BUILDING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION METHODS BETWEEN TEACHERS AND PARENTS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS IN TITLE I SCHOOLS

by

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Abstract

Some teachers’ systems they have currently in communicating with parents of their students are not effective. Teachers may not have the knowledge or proper training on what adequate communication looks like besides the district and state mandated systems. Because some teachers are unaware of the cultures of the families socially, ethnically, and economically some teachers are not able to effectively communicate with families. Students are not as successful academically and socially as students whose parents are able to communicate effectively with the teacher. This disconnect between the teacher and the family also creates a disconnect within the classroom. Teachers who have the support to form methods of successful communication with the parents will result in successful students.

In this study, four teachers and the author as the facilitator, participated in a learning group for a period of four months. This group focused on adopting methods of communication with parents about the status of their child’s progress academically and socially. Over the four-month period, the teachers explored new ways of providing additional support for students and of communicating with parents about student
progress. Interventions were related to academics, motivation, participation, attendance, and behavior. Data included teacher records of interventions and student progress, agendas and notes from the bi-weekly meetings, and facilitator field notes of interactions with the four teachers between the meetings. Analysis of the data included both formative and summative examination of the major issues and themes that emerged.

Data related to communication with parents showed that while all teachers adopted at least two new communication strategies, the group ranged in confidence regarding how to effectively express themselves to parents. Some of the interventions that teachers provided for students were not consistent with the parents’ request of interventions. According to the parents, the teachers’ forms of communication strategies were not always effective in assisting their child to become more successful. However, because of communication the parents did feel that they had become more confident in assisting their child at home in homework and preparing for tests. Teachers were also reluctant to express themselves openly within the Professional Learning Community (PLC), often preferring to take notes rather than engage in collaborative discussion.

Based on this study’s limited number of teacher participation, recommendations include providing participants with more in depth training on communicating with each other to make the learning community more interactive and potentially increase its impact. The results also corroborate the literature documenting the pervasiveness of poor communication between teachers and parents and suggest that improving communication between teachers and parents may require providing teachers with direct support and guidance related to specific strategies that they can use.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1
  Barriers ..................................................................................... 4
  Response .................................................................................... 5
  Teachers’ and Parents’ Views on Communication .................................... 7
  Cultural Competency ..................................................................... 8
  Context of Study ......................................................................... 9
  Purpose of Study ......................................................................... 14
  Improving Communication ............................................................. 14
  Limitations and Assumptions .......................................................... 16
  Conclusion .................................................................................. 16

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................... 20
  Introduction ............................................................................... 20
  Student Success and Parent Involvement ............................................ 21
  Communication between Teachers and Families .................................. 24
  Communication Barriers .................................................................. 29
  Effective Communication between Teachers and Parents ....................... 32
  Summary .................................................................................. 35

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 38
  Introduction ............................................................................... 38
  Research Design (Study’s Methodology) .............................................. 39
  Participants ............................................................................... 41
  Data Collection and Procedures ...................................................... 43
  Sources of Data .......................................................................... 44
  Data Analysis ............................................................................ 48
  Limitations ................................................................................ 50
  Subject Position .......................................................................... 51
  Conclusion ................................................................................ 52

Chapter 4: RESULTS/OUTCOMES ......................................................... 53
  Introduction ............................................................................... 53
APPENDIX D. Mrs. Baca and Her Parents’ Data .................................................................105
APPENDIX E. Daily Behavior Chart .............................................................................108
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Professional Learning Communities’ Strategies on Communication with Families .................................................................45

Table 2. Examining How Teachers Improve Communication Skills ..................................................47

Table 3. Parents’ Perceptions of Interventions ........................................................................56

Table 4. Services Students Received .........................................................................................58

Table 5. Teachers’ Perceptions of Interventions ........................................................................60

Table 6. Parent Satisfaction Survey ..........................................................................................62

Table 7. Parent Preferences Regarding Types of Communication ..................................................64

Table 8. Parents’ Perceived Impact of Communication ...............................................................65

Table 9. Professional Learning Community Meetings ..................................................................67

Table 10. Goals for Intervention and Communication ................................................................69
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Communication between families and school staff is an essential element in supporting students’ learning at school. It is an added bonus when school staff and students share a common language and cultural understanding. However, it is imperative when students and families speak different languages and come from different cultural experiences and beliefs about schooling that they are able to communicate with teachers and be a part of the school community. Ramirez (2003), discussed parents’ perceptions that teachers lacked knowledge about their child’s culture as one of the potential barriers in communication. Families’ languages, cultural backgrounds, and social economic status have created barriers between teachers and families since the majority of teachers in the educational system are White and monolingual and may not have cultural competency skills (Schulte, 1990). “Eighty-five percent of the K–12 teaching force in the United States is White and middle-class” (Michael, 2012, p. 1). Teachers communicate with tools the district provides, such as report cards and progress reports, but may not realize these do not develop effective communication between the home and school.

