

Increasing Parent Involvement by Using a Variety of Communication Tools

by

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Abstract

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Parental involvement is recognized as a way to improve students' educational achievement. One method to improve parental involvement is to develop strong communication between home and school. Using traditional methods is no longer effective at reaching the majority of parents due to their busy schedules and other barriers. Almost all parents have Internet access and most have smart phones that allow them to access information conveniently on their own schedule. With the increase use of social media to communicate, it is important that schools are using these communication tools to provide information to all stakeholders, while keeping the teacher's workflow as simplified as possible. This project concentrates on using Facebook, Twitter, and email effectively and appropriately to keep parents connected to their child's education.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Personal Framework

I started my teaching career seven years ago. The district had just integrated BCeSIS, a student information system. This was a piece of software, which centrally hosted student information and was used as a place for teachers to enter and calculate grades. Many promises were made, such as the ability for parents to have access to the system to allow for communication with the school, but this never happened.

During my first year, I also decided to create a classroom blog to use as an area to post information, such as homework assignments, upcoming tests and events. I had a lot of positive feedback from parents, as they were able to stay up-to-date for my class, but I was the only teacher in the school using this particular site. Other teachers were using their own websites and some were not offering any form of online communication. At a middle or high school, parents had to go to different locations to get information for each class. The following year, I accepted a contract at another school and they had just introduced a new school website, where teachers had homework pages for each class. Teachers updated the webpage to inform parents about what we worked on each day. We had a lot of positive feedback from parents regarding the new website and their ability to efficiently find out what their child worked on at school and if there was any homework for them to complete.

After three years in a regular classroom, I took on a position as a learning assistance teacher. In this class, we regularly worked on missing assignments or re-did assignments or revisited tests. This was very easy for students whose teachers used BCeSIS and kept their marks up-to-date, but was difficult to know what the students were missing when teachers did not use the program or kept the information private.

For the past three years, following my year as a learning assistance teacher, I have been a resource teacher. This role consists of case managing students who are identified as having a low incidence disability, which is a British Columbia (B.C.) Ministry of Education label indicating that the student needs some sort of special assistance/support. Part of this job is working with the classroom teacher, support staff, and parents to develop a program, which best fits each student. Communicating with the team allows for everyone involved to be on the same page, working towards the goals to ensure each student is successful.

Recently, I have taken on a new role as a district-helping teacher to assist in implementing My Education BC, the new common student information system for B.C. This is a web-based software, which houses student information and allows for teachers to maintain an electronic gradebook and efficiently communicate with their students and the student's parents. This program has student and parent portals, where both parties can access information regarding the student's achievement and activities happening at the school. While teachers generally recognize the potential of this tool to enhance communication with parents and their students, many are anxious about learning a new system and concerned about the additional time and effort that may be required to maintain another communication channel.

Importance of Involving Parents

The notion of parental involvement and the importance of home-school communication has not changed in the last 50 years. Educators understand that students achieve higher academically when their parents are involved in the education of their child (although this is only a correlation, it is the best link we have) (Abel, 2014; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Ho, Hung, & Chen, 2013; Minke et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2015; Mutch & Collins, 2012). One of the main methods for parent to be involved in their child's education is for them to stay informed as to

what is happening at the school and in the classroom. Keeping the parents informed allows for both parties to work as a team to ensure success for the student.

Communication Methods

Involving parents in their child's education can be challenging, as many parents have busy schedules that make it impossible for them to be available throughout the school day. There are many different methods schools can use to communicate with parents. The traditional means of face-to-face meetings, phone calls, paper-based newsletters, and report cards are not always efficient or effective for many families (sometimes the newsletters and reports do not make it home). Using non-traditional communication methods, such as websites, electronic mail, social media tools, family portals, and text messages may allow more families to stay informed.

Often in the past, most communication was "to" parents, rather than "with" parents. Educators provided parents with information, but the opportunity for the parents to respond was limited. Many of these new methods allow for parents to give the school feedback and provide the opportunity for two-way communication to occur in a timely manner. This promotes parent involvement, as the parent can decide when and where they will communicate with the school. While most families have experience with these online tools, some parents may need training or support.

Although teachers understand the importance of home-school communication, it can be hard to make time in their already busy schedule to learn the new skills required to use these tools. Districts and schools must provide educators with the necessary exemplars, training, tools and time to ensure that they are able to efficiently use these new communication resources, so that parents can be involved in their child's education.

Current Literature

When reviewing the literature regarding home-school communication, Joyce Epstein's *Theory of overlapping spheres of influence* describes the importance of the team approach between all parties to ensure students are achieving at the highest level possible. Engaging parents in the educational process, especially promoting effective communication between home and school affects student achievement.

Current requirements in B.C., which has been addressed in the B.C. Ministry of Education's' draft plan, will be examined to see how they address the issues around promoting stronger relationships between families and schools. There are many factors, such as not enough time in either parties schedules and most events occur while parents are working, which can limit the number of times parents and educators communicate throughout the school year. Traditional communication tools (e.g., report cards, newsletters, calls home, and face-to-face meetings) work, but have become less useful as lives have become busier. Some of the newer communication tools modes, such as electronic mail, websites, and social media, are having a positive effect on opening the communication lines between families and schools. These newer tools allow for parents to access the information and respond as needed when it is convenient to them. These tools are mobile and allow the users to access them from anywhere, at any time, while using any device with an Internet connection.

Project Goals

Currently, many schools and teachers in our district are using a variety of tools to communicate with parents. This can be an issue, because parents can become confused as to where they can find information regarding their child's education.

In order to make communicating between home and school as efficient and effective as possible for all parties we need to become consistent with the tools we use in each school. This will allow both the parents and teachers to become familiar with these tools, which will simplify the communication process. For my project, I will be creating a school website to assist with parent-teacher-child communications.

My Education BC is the new program for teachers in our district. It is important that they feel supported and are able to locate information quickly when learning the new program. The first area of my website will be home to resources, such as user guides, quick reference cards, and short video tutorials to assist teachers with using My Education BC in their classroom, as well as for communicating with parents and students. All teachers in our district will use this piece of software and it is important that they have an area where they can locate information when they are trying to learn the program. Teachers should not need to discover how to use the program on their own.

As many teachers, parents, and students are already using social media sites, it is important the schools use these tools to communicate with parents and students, because these users are already comfortable using these tools. The next area of the website will be home to resources on adopting social media in the classroom. There will be recommendations and guides on how to set up blogs, Facebook pages, and twitter accounts. The goal of this area will be to share information, as to what is happening in the classroom and school with parents. There will also be instructions on how to link these tools, as teachers should only have to add the information to one location, while still connecting with parents on their preferred platform.

In B.C., we need to ensure we adhere to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). This requires students to get written consent from parents before posting

any information or pictures of their child in any publically accessible online space, especially when the information is being housed on servers outside of Canada (Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for BC, 2012). The final area will include reminders and resources for adhering to FIPPA. Providing educators with sample consent forms and letters home explaining the purpose of each tool.

The goal of this project is to provide teachers the tools needed to easily increase communication between home and school while improving student achievement.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

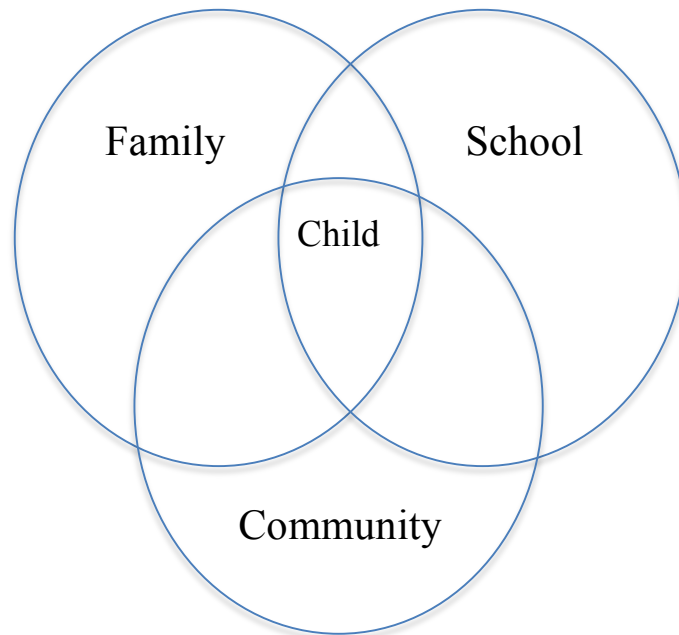
The literature on parental involvement in education includes many different theoretical models that support the effect of the family relationship with schools in education. I found Joyce Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence to best describe the positive impact on student achievement through partnerships between school, family, and the community. The main idea of this theory is that students are more successful when schools, family, and the community work as partners in the learning process (Epstein, 1995).

Epstein's Theory of overlapping spheres of influence indicates that children are more successful when a team approach between all stakeholders is put in place, rather than each part working separately to achieve the same goal. Student achievement and success is in the mutual interest of each stakeholder (or sphere). The school, family and community share responsibilities and benefit from the success of the student (Epstein, 1995).

A Venn diagram (see Figure 1) can represent the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, with a sphere for each stakeholder in a child's life. The three spheres represent the family, school, and community. In the center of the overlapping spheres is the child, the primary stakeholder. Each component of the team must make decisions with the needs of the child in mind. When the groups work together the spheres overlap. Epstein (1990) explains that the three main factors contributing to the amount and kinds of overlap are:

- 1) Time – The age and grade level of the student
- 2) Philosophies, policies and practices of the family and community
- 3) Philosophies, policies and practices of the school

Figure 1. Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence



Adapted from: Epstein, J. L. (2009). *School, Family, and Community Partnership: Your handbook for action* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

As these forces fluctuate during the student's school career so does the degree and type of overlap they experience. To enhance student development, both the family and school need to ensure they are working together to create overlap in the spheres. The spheres move closer together and the student progresses forward in his learning when meaningful communication and interactions between each sphere are occurring. It is important that all stakeholders share similar goals, resources and practices for the child, as this will allow them to move in similar directions, even when they are working alone (Epstein, 1990).

In this model the overlap represents the environment where the student can be most effectively nurtured, as the child is the primary stakeholder with respect to their education, development, and success. The student is more likely to be successful and stay in school if the

child feels safe and cared for, and is encouraged to try their best by the family, school, and community (Sanders & Epstein, 1998). It is important that educators view students as children, as this will promote the vision of having the family and community as partners in the development and education of these students. This will allow students to be successful in both school and in life. If educators view the child as just a pupil to be taught content and procedures without considering their development holistically, they are likely to separate family from school. It is important that educators create more family-like schools that recognize each student's individuality and welcome all families into the partnership. In turn, parents build more school-like families where activities can complement, support, and build upon the skills learned at school. This ensures the child develops the skills and the feeling of being successful, as well as understands the importance of school, and homework. Community-minded families and students help out in their community, while community schools allow for activities available to the general community to happen within the walls of the school (Epstein, 1995).

In Epstein's (1995) research, she describes six types of involvements as a framework to enhance student success. The types of involvements are the following:

- 1) Parenting: Providing the parents with the skills needed to support their child in the journey to success at school.
- 2) Communicating: Informing everyone about what is happening at school and how the student is progressing in their learning.
- 3) Volunteering: Inviting parents and students to assist at school functions.
- 4) Learning at Home: Sharing information and ideas, so the family can support the student at home with their schoolwork.
- 5) Decision Making: Giving the parents a voice in school decisions.

- 6) Collaborating with Community: Utilizing community resources and services to support students, their families and schools.

Epstein (1987) explains in her research, “the evidence is clear that parental encouragement, activities, and interests at home; and participation in school and classrooms affects children’s achievements, attitudes, and aspirations” (p.120). As the African proverb explains, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Essentially, the three spheres need to be overlapping to ensure students feel special, are motivated to do their best, give guidance as students manoeuvre through adolescence, while encouraging and promoting the learning process (Sanders & Epstein, 1998). Because this project is about improving family-school communication, the remainder of this literature review will focus on developing the family and school partnership.

