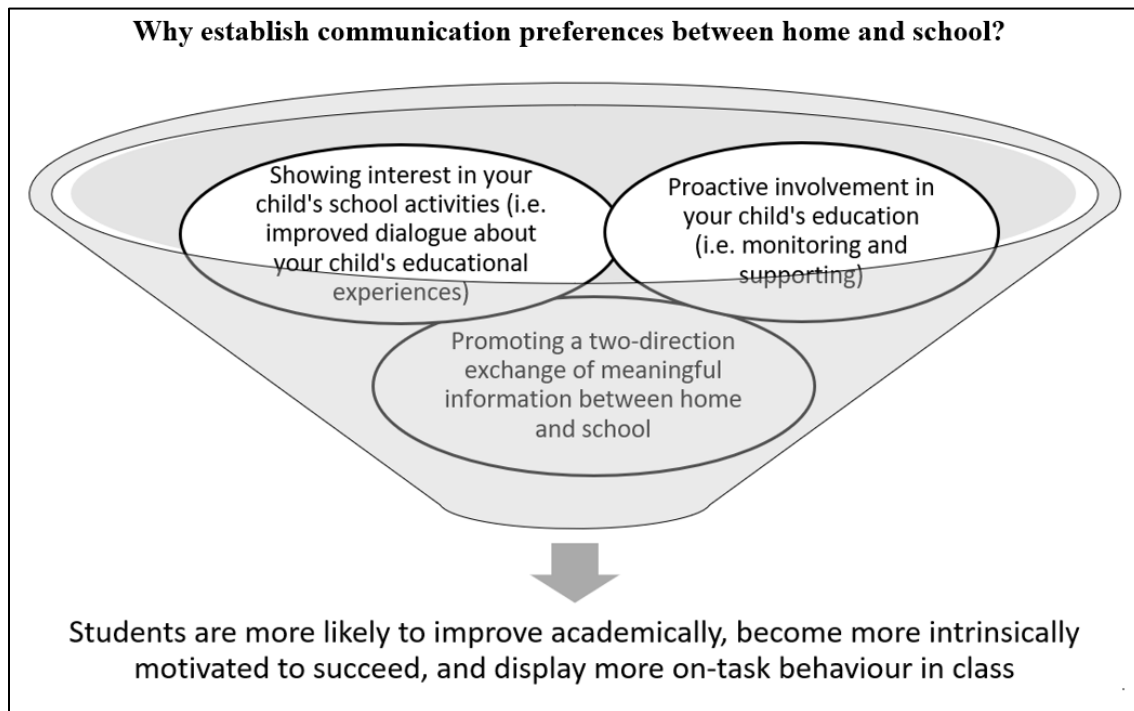


Figure 6. The motivation behind this project

It is my hope that parents will be able to refer to this informational piece throughout the year, as it outlines which platform can be used to discuss different topics. For instance, during one parent-teacher interview, one of my student's parents became aware of just how much information was accessible to them on PowerSchool! Even though they were able to access it before this time, they did not know the purpose behind having this online database. After this, the student's motivation to succeed improved when they knew that their parents were checking

in on a regular basis to monitor their child's progress. By explaining the different types of platforms, it is my hope that parents will then become better informed about their child's education and will be better able to provide the support that their child needs to succeed. This would be especially helpful for parents who are not familiar with online databases that provide extensive details about the student's progress.

Parent Survey

As previously discussed, limited time is a factor that impacts both teachers and parents and may potentially restrict open lines of communication between school and home environments. To accommodate for this factor, it is important for teachers to establish parental communication preferences, including types and frequency, especially at the beginning of a new school year. Thus, I propose that parents respond to a teacher-initiated survey to determine what their preferences are for school-home communication. In particular, the survey seeks to establish preferred modes of contact, such as email, phone calls, or digital resources such as PowerSchool or Remind. In addition, it looks at the desired frequency of this communication, and verifies whether teachers should initiate contact with one parent or both. Boudah (2011) suggests that creating questions that "yield information for the researcher about the reality being studied" (p. 161), such as parental communication preferences, are crucial in descriptive research. Furthermore, the question format of the survey could potentially lead to "structured responses and unstructured responses" (p. 162). Structured questions "include options for responses" (Boudah, 2011, p. 162), such as multiple-option surveys. On the other hand, unstructured responses "are open-ended and require respondents to create answers" (p. 162). I do believe there is value in both types of responses; however, I am also cognizant of the high immigrant and English as a Second Language population in my current school and how this could impact