In the past, communication systems between teachers and families have not been a high priority for public school leadership for a variety of reasons. Historically, parental involvement was not always a welcome addition to the school community, and even today some view parent-school relations as a power struggle (Peressini, 1998). Currently, there has been increased focus on this topic; however, the primary focus is still spent on teaching curriculum and making sure students pass the district and state mandated tests.
While much time and energy has been focused on raising test scores, less time has focused on the factors that will support students. Teachers’ current belief systems and the methods being used in communicating and building relationships with families should be assessed. After these are assessed, teachers need to be given the tools on how to effectively communicate with parents on an interpersonal level.

The families who do not feel comfortable at school sites will not be active participants in the school community (Finders & Lewis, 1994). Teachers must not only communicate more effectively through existing channels, but through developing cultural competency as individuals and creating a welcoming atmosphere within the classroom. If communication systems are improved, families may start to build relationships with their child’s teacher. Parents who have overheard or received negative comments from teachers about their child or other children at the school site may view environments as unsafe and possibly have negative feelings towards the teachers (Finders & Lewis, 1994). Parents may have had discriminatory experiences at their child’s previous school or view education as negative because of their own experiences (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Families will be less likely to speak up and advocate for their child if they feel that they are not going to be heard by the teachers at the school site. A parent may even become hostile towards their child’s teacher because they already feel they need to be on the defensive for not being valued or respected in the past, creating an unfriendly environment for everyone involved. Regular, systematic communication seldom takes place, teachers and parents remain frustrated with each other, and the child suffers.

“Teachers and the school environment are critical protective factors for fostering
resilience” (Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007, p. 330). Teachers who improve communication systems with families in schools will show students that they are supported both at home and at school.

Some teachers’ belief systems lead to an absence of communication between teachers with the families in school communities. Many teachers do not reach out to parents on an interpersonal level because of the various obstacles. Some teachers are fearful of confrontation with the parents when they reach out to communicate. When the teacher makes that phone call the parent may blame the teacher for the problem. “However, the most serious obstacle to increase parental involvement in our schools is the failure of our educational programs to adequately train pre-service teachers in effective communication skills” (Flynn, 2006, p. 12). Addi-Raccah and Ainhoren (2009) stated, “A discriminant analysis found different profiles of teachers’ attitudes towards parent involvement: resistant and negative attitudes” (p. 805). Teachers’ resistance leads to lack of communication, leaving parents disconnected from the classroom and, possibly, reluctant to be a part of the learning community. Teachers may not see parent communication as a priority or believe that it is their responsibility to communicate in other modalities other than what is mandated. Time, knowledge, resistance to change, the attitudes of both the families and teachers, along with the cultural differences, are some of the barriers which get in the way of communication between the home and the school (Shartrand, Kreider, & Erickson-Warfield, 1994). There are additional barriers, including the lack of focus from the district level, the lack of accountability, and the low expectations from the site leader. Regardless of the obstacle in communication between
the teacher and parent, it has been undisputed that parents involved in a child’s education in communicating with the teacher is of high importance in academic success (Flynn, 2006).

**Barriers**

Poor communication prevents parents from advocating for their children. The traditional methods of communication through letters, progress reports, report cards, and meetings provide a minimum level of outreach and information sharing to families. There are inconsistencies in these methods. The paperwork sent home does not always reach the families. Some families may not be able to read the material being sent home, especially families who do not speak English and families who come from low-income households who may be illiterate or not understand the academic language. Hassett’s findings showed “that 47% of the nation’s adults, more than 90 million people are functionally illiterate” (1994, p. 108). In 1995 that number grew by 18 million. Some parents may not be literate enough to read the material. Literacy could be based on the common language being used at the school sites, which is English. In an article 730 million Americans were reported to be below basic at the reading level (Kutner, Greenberg, Jin, Boyle, Hsu, & Dunleavy, 2007). These Americans performed at the lowest level of literacy (Kutner et al., 2007). The people who came from the lowest levels of literacy came from low-income households. (Kutner et al., 2007). Thomas Elementary is a Title I school at almost 50% free and reduced lunch, which reveals that there is a high poverty level (Ed-Data, 2009-2010). If the common practice within the classrooms is mostly through written
communication, many parents may not receive the information and/or understand the information being communicated from the school site and teacher.