Family-School Involvement

Research indicates that parental involvement will have a positive effect on a student’s achievement and academic progress, while improving the parents’ opinion about themselves, the school and the educators involved with their child (Brock & Edmunds, 2010; Grover, 2014; Kosaretskii & Chernyshova, 2013; Minke, Sheridan, Kim, Ryoo, & Koziol, 2014; Mitchell, Foulger, & Wetzel, 2015; Murray, McFarland-Piazza, & Harrison, 2014; Olmstead, 2013; Sanders & Epstein, 1998). Students who have parents involved in their school have fewer conduct reports, are more prepared for their classes and are less likely to dropout (Kosaretskii & Chernyshova, 2013). Knowing that there is a strong link between parental involvement and their child’s success at school, it is important that families become engaged in school activities. Developing two-way communication between the teacher and the parents is key to improving parent engagement (Abel, 2014). Building a partnership between the family, school and

community provide greater consistency between the child's home and school context (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012).

As students move into higher grades, parents become less involved, and information is shared less often, even though the older students sometimes need the guidance the most (Brock & Edmunds, 2010; Murray et al., 2014). Studies indicate that parents become less involved when their child enters school, compared to when the child was in preschool or child care (Murray et al., 2014). Parental involvement can ensure a positive transition into adolescence (Hornby & Witte, 2010). Sanders and Epstein (1998) explain, all levels of "schools are working hard to build successful partnerships because they know from theory, research, and practice that schools can most effectively educate students at all ages and grade levels with the help and support of families and communities" (p. 34). To ensure the parent-school partnership is strong, both parties should have similar goals, agendas, attitudes and use the same language when dealing with students' education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Schools can provide a strong foundation in the relationship by making parents feel welcome when they enter the school. Therefore, having a welcoming office staff can be a great start (Graham-Clay, 2005).

Family-School Communication

Communication is a key step in improving family involvement. Students benefit the most when the communication occurs frequently and not just when there are issues at school (Abel, 2014; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Ho, Hung, & Chen, 2013; Minke et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2015; Mutch & Collins, 2012). All stakeholders need to address both enabling and disabling factors to ensure communication can be used to increase the likelihood that students will be successful (Grover, 2014). Research indicates the more families and schools share regarding a student, the better prepared each will be to provide the student with the best chance of being

successful academically (Arriaga & Longoria, 2011; Garrett, 2009; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Sanders, 2014; Stringer & Blaik Hourani, 2013). Children's attitude towards school seems to be more positive when parents communicate with teachers (Brock & Edmunds, 2010). Further benefits of strong communication between the school and home are improved parent-teacher relationships, teacher morale, school climate, school attendance, attitude, behaviour, mental health of children, increased parental confidence, satisfaction and greater student interest in their own education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). While traditional modes of communication are met with limited success, it is extremely important that families and teachers develop innovative and creative methods to communicate.

Communication can be an effective way to increase parent involvement, but it needs to be timely, easy to understand and useful. Parents need to have the opportunity to be heard and any barriers preventing this communication need to be identified and addressed (Mutch & Collins, 2012). The information in two-way communication must be meaningful for both the receiver and the sender, with the purpose being that the, "receiver understands the meaning behind the senders message" (Sousa, Luze, & Hughes-Belding, 2014, p. 500). Providing parents with specific information about their child's class, activities, and education is far more productive than simply sharing general school information. Chris Wejr (2013), an educational leader in B.C. explains, it is important to start each school year by building a strong foundation between the school and home, making the first communication with a family a positive one.

Current Requirements in B.C.

Many provinces, including B.C., are encouraging parents to become involved in their child's education and improving home-school communication is a step in the right direction (Brock & Edmunds, 2010; B.C. Ministry of Education, 2015). According to the standards

established by the B.C. Teachers' Council (2015), teachers in B.C. realize and value the support of families and communities in their schools and are willing to collaborate with all stakeholders regarding their children in an effective and timely manner. Member of Legislative Assembly, Jane Thornthwaite explains in her message in the "Towards Better Communication" document produced by the B.C. Ministry of Education (2013):

We all want our children to be successful in their learning. Intuitively, we know when parents are interested and involved, children do better. We now know that research backs this up. Engaging parents starts with communication. As the education system continues to adapt to an ever-changing society, it's more important than ever to consider how we're communicating with one another. Effective communication is the foundation for parents to support their child's learning. Better communication, as many schools are realizing, contributes to a more trusting and positive relationship with parents that benefits the entire school community. (p. 1)

Throughout the year, schools are required to provide at least five reports regarding the progress of student learning. Three of these reports must be formally written and the other two can consist of telephone calls, student-led conferences, parent-teacher conferences, or any other method decided on by the school (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2009). Progress reports should describe what the student is able to do, areas where further development is still required, as well as ways to support the student in the learning process (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2009). The Ministry of Education in B.C. acknowledges the importance of communicating the student's learning with all stakeholders and keeping parents informed both formally and informally, as an ongoing discussion (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2015a). Unfortunately, traditional report cards

are often just a snapshot into the past, and occur only at scheduled times of the year.

Stakeholders are often not aware of a student's struggle until it is too late.

Factors Affecting Parental Communication and Involvement

The current requirements in B.C. may be preventing parents from becoming involved in their child's education and it is important that educators recognize and come up with solutions to these barriers. Just like students, every parent has different needs and will require different amounts of support (Brock & Edmunds, 2010).

Some of the factors Brocks and Edmunds (2010) identified that prevent parents from being involved in their child's education were:

- 1) Parents did not have enough time in their busy schedules to invest enough time required.
- 2) School events occurred while the parents were at work.
- 3) They felt the teachers did a better job at teaching their child.
- 4) Their child does not want their parents help with their schooling.
- 5) Teachers were not informing the parents as to what they could do at home to support the student.
- 6) Their child becomes frustrated when the parents were helping them.
- 7) The parents did not understand the content.
- 8) The parents were not aware when the events were not happening at school.
- 9) The parents felt that the teachers did not listen to the ideas presented by the parents.
- 10) The parents believed their child was embarrassed to have the parents help at the school.

Grover (2014) looked at similar factors, but broke them down into enabling or disabling factors depending on the amount of time spent or its context. He found that teacher accountability, job satisfaction, and communication skills enhanced communication between teachers and parents. Parents' and teachers' attitudes can be disabling factors, which can hinder communication between both parties (Grover, 2014). Murray, McFarland-Piazza, and Harrison (2014) pointed out that many students are taking the bus to school, which implies that there are fewer opportunities for informal communication between the parents and teachers to occur. Because many schools are only notifying parents when bad behaviours or low academic achievement are occurring, parents become defensive when they receive calls from the school and become less likely to work with the school to fix the issue. Educators need to be making positive connections with the families, which will allow them to build a positive relationship and make the more challenging conversations easier (Graham-Clay, 2005). Parents need to find time to be involved in their child's education and play more of a role than just getting their child to school (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Older parents may have more time, better education and/or more resources to support their child's education than younger parents (Brock & Edmunds, 2010). Parents with lower levels of education are also noted to be less involved in their child's education, perhaps because they feel like they do not have the skills needed to help their child or they had a negative experience and do not feel comfortable in schools or with educators (Murray et al., 2014). Families who speak English as a second language also appear to be less involved with the school; they engaged less in informal conversations, and were less likely to volunteer in the classroom (Murray et al., 2014). Piper (2012), points out that technology allows families who speak English as a second language to use web-based translators to read information provided by

the school. Not all families have access to computers at home or have the skills needed to use the internet as a communication tool. Continuing to use traditional means and sending home hard copies of website announcements and general emails still needs to happen to ensure all parents are getting the information they require (Kosaretskii & Chernyshova, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015).

Communication needs to be clear and accessible for all parents. Teachers need to eliminate educational jargon when communicating with parents (Epstein, 1996). A disconnect between cultures can be a challenge when connecting teachers with some families and their students (Abel, 2014; Sousa et al., 2014). It is important that parents feel welcomed by the school, and they must adjust their schedule to make time to be involved in their child's education, as this will allow students to achieve at a higher level (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Methods for Communicating with Parents

It is important that educators keep in mind the barriers that prevent families from being involved and find tools that will work to keep the lines of communication open between parents and teachers (and often the students too). Kosaretskii and Cheryshova (2013) explain that it is important to use a variety of tools to meet the needs, abilities, and interests of each family. Olmstead (2013) noted the majority of parents have access to the Internet either at home or at work and almost all parents carry a cellular phone. It is important that teachers decide which mode of communication will best fit each situation and each family involved.

Traditional modes. Teachers have traditionally used face-to-face meetings, phone calls, paper based newsletters, report cards, and other methods in an attempt to engage and communicate with parents, but as of late these models have been less successful. Meet the teacher nights, parent-teacher interviews, and student-led or student-involved conferences are

excellent ways to build the partnership between home and school. These meetings give the parents and teachers the opportunity to have or even start face-to-face dialogue regarding the child's education, and share important information about the child, such as the child's interests and anything else that might affect the child's learning. It is important that teachers provide parents with the information needed to interpret report card grades and interim progress reports and how to work with students to improve their grades (Epstein, 1996). Report cards should not be the first communication when concerns exist, as these reports are only a snap shot of the child's learning and should not provide any surprises to the parents (Graham-Clay, 2005). Being a member of the school's or district's Parents' Advisory Councils, is another traditional method for families to stay informed and make a difference in the quality of their children's learning.

Non-traditional modes. Although face-to-face communication is one of the top methods for building relationships, it is not always a viable option for all parents – either because they do not have the time, their schedules do not match the schedules of the teachers, or they are not able to come to the school. Non-traditional modes of communication can provide another way to develop these relationships. In the United States, 73 percent of teachers in middle school and 68 percent of teachers in secondary schools use electronic correspondence to interact with parents (Kosaretskii & Chernyshova, 2013). Computer-mediated communication has changed drastically over the last decade and it has allowed for improvements in both synchronous and asynchronous communication between teachers, schools, and their stakeholders (both individual and group) (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2015a; Thompson, Mazer, & Flood Grady, 2015; Graham-Clay, 2005; Ho et al., 2013; Wejr, 2011a). Cox and McLeod (2013) point out that with the increase in the number of mobile devices, it is even easier to maintain a reliable flow of two-way communication and information at anytime and anywhere. Using these tools, information and

conversations can be shared frequently, at little cost and during times that are convenient to each party.

These new modes need to be viewed as being useful and easy to use by both parties for it to be successful (Ho et al., 2013). Using systems that parents are already familiar with can increase the likelihood of finding success in opening the communication lines between home and school (Ho et al., 2013; Wejr, 2011a). With the evolution of different types of technology, teachers must continue to learn new skills to improve communication with parents. These non-traditional tools should not replace traditional channels entirely, but rather complement them in order to expand the sharing of information with families.

Digital communication tools. Websites, electronic mail, social media, family portals, and text messaging are all non-traditional digital communication tools, which can be used improve parent-school communication.

Websites. Websites can enhance traditional methods of communication by providing parents with a reliable source of information, which allows them to support their child's academic progress (Piper, 2012). A classroom or school website, when used effectively, can give parents timely feedback and allow them to stay informed, but for the greatest benefits to occur, parents may need to provide information to the school as well (Olmstead, 2013). These sites can be developed using free tools, which are accessible from any device connected to the Internet. The tools allow the user to embed calendars, handbooks, letters, homework assignments, announcements, wish lists, permission slips, volunteer activities or basically any information teachers need to provide to parents to keep them informed as to what is happening in the classroom. It is important that some sign-up/login process is installed to ensure the information on these sites meets the requirements for student privacy, and the site needs to be updated

frequently with useful information in order to be successful (Mitchell et al., 2015).

Electronic mail. Email can also increase the level of parent engagement (Thompson, 2008). Electronic mailing does not require time to be set or planned for meetings as it is freely available, asynchronous, and is comfortable for all participants. Electronic messages can be brief. While parents are usually the ones to initiate the interaction using email, not all parents are prepared to communicate using email. Emails are suitable when a more immediate response is needed. Traditionally, communication between home and school happens infrequently. By using email, the number of times parents and teachers communicate increases, which allows for more meaningful dialogues to happen because of the relationships that are developed (Thompson, 2008). One of the concerns with using email is inundating the receiver's inbox with massive numbers of messages, but parents seldom complain that their child's school is sending them too much information regarding their child's education (Dixon 2012).