school-home communication as well as survey completion rates (Jiang et al., 2012; Sousa et al., 2014). Subsequently, the language proficiency of the parent community could limit their ability to elaborate on communication preferences in a written format, and I must consider this as I decide on the communication survey format. To accommodate for a range of English-language proficiency, I will minimize the proportion of unstructured responses compared to structured responses, while still allowing the parents who choose to do so to provide me with information about their child as they see fit.

For this survey, therefore, I first recognized a need to identify which parent(s) teachers should contact first, as well as that parent's preferred contact method, as shown in Figure 7. This decision was based on research by Desimone (1999) that found contacting certain parents first regarding a given issue could have various impacts on student academic performance.

| |
|---|
| <p>Parent/Guardian Name: _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Primary Contact (both parents can be primary contact)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Secondary Contact</p> <p>The best way to reach this parent/guardian is (check all that apply):</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Phone: _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Email: _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</p> <p>Parent/Guardian Name: _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Primary Contact (both parents can be primary contact)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Secondary Contact</p> <p>The best way to reach this parent/guardian is (check all that apply):</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Phone: _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Email: _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</p> |
|---|

Figure 7. Establishing primary and secondary parental contacts

Since parents would have already been provided with a list of available communicative platforms, I would then proceed to determine which channels would be most important for parents, and subsequently, which areas I should dedicate my time to updating and sharing with parents throughout the school year, as shown in Figure 8.

| |
|---|
| <p>Which of the following methods of school-home communication will parents/guardians and/or children use or have access to throughout the school year (check all that apply)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> PowerSchool<input type="checkbox"/> School Website<input type="checkbox"/> Email<input type="checkbox"/> Google Classroom<input type="checkbox"/> Remind<input type="checkbox"/> Phone Calls<input type="checkbox"/> In-person Conversations/Teacher-Parent Meetings<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____ |
|---|

Figure 8. Determining parental accessibility

Reviewing with parents the different means of communication is important in order to reiterate the different formats through which information can be communicated. I believe it will help them to recognize how each platform is best suited for sharing that particular type of information.

In addition to recognizing the different formats, developing an understanding of how frequently those platforms will be accessed is also important (Figure 9). For instance, a teacher in ECSD must update PowerSchool grades regularly in order to remain up-to-date with the child's current grade in that particular class. In other words, it does not directly matter whether parents access PowerSchool once a week or once a month; that is, it is the teacher's professional obligation to keep track of the student's grade in PowerSchool on a regular basis. On the other hand, some parents may prefer to have a monthly update about their child's progress that extends beyond the written comments made available in PowerSchool. In that case, teachers would have

to develop a schedule to allow themselves the time to draft an email that can be used to indicate student progress in a brief, yet succinct manner.

Please consider how frequently you prefer to access or be contacted through each of the following methods.

| Communication Platform | Weekly | Monthly | As Needed | Never |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| PowerSchool | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| School Website | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Email | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Google Classroom | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Remind Application | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Phone Calls | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| In-person/Teacher-Parent Meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify): _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Figure 9. Parental preferences for contact frequency

Alternatively, if a teacher is unable to commit to a regular schedule for communication due to time limitations, or any other reasons, perhaps they can establish what the parental preferences are for communication instead, as shown in Figure 10.

Which **three** modes of communication are most preferred by the parents/guardians (check three options)?