Another communication barrier is scheduling conferences between teachers and parents. Many parents may not be able to meet with teachers at the designated times teachers have scheduled. Some barriers include parents work schedules, transportation, and childcare arrangements. Some teachers are not willing to stay late to cater to the parents’ needs or come up with other methods to conferencing with parents through phone or by going to the parent’s place of work. An inviting school environment where teachers welcome parents will have more engaged parents (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). If teachers display they want parent involvement at the school site and that they support the families with their outside concerns and problems, then parents may likely put forth more effort to meet and communicate with teachers. Other forms of communication should take place for parents to be a part of their child’s success in education.

Response

District leadership has identified communication necessary to raise academic scores, yet, there does not appear to be systems in place to establish improved communication and to evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies. The primary method of communication from teachers is written. Written communication can become impersonal and may not reach all parents in the community. We still need to keep in mind that in order for parents to become more involved in their child’s education they need to feel welcomed, which is reaching out on a personal level. The goal is to have families become a part of the community and be informed.
Many teachers would like to take the initiative to develop the relationships with parents, but may not because of a shortage of time or not having the experience to be comfortable to do so. Relationships between the school and families will only happen if both parties are involved. Some teachers may need professional development, practice, and encouragement to establish these relationships with the families at their school sites.

Teachers need to develop skills and practices that include (a) welcoming partnerships with families, identifying and using family strengths to support positive student outcomes, (b) communicating with families positively, (c) sharing data about student progress and performance in an accessible, understandable, and actionable manner, (d) demonstrating respect, especially in working with culturally and religiously diverse families and families of children with disabilities, and (e) advocating with families for policies and practices to increase student learning and achievement. (Caspe, Lopez, Chu, & Weiss, 2011, p. 2)

A teacher who has the proper knowledge and skills on how to communicate with families will most likely follow through with communicating effectively.

Some parents at schools have experienced teachers who have had biases and/or discriminatory perceptions of them or their child. This creates a negative relationship between the parent and any of their child’s teachers. Parents may think that teachers have a negative perception of them so they avoid being at the school site (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2001). Many teachers may be unaware of the power their roles and responsibilities play in developing relationships and communicating with families. An
alliance between teachers and parents needs to be formed with mutual respect and common goals for the child (Howe & Simmons, 1993). If teachers are developing relationships with the families of the children in their classrooms, they will be able to break down the barriers that have been put into place so parents will want to become a part of the school community.

Arriaza and Wagner (2012) found that home visits helped teachers to make that connection. “Over time, these structured visits left closer relationships between the participating teachers and the families they visited” (Arriaza & Wagner, 2012, p. 11). Howe and Simmons (1993) commented on the importance of home visits and conferences taking place at the families’ homes as one of the most meaningful types of conferences. A teacher taking time to visit the homes of families shows the teacher has a personal interest in their child that goes beyond teaching the curriculum and test scores. School staff should work towards all forms of communication that will support parent involvement and student achievement. Families need to know how to support their child at home and teachers need to know how to support the child at school. If both the family and teacher share the knowledge needed, both sides will have the information they need to improve student success.

**Teachers’ and Parents’ Views on Communication**

Families need to communicate with teachers to advocate for their children. English-speaking parents are able to communicate more effectively with their child’s teacher than non-English-speaking parents. Because of this, the language becomes a barrier. Some cultures come from a different perspective of what a school’s responsibility
is and what the family’s responsibility is in teaching the child. There has been a substantive amount of research which states many teachers have an insufficient amount of information on how to successfully connect with parents who are from different cultural backgrounds (Guo, 2006, p. 83). Some teachers may feel more comfortable speaking with and developing a relationship with a parent who is similar to their own culture and background.

Teachers who try to communicate with parents whose first language is not English may not have the knowledge of the proper methods or tools that can be used. However, some teachers use academic language that parents do not understand. The teachers who are not able to communicate with the parents successfully are not able to make effective phone calls, send home letters that can be read, and conduct conferences without translation. Numerous studies have shown improving communication with families at school sites can contribute to academic, social, and emotional improvements with students (Flynn, 2006). Families who do not take part in school decision-making are less capable of being an advocate for their child.

**Cultural Competency**

Cultural competency is an essential element in order for teachers to be able to communicate with the families in their community. Many teachers may not be aware of the different methods of communicating effectively between the different cultures at Thomas Elementary. Some of the families at Thomas Elementary are not able to communicate in English where most of the teachers only speak English. Teachers at Thomas may not know the cultural differences in behaviors and communication of the
cultures in the community. There are three Hispanic teachers at Thomas Elementary, two East Indian teachers, two Asian, and the other nine teachers are White.