Social media. Social media can be another effective way to open up two-way communication between schools and home (Cox & McLeod, 2013). Robinson (2012) mentions a quote from *The School Leaders Guide to Social Media*, "we have a moral and ethical obligation to teach our students how to use this technology effectively, ethically and for the greater good" (p. 101). These tools provide families with the opportunity to review school or class postings and respond with comments, questions, and feedback to the school. Because many students and parents are already using a number of social media sites, they feel comfortable and are willing to use these tools to engage with the teachers (Magette, 2013; Wang, 2013). This method allows for communication to happen in real-time, in a format that is content rich, and for collaboration to happen while others support and participate in the learning process (Magette, 2013). Social media allows for families to keep up-to-date with important events and activities occurring at

school and gives them a glimpse of what is happening during the school day (Magette, 2013; Wang, 2013). It is important that any class or school sites where students, parents, and other stakeholders can comment that their comments are moderated to ensure student privacy is upheld. Students often produce better quality projects when they know their assignment will be posted online for a larger, more authentic audience (Magette, 2013).

Family portals. These portals give the parents the ability to directly communicate with teachers using email addresses provided in the tool. Often parents can keep up-to-date with student progress and can be made aware of assignments that have not been handed in or areas where the student is struggling (Al-halhouli & Owaied, 2013). This method has the potential for parents to view marks, course schedules, and assignments that teachers have sent to their students (Al-halhouli & Owaied, 2013). It is important for these portals to be updated regularly to be most effective when communicating student progress (Garrett, 2009). It allows for all users to easily communicate both quickly and simply (Al-halhouli & Owaied, 2013).

Text messages. Text messaging is another sought-after form of communication by the parents, but many teachers are hesitant to provide their personal cell phone number (Olmstead, 2013). This method provides the parents with immediate access to the teacher. With the increase in the number of mobile devices, it is easy to maintain a constant flow of two-way communication and information at anytime and anywhere using this method (Cox & McLeod, 2013). Teachers are now using free tools, such as Remind, to provide information and chat with parents and students, while keeping their phone number private (Features, 2015).

Supporting School-Family Communication

Supporting non-traditional communication, moving away from communication ‘to’ families and towards communicating ‘with’ families, taking into account a teachers perspective, as well as the skills needed are all ways we can support school-family communication.

Non-traditional communication. Professional development needs to focus on providing understanding and the skills needed to effectively use technology to involve parents in their classrooms and schools. Administrators must model this and stay current with their use of these technologies, if they expect their staff to use them in their classrooms (Mutch & Collins, 2012).

Using a variety of tools may encourage more parents to engage with school in order to enhance the students’ learning experience (Cox & McLeod, 2013). These tools allow parents to listen/see class reports, provide feedback, ask questions, and participate in discussions, resulting in better informed parents. To support this, teachers may choose to link social media channels, to have the same information appear in a number of different places.

Teachers can continue to use technology to communicate about classroom practice, student successes, plans, etc., but some more personal or complex topics require face-to-face or virtual face-to-face communication (Thompson, 2008). It is important that teachers determine which families are not receiving the already existing communication and discover ways to reach them with effective two-way communication (Epstein, 1996; Ho et al., 2013). It can be difficult for single- or two-working parents to be involved in their child’s education, so it is important that educators use 21st century tools to communicate with and engage parents in their child’s education (McLeod & Vasinda, 2009).

Types of communication: ‘to’ vs ‘with’. Although it is important to keep parents informed as to what is happening at school and in their child’s classroom, it is just as important

to ensure parents are active partners in the learning process. Schools need to move away from communicating ‘to’ the parent and towards communicating ‘with’ the parents. Providing parents with a variety of ‘one-way’ communication and ‘two-way’ communication methods is key (Graham-Clay, 2005). The one-way methods allow for schools to share information with all stakeholders and two-way methods allow the schools to provide the opportunity to engage in dialogue. As Wejr (2011b) points out, “we need to meet families where they are and we need to use a number of different tools to communicate both TO and WITH families” (para 3) Educators can use both traditional and non-traditional methods to communicate to and with the families and some of the chosen methods can be moving from providing information, to allowing for dialogue to occur simply by enabling comment features built into these tools. Educators “need to increase dialogue and communication WITH families by not only making themselves visible but also by embracing the available social media tools to meet parents and families where they are” (Wejr, para 7)

Graham-Clay (2005) explains, “Every communication exchange, regardless of format, should reflect a thoughtful, planned approach and should be viewed as an opportunity for teachers to promote parent partnerships and, ultimately, to support student learning” (p. 127).

Teachers’ perspectives. Although every stakeholder’s perspective is important and needs to be heard, the teachers’ perspective is going to be the one, which can affect the most change. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) report that, 83 percent of teachers recognize the need to increase parent involvement. A positive attitude from teachers can allow them to connect with and involve ‘hard to reach’ parents. These parents can be working, less educated, single, English Language Learners and/or have more than one child (possibly at a different school) or are new to the school (Abel, 2014). Districts and schools need to provide teachers with time for training,

time to set up and adjust a class Facebook page, Instagram account, blog, or website and time to keep information current. This will allow teachers to keep parents up to date regarding their child's education. Professional development opportunities need to focus on helping teachers to learn new technologies to enable effective communication between parents and teachers (Mitchell et al., 2015).

Skills needed. Educators are aware that they need training to help them to improve communication with their students' families in order to increase the success of students at school (Epstein, 2005; Sanders & Epstein, 1998). This training needs to work on improving communication skills both online and in-person. Teachers felt better equipped to communicate with parents when they were trained in counseling skills, as this allowed them to facilitate effective communication to increase collaboration and promote success for their student (Symeou, Roussounidou, & Michaelides, 2012). It is important that all educators are able to effectively communicate, carefully listen, graciously end conversations, and summarize agreements to be more effective in their jobs (Symeou et al., 2012). Using the SOLER (Square posture, Open position, Lean towards the other, Eye contact and Relaxation position) can ensure good listening skills are being used during face-to-face meetings (Graham-Clay, 2005). Using these techniques can ensure the parents are treated with respect and as equals when communicating with educators. It is important that teachers keep communication professional, eliminating educational "jargon" as much as possible, provide a balance of both good and bad news, as well as use titles when addressing parents to establish respect when building the relationship (Graham-Clay, 2005).

Summary

Epstein's (1995) theory of overlapping spheres of influence indicates that students are more successful when a team approach between home, school and community is put in place. Parental involvement has a positive effect on student achievement and one of the most effective ways of getting parents involved, is by keeping them informed as to what is happening with their child's education. School-family communication can increase the likelihood that the student will be successful. There are many barriers, such as time, that can make using traditional methods of communication less effective. Many educators are starting to use non-traditional modes, often involving the use of the Internet, to reach more parents. These tools allow for communication to occur when it is convenient for all parties. It is important that educators are given the time to keep information up-to-date and learn the skills to use these new tools effectively and efficiently.

Chapter Three: Project

Project Overview

In this chapter, screenshots are provided of the various sections of the website developed using Google Sites. The website is titled *Keeping Parents Connected* and can be located at <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/>. It starts with a home page, which gives a basic overview of using e-mail and social media tools to keep parents connected with what is happening in their child's classroom. The next few pages provide teachers with step-by-step directions on how to use the My Education BC email feature, create a classroom Facebook Page, Facebook Group, Twitter account, and finally how to simplify the workflow, so the teacher only has to post the information once and have it posted in multiple locations. Each page also has samples of classrooms, schools, and districts that are currently using these tools. The next section of the website, provides teachers with sample consent forms and sample letters to request parents email address. Lastly, I share some of the resources and research regarding home/school communication.

Home Page



Figure 2. Home page (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/>

Text quoted from *Home* page:

Please note: I am not a lawyer. It is mandatory under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) to have parental consent to use these tools:

“Under s. 30.1(a) of FIPPA, public bodies can store or access personal information outside of Canada if the individual the personal information is about has given consent to the public body to do so. The consent must be in the prescribed manner. The regulations to FIPPA 7 set out the requirements for consent under s. 30.1(a).” According to the regulations, an individual’s consent must be in writing and must specify the personal information for which the individual is providing consent, the date on which the consent

is effective and, if applicable, what date the individual's consent expires. The consent must also specify who may store or access the personal information from outside of Canada, and if it is practicable, which jurisdiction the personal information may be stored in or accessed from. The consent must also specify the purpose of storing or accessing the personal information. Please speak with your administrator before you decide to use these tools or forms to ensure you are following your district's policy. (Kemp, 2015)

Using Email in My Education BC to Communicate with Parents

Text quoted from *Using email in My Education BC* webpage:

My Education BC, is the new student information system being used in British Columbia. It has many features that allow for easy communication between home and school. One of these features is the ability to email parents easily using the built-in email feature. The parents email addresses are entered into the system at the office level, but can be used by any user.

Email can increase the level of parent engagement (Thompson, 2008). Electronic mailing does not require time to be set or planned for meetings, it is freely available, asynchronous and is comfortable for all participants. Electronic messages can be brief. While parents are usually the ones to initiate the interaction using email, not all parents are prepared to communicate using email. Emails are suitable when a more immediate response is needed. Traditionally, communication between home and school happens infrequently. By using email the number of times parents and teachers communicate increases, which allows for more meaningful dialogues to happen because of the relationships that are developed (Thompson, 2008). One of the concerns with using email is inundating the receiver's inbox with massive numbers of messages, but parents seldom

complain that their child's school is sending them too much information regarding their child's education (Dixon, 2012). (Kemp, 2015)

Using My Education BC to email parents in a class.

Using My Education BC to eMail Parents in a Particular Class

Figure 3. Slide from *Using My Education BC to email parents in a particular class* (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-email-in-my-education-bc>

Step 1

Log-on to My Education BC <https://www.myeducation.gov.bc.ca/aspen/logon.do>

Figure 4. Slide from *Step 1: Using My Education BC to email parents in a particular class* (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-email-in-my-education-bc>

Step 2

From your home page under Teacher Classes, select the envelope next to the class you want to email.

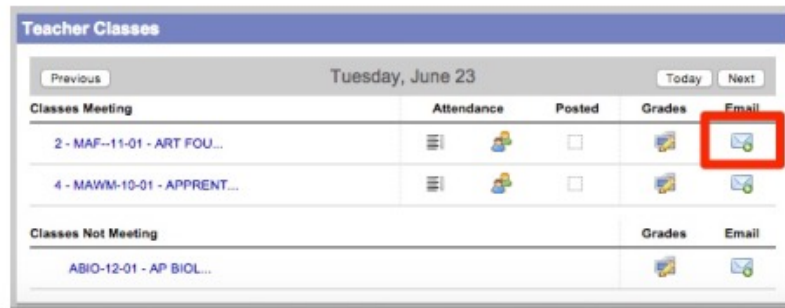


Figure 5. Slide from Step 2: Using My Education BC to email parents in a particular class (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-email-in-my-education-bc>

Step 3

Select Contacts and every contact that has provided his/her email address will be included for all students in your class will appear.

Type your Message and hit Send

*It is good practice to include your Name, School and position at the bottom of your email.

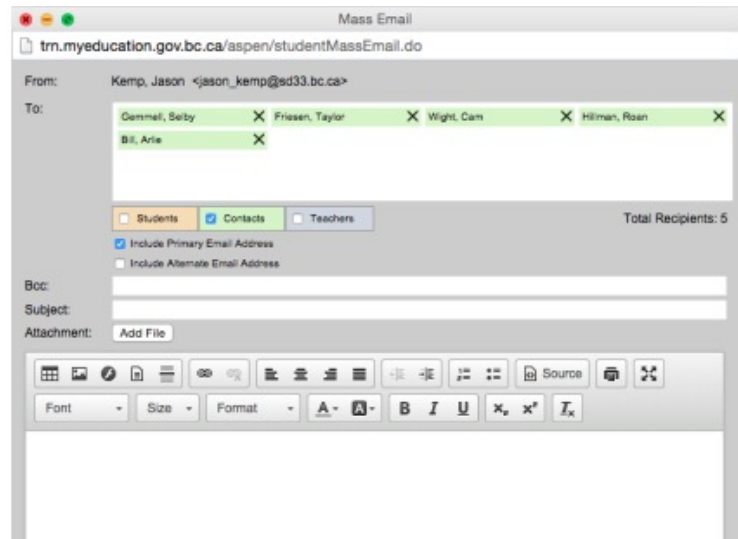


Figure 6. Slide from Step 3: Using My Education BC to email parents in a particular class (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-email-in-my-education-bc>

Finish

All email address will be blind to the other recipients. Contacts will not be able to see others' email addresses.