- PowerSchool
- School Website
- Email
- Google Classroom
- Remind
- Phone Calls
- In-person Conversations/Teacher-Parent Meetings
- Other (please specify): _____

Figure 10. Parental preferences for communication

At the very least, this would allow parents and teachers to communicate in a way that is efficient, effective, and best suited to their schedules and personal preferences.

Finally, I believe that parents should be able to provide input in an unstructured way that is not limited by a few options to select from. These unstructured responses, as shown in Figure 11, will allow for maximum collaboration between school and home, and will give parents the autonomy to voice any other information or concerns regarding communication that were not addressed otherwise in the survey.

| |
|---|
| <p>Do you have any special concerns about your child, including academically, socially, behaviourally, medically, etc.?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>Is there anything else I should know about your child?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
|---|

Figure 11. Optional open-ended parental questions

I have included a sample parent survey letter in Appendix A that incorporates all of the elements of the survey so far. It could be adjusted to the particular school setting, and the various formats of communication could be re-worded to accommodate for platforms already being used by the school or teacher.

Implementing Communication Strategies in a Classroom

Ideally, the majority of the parents in a classroom would respond to the parent survey discussed in the previous section. It would then be important to review the results of the survey and determine if it is possible to categorize students based on their parental preferences for communication. For example, if a group of parents indicate that PowerSchool is their preferred method for communication, I would ensure that while assessing quizzes or tests, I must provide written comments, such as progress statements, that can be accessed through PowerSchool. This

will provide students and parents with information regarding positive progress or identifying areas of growth with proactive suggestions for improvement. In doing so, parents would only need to access one platform in order to view their child's academic progress and receive written suggestions for improvement. This simplifies the process of communication and is beneficial for teachers since both parents and students can access this information through the same platform. In addition, I believe that teachers will become more streamlined in their practices as they become accustomed to the parental preferences. For instance, while I assess a quiz or test, I could have PowerSchool open on a computer at the same time. This would allow me to enter student comments directly into PowerSchool simultaneously instead of writing the comment in an email to be sent to parents at a later time.

Similarly, if parents indicate that email is a preferred format for communication, teachers may benefit by developing a "bank" of comments that can be used. In the literature review I discussed how teachers tend to spend a lot of time and effort on specifically wording their email messages to parents in a clear and respectful manner (Palts & Kalmus, 2015). It would be helpful if administrators provided their teachers with time to brainstorm general statements that could be adjusted to the particular context and emailed to parents when needed. For instance, Figure 12 shows a basic message regarding student behaviour that could be adjusted accordingly and either emailed to parents or used as a script when phoning parents. By having the basic message already, it cuts down on the time that the teacher would require creating an email or message.

_____ demonstrates a proficient understanding of _____, but I noticed that he/she tends to be distracted by his/her peers, which may be affecting his/her homework completion and grades. I have subsequently moved _____ to sit closer to the front of the classroom, away from his/her peers. If there is anything else that you know has helped _____ to focus in class, please let me know as I would be happy to try out other strategies as well.

Figure 12. Sample parent email

If teachers then develop a “bank” of comments that can be referred to regarding different academic or behavioural issues, these can then be shared amongst the staff, which would drastically cut down on using up limited teacher time.

On a personal note, when I am phoning parents to speak about an issue or concern that affects more than one student, I find phone calls to be the most time consuming, especially because I am often limited to phoning parents immediately before or after school. For instance, consider the example of talkative students brought up in Figure 11. I could draft an email and send it to all the parents of the students involved in a fraction of the time that it would take me to phone each individual parent. It is imperative, therefore, that teachers consider which format would be the most time-efficient, especially when parents have indicated multiple preferences for communication.