Some teachers may be unaware of the different cultures of their families within their classrooms. They may not know the different methods on how to interact with families of different cultures. Teachers taking the time to get to know their families by having meetings other than the district mandated meetings and sending home other forms of communication can express that they are personally interested in the family and their child. Teachers who support and encourage one another to work more effectively with the parents can learn how to get around the barriers that are in place. Milner (2011) stated that a successful teacher “was able to build cultural congruence with his highly diverse learners because he developed cultural competence and concurrently deepened his knowledge and understanding of himself and practice” (Milner, 2011, p. 66). If teachers build cultural competence around their students, they will learn more about the students’ families and styles of communication. This learning will result in relationship building, which can lead to better communication between the teacher and the parent. It is more likely for the child to become successful with parents and teachers working together towards a common goal.

**Context of the Study**

There has been a lack of parent involvement at Thomas Elementary for approximately 10 years. The participation is low in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the School Site Council (SSC) until recently, family functions, and overall interaction with the teachers particularly. At a PTA board meeting possibly two of the
five members of the board will attend. At the PTA meetings, out of all the families from Thomas Elementary, maybe two to three parents will attend. These parents work diligently at fundraising to make sure all classrooms can attend fieldtrips, but it is difficult with so few members. Up until this past year it was a chore to urge parents to become involved in the School Site Council (SSC). However, in the past year, there has been a growth of parents who have become involved in the SSC. Although, family nights have received some additional participation, there has been minimal participation in fundraisers such as the fall festival and spring carnival. Because of the absence of parent involvement, programs like cultural day and science camp have been cut. There is a need for parents to become involved at Thomas Elementary in order for it to become a community. The students at Thomas Elementary are proud when their parents are taking part in school activities; this motivates the students and brings the home-school connection closer. “Numerous types of parental involvement have been shown to develop cognitive growth and success in school” (Campbell & Glasgow, 2010, p. 3). Besides attending school functions and being part of school groups, parents can be active participants in their child’s education by becoming knowledgeable about educational expectations and how to support their child with their education. Students show a change in attitude and in academics when they know their parent is working together with their teacher (Sirvani, 2007). Through my years in education I have built many alliances with parents where I have seen children grow academically, motivationally, and behaviorally. When parents are unable to drive to the school site for meetings, I have set up meetings with parents at their homes and places of employment. Each parent in my class is also
given my email address to contact whenever needed. If there is a unique situation with a
child I will give the parent my cell phone number. Teachers and parents working
together can show improvement in a child holistically.

Teachers at Thomas Elementary care about the students in their classrooms. They
work exceptionally hard teaching students while trying to communicate with parents. At
Thomas Elementary, parent – teacher communication has not been a focus. Teachers may
reach out to parents, but are not always successful in building the relationships so that the
children in their classrooms will be successful. The teachers at Thomas Elementary have
voiced that they would like to focus on communicating with parents.

Through this study I will explore the various methods teachers currently use to
communicate with parents to understand teachers’ current beliefs and methods they are
using in communicating and developing these relationships with parents. Some teachers
may not realize how building a relationship with parents affects their students’
achievement and success academically and socially. The communication teachers
currently use is usually limited to district mandated methods of report cards, progress
reports, and school newsletters. Some teachers may not have been given the proper
training needed to communicate effectively leaving them feeling unprepared to develop
methods to gain parental involvement properly. Most of the time the parent involvement
piece is overlooked.

Teachers who teach at Title I schools may have feelings of being overworked
since there are other concerns other than just learning the core curriculum. Some students
who attend Title I schools may have other needs not being met because the family does
not have the monies and support as some other families. Families who come from poor urban neighborhoods have children who might have health concerns, absenteeism, behavioral issues, poor social skills, or other family concerns (Prince, Ho, & Hansen, 2010). Other obstacles parents may have are employment at odd hours, single-parent households, transportation, and lack of childcare. I will look at all of these obstacles and how teachers and parents can work together to build a communication relationship.