If you are attaching files ensure they are PDFs, as this format can be opened by any device and holds formatting best.

Parents will reply to your School District email and you will receive a copy of your email to your account.

Figure 7. Slide from Finish: Using My Education BC to email parents in a particular class (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-email-in-my-education-bc>

Using My Education BC to email parents of one student or a group of students.

Using My Education BC to email contacts of one student or a group of students

Figure 8. Slide from *Using My Education BC to email parents of one student or a group of students* (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-email-in-my-education-bc>

Step 1

Log-on to My Education BC <https://www.myeducation.gov.bc.ca/aspen/logon.do>

Figure 9. Slide from Step 1: Using My Education BC to email parents of one student or a group of students (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from

<https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-email-in-my-education-bc>

Step 2

Go to your Student top tab.



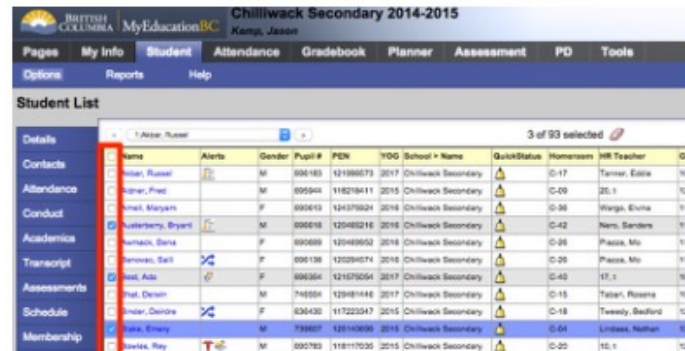
Name	Alerts	Gender	Pupil #	PIN	YOG	School Name	QuickStatus	Homeroom	HR Teacher	Grade	Gr/SubLvl	DOB	EnrStatus	HomePhone	Address
Aldar, Russel		M	890183	121999073	2017	Chilliwack Secondary		C-17	Tanner, Eddie	10		9/3/1999	Active	(250)555-1234	217 Belts St.
Aldner, Fred		M	890944	118218411	2016	Chilliwack Secondary		C-09	20, I	12		12/5/1997	Active	(250)555-1234	2992 Remming St.
Amell, Maryam		F	890613	124379924	2016	Chilliwack Secondary		C-38	Wargo, Evlma	11		11/21/1997	Active	(250)555-1234	1888 Labine St.
Austberry, Bryant		M	890618	125485216	2016	Chilliwack Secondary		C-42	Nero, Sanders	11		10/5/1998	Active	(250)555-1234	1347 Hanley St.
Ausmack, Denis		F	890689	125499952	2016	Chilliwack Secondary		C-28	Piazza, Mo	11		5/4/1998	Active	(250)555-1234	2785 Finch St.
Barovic, Sall		F	890138	123294074	2016	Chilliwack Secondary		C-28	Piazza, Mo	11		2/1/1998	Active No Primary		4171 View St.
Best, Ade		F	890384	121579054	2017	Chilliwack Secondary		C-40	17, I	10		12/17/1999	Active	(250)555-1234	2877 Quackenbush St.
Bhat, Delwin		M	748564	129481446	2017	Chilliwack Secondary		C-15	Tasari, Resena	10		3/1/1999	Active	(250)555-1234	3493 Shena St.

Figure 10. Slide from Step 2: Using My Education BC to email parents of one student or a group of students (Kemp, 2015). Note: fake student information used for presentation purposes.

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-email-in-my-education-bc>

Step 3

Select the Checkbox next to the names of the student(s) you want to email home.



Chilliwack Secondary 2014-2015
Kemp, Jason

Pages My Info Student Attendance Gradebook Planner Assessment PD Tools

Options Reports Help

Student List

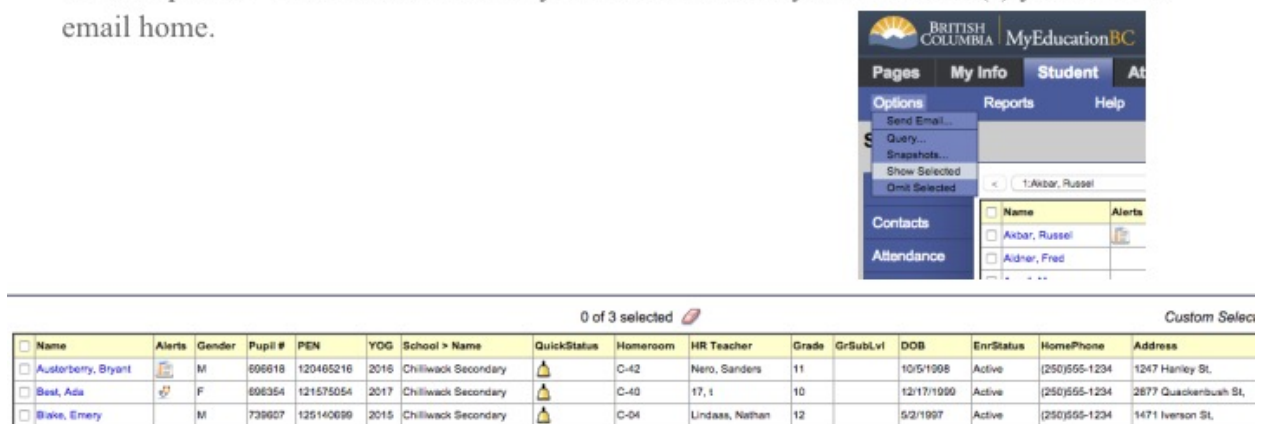
1: Akbar, Russel 3 of 93 selected

Details	Name	Alerts	Gender	Pupil #	PE#	YOG	School > Name	QuickStatus	Homeroom	HR Teacher	Gr
Contacts	Akbar, Russel		M	806183	12198673	2017	Chilliwack Secondary		C-17	Tanner, Eddie	10
Attendance	Aidher, Fred		M	806043	118218411	2015	Chilliwack Secondary		C-09	26,1	12
Conduct	Aidher, Maryam		F	806013	124379924	2016	Chilliwack Secondary		C-36	Wings, Evina	11
Academics	Austerberry, Bryant		M	806018	120485216	2016	Chilliwack Secondary		C-42	Nero, Sanders	11
Transcript	Best, Ada		F	806089	120489552	2016	Chilliwack Secondary		C-26	Passa, Mo	11
Assessments	Best, Ada		F	806138	120294574	2016	Chilliwack Secondary		C-26	Passa, Mo	11
Schedule	Blake, Emery		F	806354	121575054	2017	Chilliwack Secondary		C-40	17, 1	10
Membership	Blake, Emery		M	739607	125140089	2015	Chilliwack Secondary		C-04	Lindaas, Nathan	12
	Blake, Ray		M	806783	118117030	2015	Chilliwack Secondary		C-20	15, 1	12

Figure 11. Slide from Step 3: Using My Education BC to email parents of one student or a group of students (Kemp, 2015). Note: fake student information used in figure. Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-email-in-my-education-bc>

Step 4

Select Options - Show Selected. Now you should have only those student(s) you wish to email home.



BRITISH COLUMBIA MyEducationBC

Pages My Info Student At

Options Reports Help

Send Email...
Query...
Snapshots...
Show Selected
Omit Selected

1: Akbar, Russel

Contacts
Attendance

0 of 3 selected Custom Select

Name	Alerts	Gender	Pupil #	PE#	YOG	School > Name	QuickStatus	Homeroom	HR Teacher	Grade	GrSubLvl	DOB	EnrStatus	HomePhone	Address
<input type="checkbox"/> Austerberry, Bryant		M	806018	120485216	2016	Chilliwack Secondary		C-42	Nero, Sanders	11		10/5/1998	Active	(250)555-1234	1247 Hanley St.
<input type="checkbox"/> Best, Ada		F	806354	121575054	2017	Chilliwack Secondary		C-40	17, 1	10		12/17/1999	Active	(250)555-1234	2877 Quackenbush St.
<input type="checkbox"/> Blake, Emery		M	739607	125140089	2015	Chilliwack Secondary		C-04	Lindaas, Nathan	12		5/2/1997	Active	(250)555-1234	1471 Iverson St.

Figure 12. Slide from Step 4: Using My Education BC to email parents of one student or a group of students (Kemp, 2015). Note: fake student information used in figure. Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-email-in-my-education-bc>

Step 5

Select options - Send Email



Figure 13. Slide from Step 5: Using My Education BC to email parents of one student or a group of students (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from

<https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-email-in-my-education-bc>

Step 6

Select Contacts and every contact that has provided his/her email address for your selected student(s) will appear.

Type your Message and hit Send

*It is good practice to include your Name, School and position at the bottom of your email.

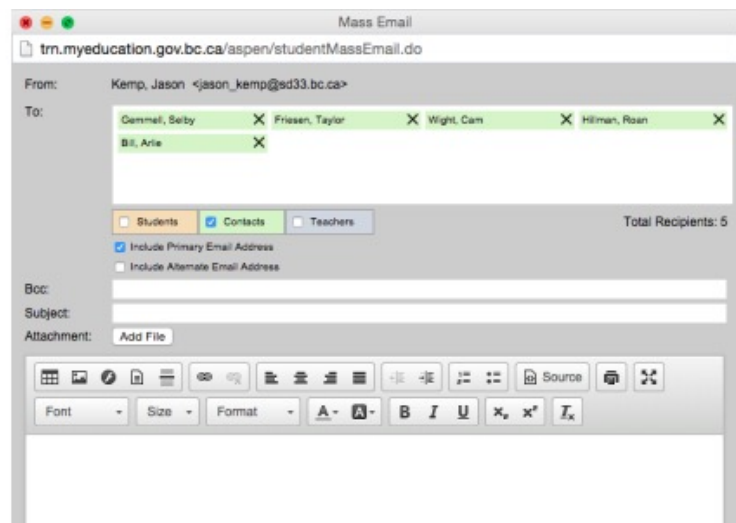


Figure 13. Slide from Step 6: Using My Education BC to email parents of one student or a group of students (Kemp, 2015). Note: fake student information used in figure. Retrieved from

<https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-email-in-my-education-bc>

Finish

All email address will be blind to the other recipients. Contacts will not be able to see others' email addresses.

If you are attaching files ensure they are PDFs, as this format can be opened by any device and holds formatting best.

Parents will reply to your School District email and you will receive a copy of your email to your account.

Figure 14. Slide from Finish: Using My Education BC to email parents of one student or a group of students (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from

<https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-email-in-my-education-bc>

Using Facebook to Communicate with Parents

Text quoted from *Using Facebook to Communicate with Parents* webpage:

Facebook is a free, online social networking service that allows users to post information and share with other users. According to the ["Facebook Reports First Quarter 2015 Results,"](#) there are over 1.44 billion monthly active users using Facebook. The program allows users to create pages, which allows two-way communication to happen. Pages are best for teachers to share information with their student's parents and for the parents to share information with their child's teacher, but make it difficult for parents to share information with other parents. Users can also create groups, which allow for equal communication between all users. Both pages and groups allow for the teacher to control who sees the information and can moderate the information that is being shared. With

Pages, your posts show up on members' Newsfeeds, but visitors' and members' posts do not. Members don't get any notification when other members or visitors post. In Groups, everyone is notified when anyone posts to the Group. This is more ideal when you want all-way communication.