Impact and Future Steps

It is my hope that this communication survey could be piloted with my students and their parents in the near future. Because of the nature of the content, it would ideally need to be distributed to parents near the beginning of a new school year or term. I would be able to adjust some of the platforms as technological advancements change over time. For example, I have been recently made aware that Google Classroom, which can be downloaded on to a mobile phone as an application, can be used to make announcements to individual or groups of students and/or their parents. In addition, if the individual has the application downloaded on their device, they could receive a “notification” on their phone to indicate a new post or announcement has been made. Thus, due to its accessibility, it may encourage me to move away from the Remind app and use Google Classroom in its place. In addition, depending on how teachers feel about maintaining the open lines of communication with parents, some of the information in the parent

letter or in the survey may need to be adjusted accordingly. For instance, if a teacher knows they are unable to maintain weekly email updates, they should remove that option from the survey to ensure parents understand that some forms of communication that are more involved and require additional time are not achievable due to their time involvement. Finally, while this survey is designed for a middle school classroom, it could easily be tailored for even elementary or high school settings given how broad and common the communicative platforms are. Ultimately, I believe that when teachers learn what the research indicates about the value of teacher-initiated communication with parents, they will realize that educators simply cannot afford to pass up on a valuable opportunity to promote parent and student engagement in a positive manner, and potentially impact the educational success that our students will experience.

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Appendix A

Sample Cover Letter

Dear parents and guardian(s),

My name is _____ and I am your child's _____ teacher this school year. It is my sincere desire to provide all of my students with a positive and stimulating educational experience throughout the year, and to ensure that your child's achievements as they progress through these experiences is regularly and clearly communicated with you.

I understand that your time is incredibly valuable, especially in the busyness of day-to-day life. As such, I can appreciate that this time must be spent wisely and efficiently. It is my goal that I will become a more efficient and effective communicator with you in order to ensure that the information being exchanged between school and home is meaningful and relevant, especially to you and your child. In order to best meet this goal, I would like to provide you with a list of the numerous channels for communication that we will rely on this year, including:

- PowerSchool
- School Website
- Email
- Google Classroom and/or Remind
- Phone Calls and/or In-person Conversations (either formal or informal meetings)

Each of these communication channels will be further broken down in the attached document, with a description of the types of information that can be communicated through each channel.

In order to promote an open, collaborative environment between school and home, I will also be seeking your valuable input in a future survey. I am asking for your help to ensure that I am well informed of any details or information that can be used to support your child in their learning experiences at school. In addition, it is my hope to provide you with information that can be used to support your child at home, and to encourage you and your child to become more proactively engaged in their education.

I ask that you please review the communication platforms attached to this letter. In the forthcoming weeks, I will also send a survey home with your child. Please complete and return the survey form regarding yours and/or your child's communication preferences. In addition, I am also available at school via telephone (_____) or email (_____) if you have any further questions or comments.

Thank you,

Teacher name

School phone number and teacher email address

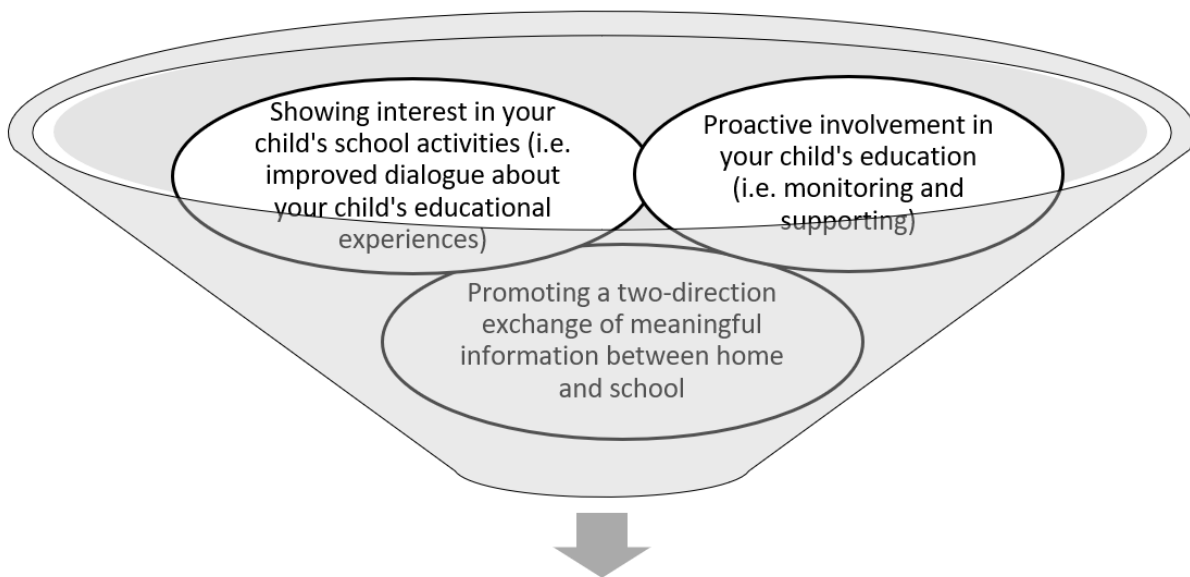
Sample Communicative Information Handout for Parents