Social media can be another effective way to open up two-way communication between schools and home (Cox & McLeod, 2013). Robinson (2012) mentions a quote from *The School Leaders Guide to Social Media*, "we have a moral and ethical obligation to teach our students how to use this technology effectively, ethically and for the greater good."

These tools provide families with the opportunity to review school or class postings and respond with comments, questions and feedback to the school. Because many students and parents are already using a number of social media sites, they feel comfortable and are willing to use these tools to engage with the teachers (Magette, 2013; Wang, 2013).

This method allows for communication to happen in real-time, in a format that is content rich, and for collaboration to happen while others support and participate in the learning process (Magette, 2013). Social media allows for families to keep up-to-date with important events and activities occurring at school and gives them a glimpse of what is happening during the school day (Magette, 2013; Wang, 2013). It is important that any class or school sites where students, parents and other stakeholders can comment that their comments are moderated to ensure student privacy is upheld. Students often produce better quality projects when they know their assignment will be posted online for a larger, more authentic audience (Magette, 2013). (Kemp, 2015)

Using Facebook pages to communicate with parents.

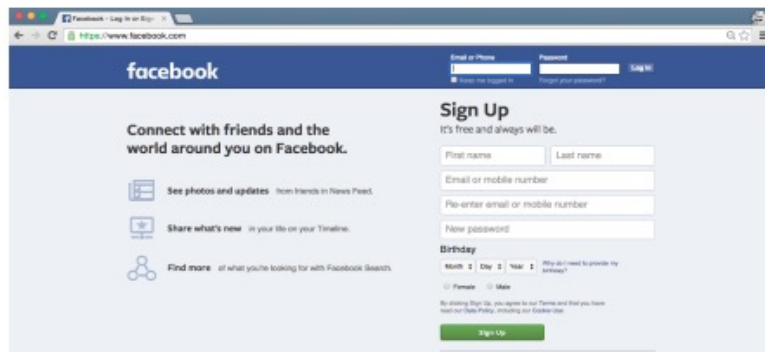
USING FACEBOOK PAGES TO COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS

Figure 15. Slide from Title: Using Facebook Pages to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 1

Go to www.facebook.com and create a Facebook account. If you have an account skip to next step.



The image shows a screenshot of the Facebook website's sign-up page. The browser address bar shows 'https://www.facebook.com'. The page features the Facebook logo and navigation links for 'Email or Phone' and 'Password'. The main heading is 'Sign Up' with the subtext 'It's free and always will be.' Below this, there are input fields for 'First name', 'Last name', 'Email or mobile number', and 'New password'. A 'Birthday' section includes dropdown menus for 'Month', 'Day', and 'Year', along with a checkbox for 'Whether you'd like to provide my birthday?'. At the bottom, there are radio buttons for 'Female' and 'Male', a small disclaimer, and a green 'Sign Up' button.

Figure 16. Slide from Step 1: Using Facebook Pages to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 2

Once you log onto your Facebook account, create a page for your classroom by selecting the Create Page icon.

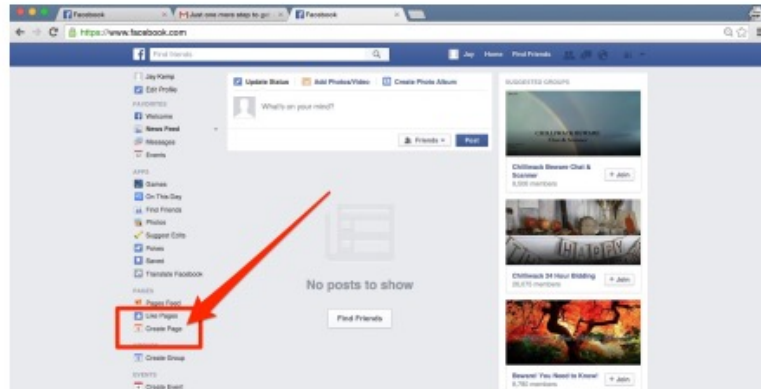


Figure 17. Slide from Step 2: Using Facebook Pages to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 3

Select Company, Organization or Institution. The Category would be Education and Company Name would be your Classroom. (ie. Mr Kemp's Classroom or school name. Click on Get Started.

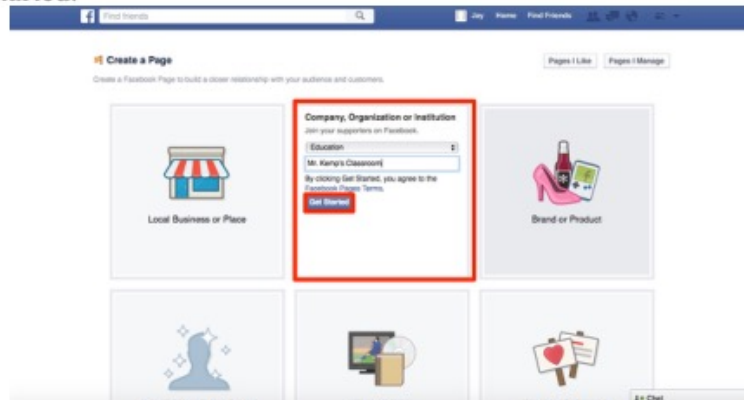


Figure 18. Slide from Step 3: Using Facebook Pages to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 4

Fill in the information explaining your Facebook Page. Then hit Save Info.

The screenshot shows the 'Set Up Mr. Kemp's Classroom' interface. At the top, there is a progress bar with four steps: 1 About, 2 Profile Picture, 3 Add to Favorites, and 4 Preferred Page Audience. Step 2 is currently active. Below the progress bar, there is a tip: 'Tip: Add a description and website to improve the ranking of your Page in search. Fields marked by asterisks (*) are required.' This is followed by a sub-tip: 'Add a few sentences to tell people what your Page is about. This will help it show up in the right search results. You will be able to add more details later from your Page settings.' There is a character count '155' to the right of the text. Below the tip is a text input field with the placeholder text '*Tell people what your Page is about...'. Underneath that is a website input field with the placeholder text 'Website (ex: your website, Twitter or other social media links)'. At the bottom left, there is a link 'Need Help?'. At the bottom right, there are two buttons: 'Skip' and 'Save Info'.

Figure 19. Slide from Step 4: Using Facebook Pages to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 5

Upload a picture of your classroom or your name bar as your Profile Picture. Then hit Save Photo

The screenshot shows the 'Set Up Mr. Kemp's Classroom' interface. At the top, there is a progress bar with four steps: 1 About, 2 Profile Picture, 3 Add to Favorites, and 4 Preferred Page Audience. Step 2 is currently active. Below the progress bar, there is a large square placeholder for a profile picture, which currently shows a white flag on a blue background. To the right of the placeholder are two buttons: 'Upload From Computer' and 'Import From Website'. At the bottom right, there are two buttons: 'Skip' and 'Save Photo'.

Figure 20. Slide from Step 5: Using Facebook Pages to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 6

Add to Favorites to allow for you to easily access your Classroom Page from your Facebook Home screen. Click on Add to Favorites. Then hit Next.

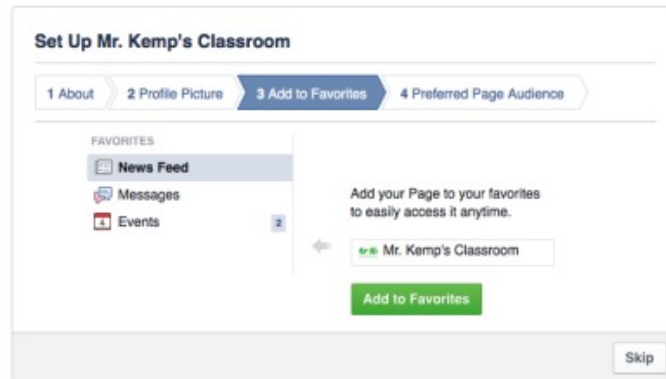


Figure 21. Slide from Step 6: Using Facebook Pages to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 7

Skip the Preferred Audience as you will be informing your parents about the Facebook Page

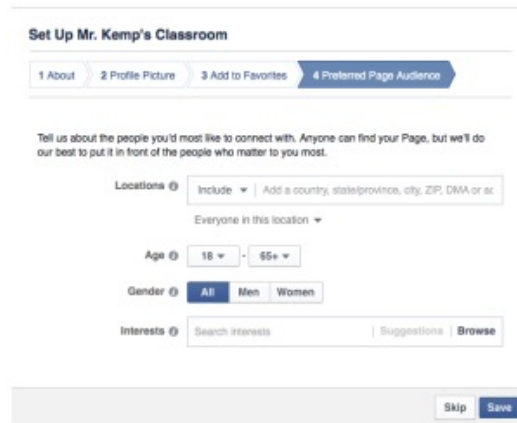


Figure 22. Slide from Step 7: Using Facebook Pages to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 8

Select Settings

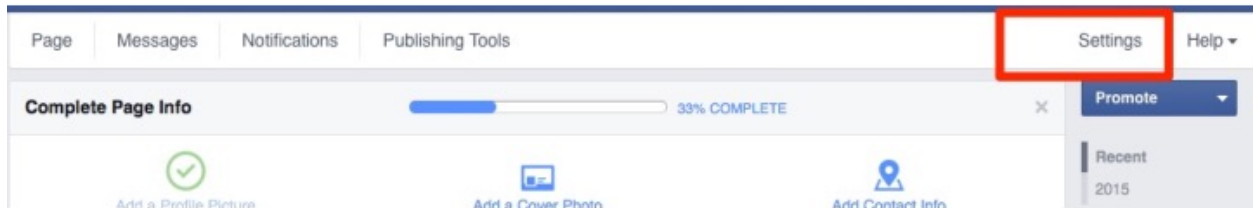


Figure 23. Slide from Step 8: Using Facebook Pages to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 9

Edit Visitor Posts. Important to Allow visitors to the Page to publish posts. This allows for 2-way communications. I would recommend turning off Allow Photos and Video posts, as parents might not have permission to post pictures of other students.

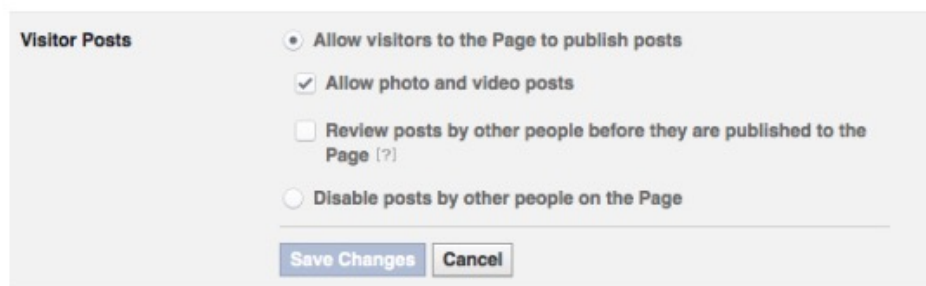


Figure 24. Slide from Step 9: Using Facebook Pages to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 10

Ensure under Messages, you Allow people to contact my Page privately by showing the Message button. Again this will allow parents to ask you questions privately. Keeping this option promotes 2-way communication.

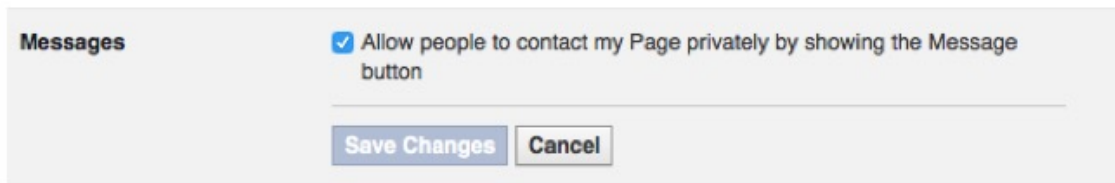


Figure 25. Slide from Step 10: Using Facebook Pages to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Finished

You have now successfully created your classroom's Facebook Page. Now you will be able to keep parents informed as to what is happening in your class. You are able to add pictures of student work, and share events that are happening in your class or at your school.

When you post something it will come from your page, not as your personal account.

*Please ensure you have parent and student permission to post pictures of student or their work on your page.

Figure 26. Slide from Finish: Using Facebook Pages to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Using Facebook groups to communicate with parents.

Using Facebook groups to communicate with Parents

Figure 27. Slide from Title: Using Facebook Groups to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 1

Go to www.facebook.com and create a Facebook account. If you have an account skip to next step.

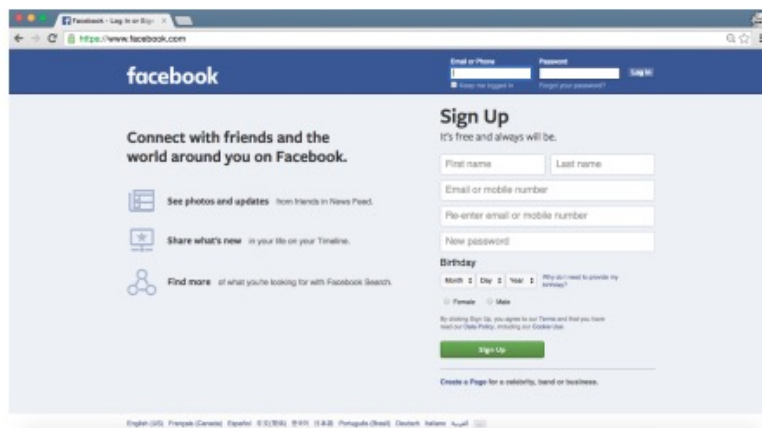


Figure 28. Slide from Step 1: Using Facebook Groups to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 2

Create a Facebook Group

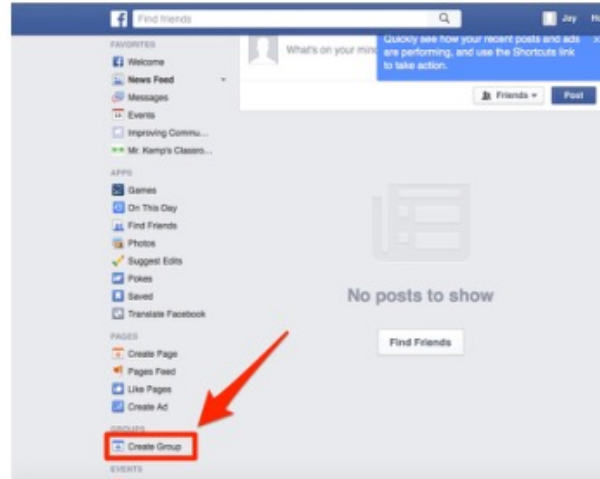


Figure 29. Slide from Step 2: Using Facebook Groups to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 3

Give your Group a name, and add someone to your group. Ensure you select a closed group, as parents will need to join your group to see the posts. Select Create.

 A screenshot of the 'Create New Group' form on Facebook. The form includes the following fields and options:

- Group Name:** Mr. Kemp's Classroom
- Members:** Parents of students in Mr. Kemp's Class
- Favorites:** Add this group to your favorites.
- Privacy:**
 - Public: Anyone can see the group, its members and their posts.
 - Closed: Anyone can find the group and see who's in it. Only members can see posts.
 - Secret: Only members can find the group and see posts.
- Buttons:** Learn more, Cancel, Create

Figure 30. Slide from Step 3: Using Facebook Groups to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 4

Select an icon for your group. Then select OK.

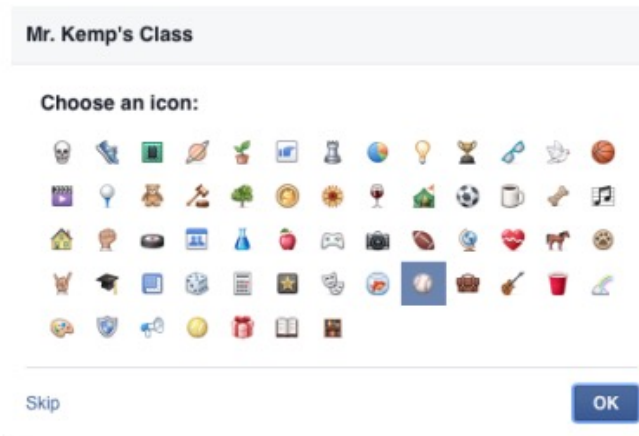


Figure 31. Slide from Step 4: Using Facebook Groups to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

step 5

Select the ... icon and then Edit Group Settings

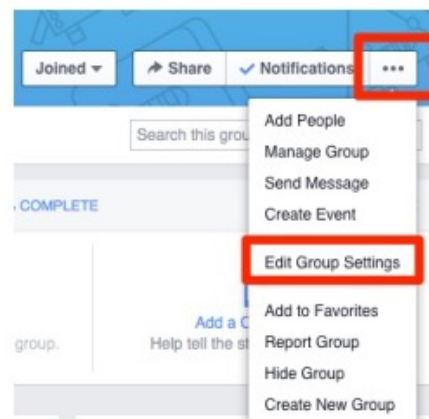


Figure 32. Slide from Step 5: Using Facebook Groups to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Step 6

For Membership Approval - select Any Member can add members, but an admin must approve them. This ensures you have control of who sees information in your group

Posting Permission - Members and admins can post to the group. This allows parents to comment within the group. A great way to ensure the parents have a voice.

Save changes.

Membership Approval: Any member can add members, but an admin must approve them.

Web and Email Address: Customize your group's contact info so you can create posts using email or quickly share a link to your group.

Description:

Potential members see the description if privacy is set to public or closed.

Tags: Enter descriptive keywords (ex: soccer). Tags help people find groups about certain topics. [Learn More](#)

Posting Permissions: Members and admins can post to the group. Only admins can post to the group.

Post Approval: All group posts must be approved by an admin.

Figure 33. Slide from Step 6: Using Facebook Groups to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Finished. you now have a classroom Facebook group

You can now edit your group information and allow parents to join the group, with your permission. Now you will be able to keep parents informed as to what is happening in your class. You are able to add pictures of student work, and share events that are happening in your class or at your school.

*Please ensure you have parent and student permission to post pictures of student or their work on your page.

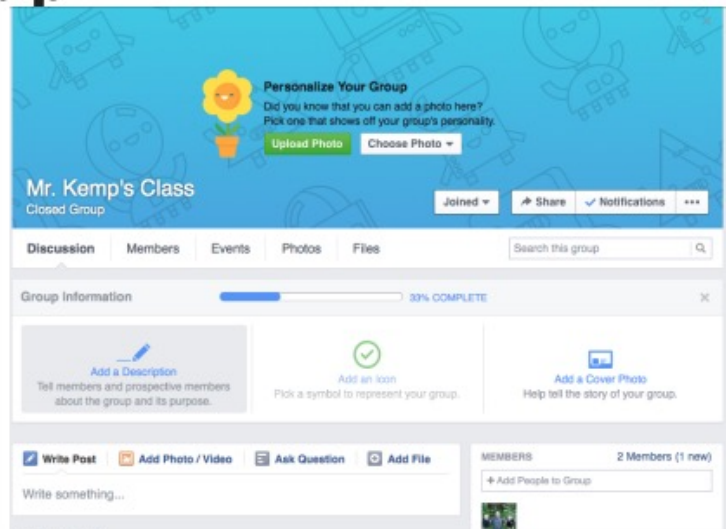


Figure 34. Slide from Finish: Using Facebook Groups to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-facebook>

Using Twitter to Communicate with Parents

Text quoted from *Using Twitter to Communicate with Parents* webpage:

Twitter is a social networking service, that allows users to share short (140 characters) messages, called "tweets." According to Wikipedia, there are 302 million users on Twitter, but people are able to read tweets without registering for the service. Twitter can be used to share information about upcoming events, due dates and assignments, but also allows for two-way communication.

Social media can be another effective way to open up two-way communication between schools and home (Cox & McLeod, 2013). Robinson (2012) mentions a quote from *The School Leaders Guide to Social Media*, "we have a moral and ethical obligation to teach our students how to use this technology effectively, ethically and for the greater good" (p. #). These tools provide families with the opportunity to review school or class postings and respond with comments, questions and feedback to the school. Because many students and parents are already using a number of social media sites, they feel comfortable and are willing to use these tools to engage with the teachers (Magette, 2013; Wang, 2013). This method allows for communication to happen in real-time, in a format that is content rich, and for collaboration to happen while others support and participate in the learning process (Magette, 2013). Social media allows for families to keep up-to-date with important events and activities occurring at school and gives them a glimpse of what is happening during the school day (Magette, 2013; Wang, 2013). It is important that any class or school sites where students, parents and other stakeholders can comment that their comments are moderated to ensure student privacy is upheld. Students often

produce better quality projects when they know their assignment will be posted online for a larger, more authentic audience (Magette, 2013). (Kemp, 2015)

Creating a classroom Twitter account to communicate with parents.

Using Twitter to communicate with parents

Figure 35. Slide from Title: Using Twitter to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-twitter>

Step 1

Go to www.twitter.com

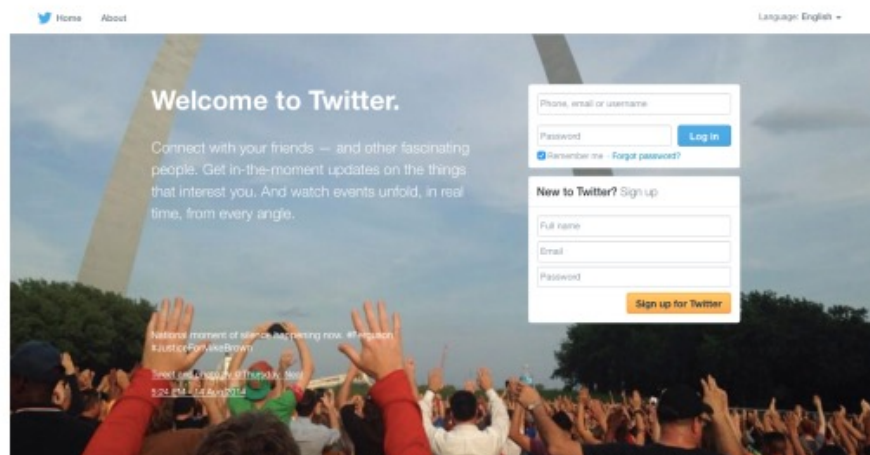


Figure 36. Slide from Step 1: Using Twitter to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-twitter>

Step 2

Fill out the info needed in the New to Twitter section.

Full Name: Mr. Kemp's Class, Email: Email address, Password: Password. Then select Sign up for Twitter



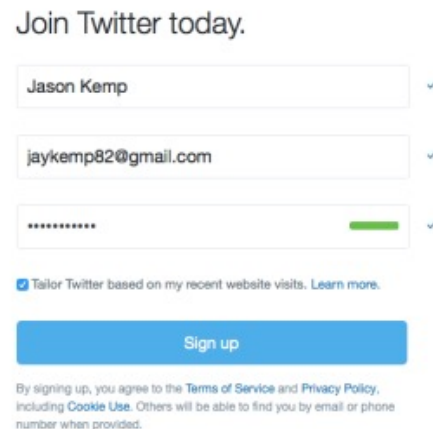
The screenshot shows a sign-up form titled "New to Twitter? Sign up". It contains three input fields: "Full name", "Email", and "Password". Below the fields is an orange button labeled "Sign up for Twitter".

Figure 37. Slide from Step 2: Using Twitter to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-twitter>

Step 3

Fill in the required fields and select Sign up



The screenshot shows a sign-up form titled "Join Twitter today." It contains three input fields: "Jason Kemp", "jaykemp82@gmail.com", and a password field with a green progress bar. Below the fields is a checkbox labeled "Tailor Twitter based on my recent website visits. Learn more." and a blue button labeled "Sign up". At the bottom, there is a small disclaimer: "By signing up, you agree to the Terms of Service and Privacy Policy, including Cookie Use. Others will be able to find you by email or phone number when provided."

Figure 38. Slide from Step 3: Using Twitter to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-twitter>

Step 4

You can enter your phone number or select skip. I recommend Skipping this step.