| Platform | Accessibility | Details |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| PowerSchool | Mobile, tablets, or computers with internet access via internet browsers or downloadable applications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online database for paying school fees, monitoring attendance, teacher contact information, viewing student schedules • Main resource for tracking student academic progress, including student grades and viewing report cards (released in January and June) • Regularly updated (once or twice a week) |
| School Website | Mobile, tablets, or computers with internet access via internet browsers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online website containing school-related detailed information, including school calendars, school-wide events, athletics updates, monthly school newsletters, information about the school, and contact information for teachers • Regularly updated (on a weekly basis) |
| Email | Mobile, tablets, or computers with internet access via internet browsers or downloadable email applications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly used for school-home communication regarding behaviour issues, attendance, or general progress updates, etc. • Parents to establish preferences for primary and secondary contacts • Used as needed |
| Google Classroom | Mobile, tablets, or computers with internet access via internet browsers or downloadable applications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online classroom that supplements in-class activities, including homework assignments, notes, video links, teacher announcements, eTextbooks, and other additional resources that support learning • Regularly updated (once or twice a week) |
| Remind | Mobile devices with internet access via downloadable applications, or as email messages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital messaging application that does not require the release of personal phone numbers • Used to share brief announcements and reminders with students and parents, and can also be used by students and parents to privately message teachers with brief questions or inquiries in a text-message style • Used as needed |
| Phone Calls | Telephones or mobile phones | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly used for school-home communication when appropriate (either in conjunction with or in place of email) • Limited to daytime business hours • Used as needed |
| In-person Conversations | Formal or informal parent-teacher meetings or chats | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly used when face-to-face dialogue is most appropriate, or the format is convenient • Used as needed |

In summary,

- **PowerSchool** will be predominately used to communicate student academic progress to students and parents in the form of grades, as well as brief comments regarding areas of excellence, areas of growth, and concrete suggestions for improvement.
- **Email, phone calls, and in-person conversations** will be used collaboratively to provide parents with meaningful suggestions and information that they can use to support their child in their learning at home, and to provide teachers with suggestions for previously successful strategies that can be applied in the school setting. I will also rely on email, phone calls, or in-person conversations at the parent's discretion to discuss academic progress in greater detail, as well as any other issues or concerns (i.e. attendance or behavioural issues).
- **School websites** are used to share general information about school activities and will not include individual student progress or details.
- **Google Classroom** will mainly be used as an "online classroom" to supplement in-class learning and activities.
- **Remind** will be used occasionally to remind students and parents of important dates, and to provide a channel for "quick" or brief questions and answers.

Why establish communication preferences between home and school?



Students are more likely to improve academically, become more intrinsically motivated to succeed, and display more on-task behaviour in class

Sample Remind Application Handout for Parents and Students

_____ Homeroom Reminders via Text Notifications

I know life can get hectic once school and extra-curricular activities start up for the year.

To help keep everyone informed, I use a text-reminder app that will allow me to periodically send out homeroom and school reminders via text message. The best part is it works just like a text-messaging app, but no one ever has to share out their personal cell phone numbers in order to join! Please see the back of this sheet for sign-up instructions. **This sign-up is available to students and parents.**

This is not mandatory, it is just something to help everyone remember to bring items or forms back to school or remind you if there is a special event happening such as Picture Day. If you are absent from school, you can also send me a message to figure out what you missed! If you have any questions, please email me or call me at school.