Enter your phone.

Your phone number keeps your account secure, connects you to friends and makes login easier.

Canada

+1 Phone number

Next

Skip

We will text a verification code to this number. Standard SMS fees may apply. We will never display your phone number to other Twitter users.

Figure 39. Slide from Step 4: Using Twitter to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-twitter>

Step 5

Choose a username. I recommend using your name/class. (ie. Mr.Kempsclass)
Select Next

Choose a username.

Don't worry, you can always change it later.

MrKempsClass ✓

Suggestions: KempsMr | MrKemps | kemps_mr | mr_kemps | ClassKemps

Next

Skip

Figure 40. Slide from Step 5: Using Twitter to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-twitter>

Step 6

Upload a photo of your classroom or name bar.

Add a photo.

Show your unique personality and style.

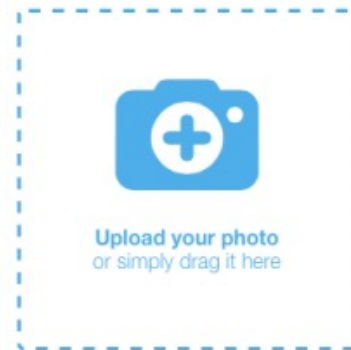


Figure 41. Slide from Step 6: Using Twitter to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-twitter>

Step 7

Select Edit profile from the home screen to edit your preferences and give followers information about your class.

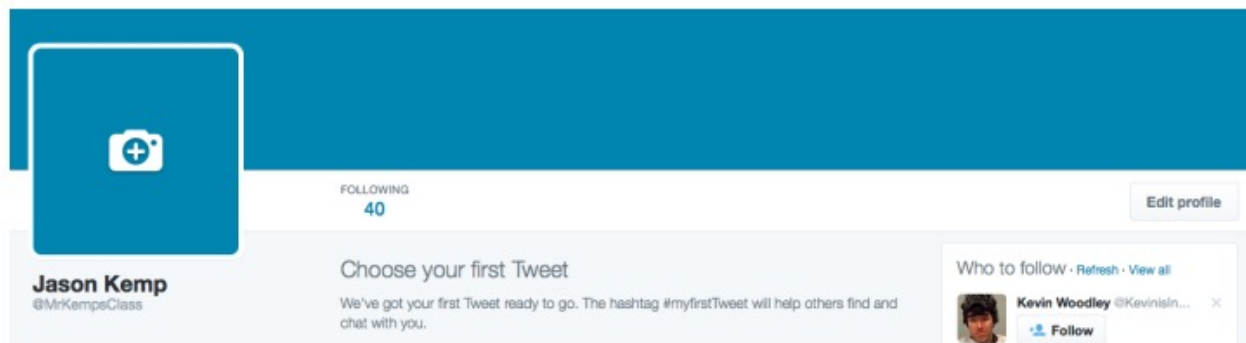


Figure 42. Slide from Step 7: Using Twitter to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-twitter>

Step 8

Edit the Name you want your parents to see.

Give a Bio explaining to your followers the purpose of your account.

Location can be the School's name.

Include your website.

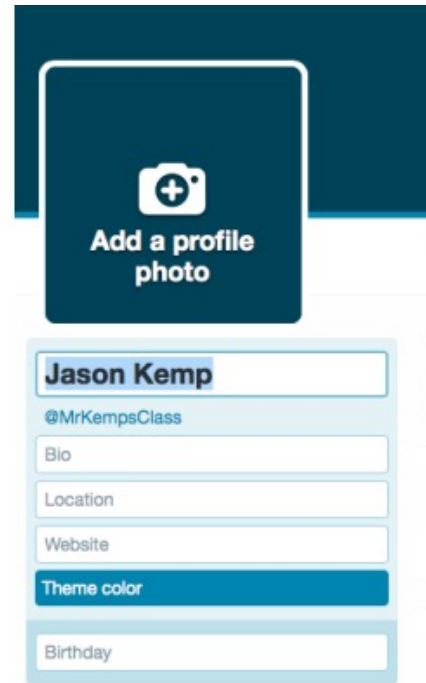


Figure 43. Slide from Step 8: Using Twitter to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-twitter>

Finish

You have created a classroom Twitter account. You can use Twitter to communicate with the parents of your students and keep them informed to events that are happening in your class and at your school.

Figure 44. Slide from Step 9: Using Twitter to Communicate with Parents (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/using-twitter>

Simplifying Workflow

Text quoted from *Simplifying Workflow* webpage:

Being a teacher is busy enough. Next we will connect your Classroom Facebook Page to your Classroom Twitter Account. This means you only need to post information to your Facebook Page and the same information will be tweeted out by your classroom Twitter account. I will then provide you with a way to place your Twitter feed onto your classroom website, so again the information that you Post on your Facebook Page will appear on your classroom website. This allows parents to choose where they will read the information. (Kemp, 2015)

Simplifying workflow: connecting Facebook and Twitter.

Simplifying workflow: Connecting Facebook and Twitter

Figure 45. Slide from Title: Connecting Facebook and Twitter (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from

<https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Step 1

Go to <https://www.facebook.com/twitter>

Select Link a Page to Twitter



Figure 46. Slide from Step 1: Connecting Facebook and Twitter (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Step 2

Select Link to Twitter button next to your classroom page



Figure 47. Slide from Step 2: Connecting Facebook and Twitter (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Step 3

You will be redirected to your twitter account. Authorize app, will give Facebook permission to link your Twitter account.

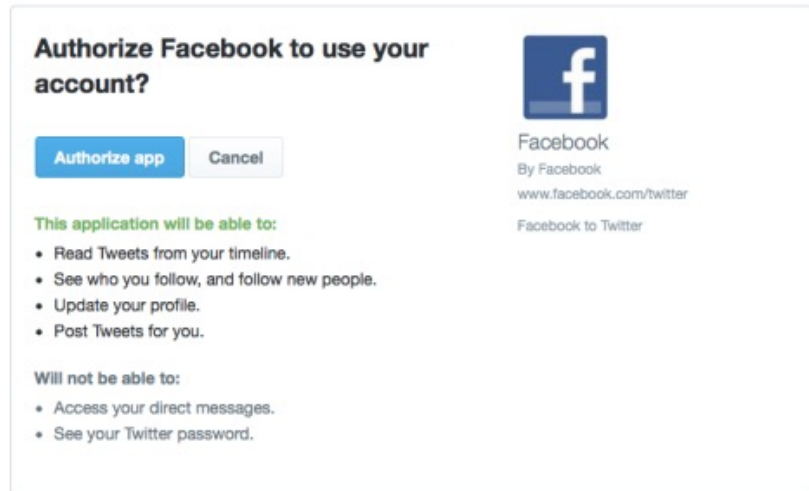


Figure 48. Slide from Step 3: Connecting Facebook and Twitter (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Step 4

Ensure check marks are next to the post you would like to link. I recommend having them all checked. Hit Save Changes.



Figure 49. Slide from Step 4: Connecting Facebook and Twitter (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Finished

Now all of your posts to create in Facebook will be tweeted out using your classroom Twitter account. This allows you to post something once and show up in multiple areas.

Figure 50. Slide from Finish: Connecting Facebook and Twitter (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Embedding your Twitter feed onto your classroom website or blog.

Embedding your Twitter feed onto your classroom website or Blog

Figure 51. Slide from Title: Embedding Twitter feed onto your website (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Step 1

Log into Twitter (www.twitter.com)

Figure 52. Slide from Step 1: Embedding Twitter feed onto your website (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Step 2

Click on your Profile picture, then select Settings

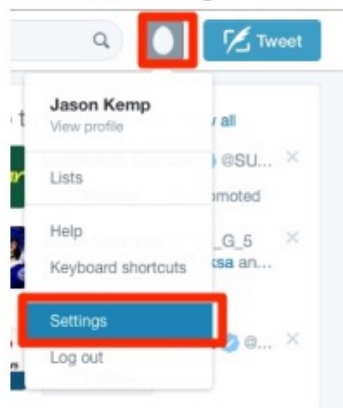


Figure 53. Slide from Step 2: Embedding Twitter feed onto your website (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Step 3

Select Widgets

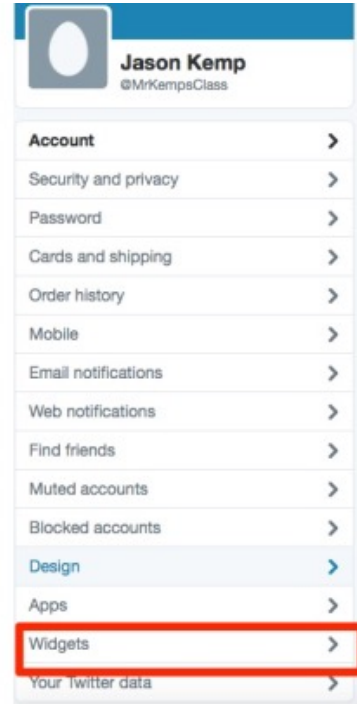


Figure 54. Slide from Step 3: Embedding Twitter feed onto your website (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Step 4

In the Widgets menu, select Create new

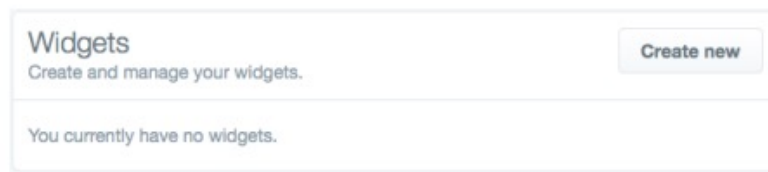


Figure 55. Slide from Step 4: Embedding Twitter feed onto your website (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Step 5

Under Options ensure both Exclude replies and Auto-expand photos are checked.

Then click on Create widget

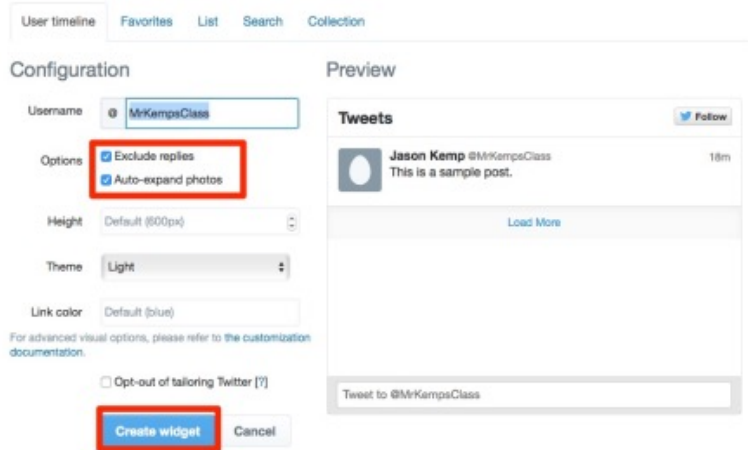


Figure 56. Slide from Step 5: Embedding Twitter feed onto your website (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Step 6

Copy the HTML that has been created. (Ctrl + C on a PC and command + C on a MAC)

You will then paste this on your blog or classroom website.

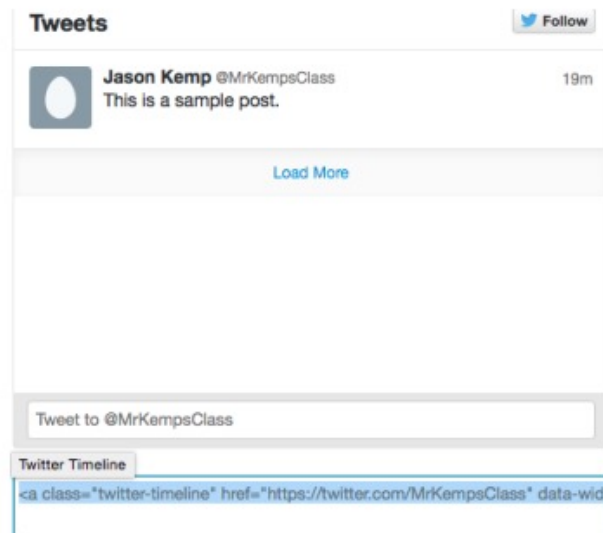


Figure 57. Slide from Step 6: Embedding Twitter feed onto your website (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Step 7

On your blog or website locate a button that looks like this one:

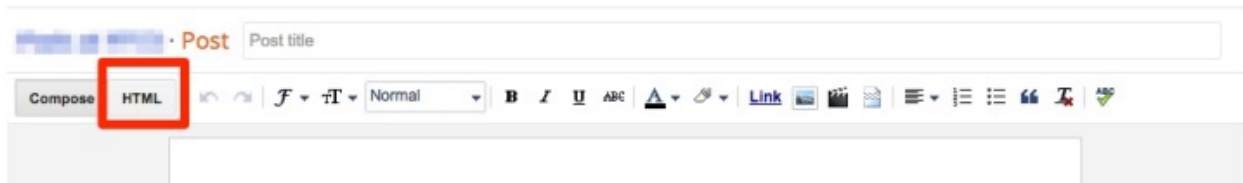


Figure 58. Slide from Step 7: Embedding Twitter feed onto your website (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Step 8

Paste your HTML code created by twitter in the text editor (Ctrl + V on PC and command + V on MAC)

```
<a class="twitter-timeline" href="https://twitter.com/MrKempsClass" data-widget-id="655965444726124545">Tweets by
@MrKempsClass</a> <script>ifunction(d,s,id){var js,fjs=d.getElementsByTagName(s)
[0],p="/^http:/.test(d.location)?'http':'https';if(!d.getElementById(id))
{js=d.createElement(s);js.id=id;js.src=p+"://platform.twitter.com/widgets.js";fjs.parentNode.insertBefore(js,fjs);}}
(document,"script","twitter-wjs");</script>
```

Figure 59. Slide from Step 8: Embedding Twitter feed onto your website (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Finished

On your blog or website you will now have a widget that shows all your tweets.

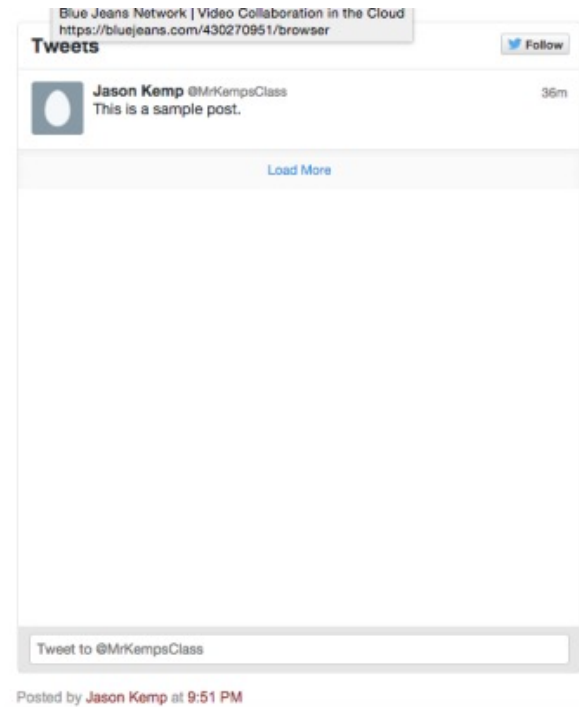


Figure 60. Slide from Finish: Embedding Twitter feed onto your website (Kemp, 2015).

Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/simplifying-workflow>

Letter to Obtain Consent for Social Media

Text quoted from *Obtain Consent for Social Media* webpage:

Please note: I am not a lawyer and this form has been adapted from forms being used by various districts, schools and educators around British Columbia. Please speak with your administrator before you decide to use these tools or form to ensure you are following your district's policy.

Please go to the [Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia](#) to ensure your form meets the criteria laid out in their guidelines. (Kemp, 2015)

New Media Parent Release Form

Dear Parents,

We take great pride at our school in our efforts to share important information with our stakeholders in a variety of ways. Not only will we use traditional tools—newsletters, phone calls, local papers, and websites—to keep you posted about everything happening here in our building, we'll also use social media services like Twitter and Facebook. We hope to develop stronger partnerships with the community we serve by joining you in these popular digital spaces.

We also like to celebrate the successes of our students in all of our communications. There are times when we'll share photos or video clips from important school events like dances, performances, athletic events, or interesting classroom activities. We also like to praise students who are doing remarkable things in and beyond our classrooms. We believe that we build stronger communities when we take the time to spotlight the positive work our children do.

Understandably, however, we want to respect your right to privacy. Note that each of these websites is an online service located outside of Canada and as a result is within the jurisdiction of the United States of America, something British Columbia's privacy laws do not permit public institutions to engage in without a waiver such as this. As a result, we'd like to know which of the following practices you give us permission to use in our school-based communication efforts:

(Please check all that apply.)

- I give permission for my child's first and last name** to be used in any school-based communications—like newsletters, websites, articles for local papers, television programs, and posts to school-monitored Facebook and Twitter spaces—that school or district employees generate.
- I give permission for my child's likeness** to be used in any photos or video clips the school or district employees generate for school-based communications—like newsletters, websites, and articles for local papers, television programs, and posts to school-monitored Facebook and Twitter spaces.
- I give permission for my child's likeness to be used in any school-based communications only when he or she is a part of a larger group of students**—such as athletes on the sidelines of a game, actors in a school performance, or students working together on a project in class.
- I do not give permission** for my child's name or likeness to be used in any school-based communications.

Student name (please print): _____

Parent/guardian name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Figure 61. Sample media release form (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from

<https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/letter-to-obtain-consent-for-social-media>

Letter to Obtain Email Addresses

Text quoted from *Obtain Email Address* webpage:

Here is a sample of a letter to parents requesting their email address, so you can use the email function in My Education BC. You would then provide this information to the office, so the student's record can be updated on the system. (Kemp, 2015)

New Email Address Request

Dear Parents,

We take great pride at our school in our efforts to share important information with our stakeholders in a variety of ways. Not only will we use traditional tools—newsletters, phone calls, local papers, and websites—to keep you posted about everything happening here in our building, we'll also use the email function in My Education BC, our provinces new student information system. It is important that we have your current email address, to ensure you are receiving this information. If you happen to change your email address throughout the school year, please send us the updated information to ensure our records stay up-to-date.

Please fill out the information below, if you would like to receive emails regarding your child's education. If you have any questions please contact **Teacher's Name** at **School Phone number** or **Teacher's email address**.

Student name (please print): _____

Parent/guardian name (please print): _____

Email Address: _____

Parent/guardian name (please print): _____

Email Address: _____

Figure 62. Sample letter to obtain email address (Kemp, 2015). Retrieved from

<https://sites.google.com/site/keepingparentsconnected/letter-to-obtain-email-addresses>

Chapter Four: Reflection

Project

For my project, I created a website to provide teachers with instructions on implementing tools to improve communication with parents. Because families have become increasingly busy, it is essential that teachers provide information in a variety of ways, which will meet the needs of the parents with children in their class. The tools I covered in my project were: using the built in email feature in My Education BC, using Facebook Pages, and classroom Twitter accounts to open the line of communication with parents. Many parents are already using these tools to communicate in their personal lives, so it would be an easy transition to use these tools to communicate with their child's teacher. The website also includes instructions for streamlining workflow for the teachers. This means they can post the information using one tool and the information will automatically be posted in other locations. It does not make sense for teachers to need to sign in and add the same information to a number of different areas. This allows parents to continue to use the tools they already feel comfortable with to receive the information regarding their child's education. Because of the FIPPA laws in B.C., it is essential for teachers to have parental consent to post student's personal information online. I have included a sample consent form explaining to parents why we are planning to use these tools.

Changing Professionally

When I first started the program. I was very confident with cloud-based storage. I had never lost any documents when storing them in the cloud, however I had lost documents saved on computers before. This all changed at the end of semester three, when our blogs that were hosted on University of Victoria servers were lost. This was very discouraging, as many of my blog

posts were not backed up. This was a good lesson, as I now ensure I have everything backed up in multiple locations.

Before I began this program, I had just started to use Twitter, as a professional development tool. I had very little knowledge of the platform and only had a very small professional learning network (PLN). I was more of a lurker, than a contributor on Twitter. This program allowed me to build my PLN quickly, and connected me with my #TIEGrad family. I knew answers to some of my questions were only a tweet away. This was a very powerful transition for me, as it allowed me to realize that knowing that answers to all the questions was impossible. I would no longer need to research on my own, but could now request assistance from someone that might have first-hand experience with the solution to my problem. This group of people had the ability to support me as an educator and push my educational beliefs.

Throughout the program, we were offered many opportunities to choose what and how we were going to learn. This passion-based learning approach reinforced my belief that students are able to learn more and produce higher quality work when the topic is something meaningful to the learner. An authentic audience also plays a strong role to ensure a higher quality product is developed. When students know that the audience is larger than just the teacher or class, they tend to work hard to demonstrate their learning. We often published our assignments on our blogs and posted them for the world to see, rather than just submitting them to our professor. Often the feedback from the outside audience was more meaningful than the letter grade we earned.

The backbone of our program was our meeting dates on BlueJeans video conferencing software. Most of our courses required us to meet, at least once per week. Sometimes these meetings were informal chats, while other times they were formal presentations from speakers

that were able to present from around the world, while still sitting in their living room or office. This was very powerful, as the program also gave us the opportunity to record the session and review the lesson at our own pace and on our own schedule. With my family and busy schedule, I do not think I would have been able to complete this program if I needed to attend classes weekly away from home. I know many other online master's programs that take place in discussion form, but the ability to see each other weekly, even if it was on a screen allowed us to develop a strong community. This group of people became a family that was there to support and push us along our journey. This community approach is very important in education, as learners need to feel comfortable to be successful.

Affecting Myself and Others

When I embarked on the journey to obtain my master's degree, I was looking for the piece of paper that would allow me to apply and become an administrator, as well as provide me with a little pay raise, then I was reminded how much I loved to learn. I had been out of formal schooling for over seven years and it was frightening to think of going back to becoming the student. To start, I struggled with being given the freedom to learn what I wanted and when I wanted, which made me realize how hard this must be for young learners, but it ensured that I took ownership in my learning. This method is also more meaningful when the learner gets to choose their own topics and things that interested them.

This program also showed me the importance to share. There are so many great things happening in education that most people are unaware of because these stories are not shared. The goal of my project is to give teachers the tools needed to share the success stories that are occurring in their schools and classrooms. I hope that my resource will provide educators with some direction in using a variety of tools to improve home-school communication. There are

many tools available, but they need to be used responsibly, effectively, and efficiently to meet the needs of all stakeholders.

As I started my journey, our school began to investigate how a few social media tools could improve parent involvement. We wanted to share some of the positive events that were happening at our school. Parents appreciate knowing what is happening in their child's school, but it is not always possible for them to visit the school during the school day.

Recommendations

As an educator looking to improve home/school communication I recommend they lead by example, get permission, and celebrate success and the positive things that are happening at your school. The first step to use new tools to improve communication with parents is to get permission. Educators should ensure they are following district policy when using social media and other tools to communicate with parents. If your district has a policy against using these tools, having conversations and bringing examples of other districts and educators that are utilizing these tools with success can help move your district or school in the right direction. Ensure you have the permission of the parents before you start posting pictures and other information regarding their child. Sometimes the need to educate the parents, as to why we want to use these tools is essential. Finally, it is always good practice to get permission from students when you are posting their pictures or information using these tools. This can be a great way to model digital citizenship for your students.

The next step to improve communication between home and school is to lead by example. This can be done by using the tools to improve your own practice, while investigating ways to improve, as the tools available are always changing. It is important that we are meeting parents where they are and not expecting them to learn new tools.

Using social media to celebrate positive things that are happening is key. Parents like to be aware of the positive things their child is involved at in school. Many parents are busy at work or are unable to visit their child's school, so often they do not hear from schools unless something negative has occurred. By sharing success stories with the parents, it becomes easier to work as a team when difficult situations arise.

Lastly, I encourage educators to also investigate tools that would best meet the needs of the students to improve how we connect and communicate with our students.

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