Wishing you a great year!

Teacher name

School phone number and teacher email address

Sample Remind Application Parent and Student Instructions

Sign up for important updates from Miss P. El Cid.

Get information for **Homeroom 9B** right on your phone—not on handouts.

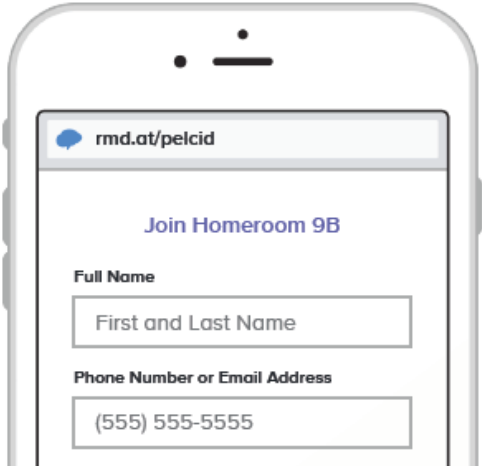
Pick a way to receive messages for **Homeroom 9B**:

A If you have a smartphone, get push notifications.

On your iPhone or Android phone, open your web browser and go to the following link:

rmd.at/pelcid

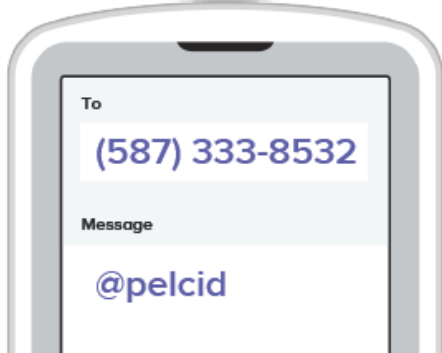
Follow the instructions to sign up for Remind. You'll be prompted to download the mobile app.



B If you don't have a smartphone, get text notifications.

Text the message [@pelcid](https://rmd.at/pelcid) to the number [\(587\) 333-8532](tel:5873338532).

* Standard text message rates apply.



Don't have a mobile phone? Go to rmd.at/pelcid on a desktop computer to sign up for email notifications.

Note. Adapted from *Remind Parent Letter*. Copyright (2016) by Remind.

Sample Parent Survey

Date _____

Dear parents/guardians,

I am very excited to be teaching your child this year! Please fill out and return this form so that I can keep in touch with you throughout the school year.

Thank you,

Teacher name _____

School phone number and teacher email address _____

Student Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

- Primary Contact (both parents can be primary contact)
- Secondary Contact

The **best** way to reach this parent/guardian is (check all that apply):

- Phone: _____
- Email: _____
- Other: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

- Primary Contact (both parents can be primary contact)
- Secondary Contact

The **best** way to reach this parent/guardian is (check all that apply):

- Phone: _____
- Email: _____
- Other: _____

Which of the following methods of school-home communication will parents/guardians and/or children use or have access to throughout the school year (check all that apply)?

- PowerSchool
- School Website
- Email
- Google Classroom
- Remind

- Phone Calls
- In-person Conversations/Teacher-Parent Meetings
- Other (please specify): _____

Please consider how frequently you prefer to access or be contacted through each of the following methods.

| Communication Platform | Weekly | Monthly | As Needed | Never |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| PowerSchool | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| School Website | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Email | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Google Classroom | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Remind Application | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Phone Calls | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| In-person/Teacher-Parent Meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify): _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Which **three** modes of communication are most preferred by the parents/guardians (check three options)?

- PowerSchool
- School Website
- Email
- Google Classroom
- Remind
- Phone Calls
- In-person Conversations/Teacher-Parent Meetings
- Other (please specify): _____

Do you have any special concerns about your child, including academically, socially, behaviourally, medically, etc.?

Is there anything else I should know about your child?