Since 1998, there was a steady increase of free/reduced lunch and English Language Learner student population at Thomas Elementary. The English Language Learner population went from 21% in 1998 to 33.2% in 2010 (Ed-Data, 1998-1999, 2010-2011). There was a steady increase of free/reduced lunch from 36.5% to 48.2% in the 12-year span (Ed-Data, 1998-1999, 2010-2011). There was a dramatic increase of students who were in compensatory education. Compensatory education was 18% in 1998 and increased to 53.6% in 2010. The student ethnic population in 1998 was not comparative to the teacher population. In 1998, 81% of the teachers were White, where the student ethic population was 27.1% Asian, 22.7% Hispanic, 6.9% African American, and 35.9% White. The student to teacher population had moderately changed when being compared in 2010. The teachers were 13.3% Asian, 33.3% Hispanic, and 46.7% White; there were not any African American teachers. The student population was 19.4% Asian, 36% Hispanic, 9.6% African American, and 16.1% White. About 80% of the teachers have been at this school site for eight years up to 20 years (Various teacher interviews, October 2011). There has not been a focus on parent – teacher communication at Thomas Elementary so teachers have not moved forward in this area.
Some of the teachers at this school site may only be able to be culturally competent with a percentage of students within their classroom. There are a couple of courses that address this in the teacher credential program, but not to the extent needed. Without the proper education in cultural competence in communicating with the families in their classrooms, communication is difficult to begin.

Language is a significant challenge in gaining parent involvement (Guo, 2006). In one study, McDermott and Rothberg (2001) found that low-income parents wanted to take part in their children’s education; however, because they perceived that teachers saw them negatively, they often felt excluded. Parents might be intimidated by the teachers because of social status and feeling teachers may think less of them. Some teachers may feel uncomfortable because of the need for cultural competence. Power, social status, language, and ethnicity are some of the obstacles Thomas Elementary has that factor into poor communication between teachers and parents.

Teachers may be reluctant to communicate with parents because of language barriers and cultural differences. Many of the families who come to Thomas Elementary from other cultures do not know the dominant language or culture of the school site. The teachers do not know the families’ language or culture, which leaves a disparity of communication. Within the last 12 years the constant growth of our other ethnic populations has increased while the teacher population has continued to remain predominately White.
Purpose of the Study

I have been working at a Title I school for over 12 years now. There has been many different types of approaches to communication taking place between teachers and parents. There are teachers who are able to go beyond the district-mandated methods of communication with families to develop relationships. Yet, I have seen other teachers frustrated and become defensive with parents, possibly not understanding how to communicate. Some parents go unacknowledged because of language or cultural barriers. It becomes difficult when other issues and concerns with the child have to be given the proper attention which the mandated systems will not have an effect. Both teachers and parents have voiced their concern in the lack of communication between themselves and the teacher and how this causes a barrier in knowing more about the child. If both parties are working together and are able to share their knowledge of the child the child is more likely to be successful. Sometimes communication is put to the end of the list of things to do. Teachers who can put forth the effort and know how to communicate and develop relationships with parents can create an overall positive learning environment.

Improving Communication

Schools will be more welcoming places and education will be more effective when teachers and families improve their communication. Most school sites are not designed for relationships and communication to take place. School classrooms have been constructed to concentrate on test scores and teaching the mandated curriculum, not to build relationships. For change to happen, teachers would have to assess their current belief systems and what their current practices are in communicating with parents. From
there, teachers could learn the many different types of communication systems necessary to develop these relationships with all the different families of the students in their classrooms.

Through this study I will be researching and addressing the following questions.

1. How do teachers learn to build effective communication skills with parents to support students’ academic and social success?

2. What patterns and forms of communication are effective for the teacher and parent to improve their relationship in order to increase student success?

I will give examples of the gravity of the problem, as well as provide a rationale to the importance of developing the relationships with all families in the school community. Teachers who learn to better communicate with all families at the school site will progress towards a better school climate. Using a mixed methods approach, through action research and a Professional Learning Community (PLC) of teachers, the teachers and I will examine the current interactions and communication systems they have in place while working with the families at a Title I school site. Through the cycle of inquiry, teacher’s innovative ideas, and the literature, the PLC group of teachers will discuss their interactions with the families. We will support one another while implementing new communication methods with the families in their classrooms. The teacher will observe if children who need specific interventions show any improvement academically in motivation through turning in classwork, homework, showing interest in class, and through improved behavior. Research has found that when parents are involved in their children’s education there is a direct link to academic and behavioral success.
(Turney & Kao, 2009). The PLC will be working together toward developing these relationships in communication with the families in their classrooms for student success.

**Limitations and Assumptions**

There are several limitations in doing this research. The first possible drawback is the time constraints. Teachers are extremely busy with many meetings outside of the one I am asking them to attend. Teachers may begin to feel overwhelmed with all of the work that is required of them. In order to address this, the PLC group will be conducted during a convenient time for the teachers. Teacher’s identities will remain anonymous in the study and all material from the study will be kept in a secure location. There may be feelings of uncertainty in having to step out of their normal communication routines to try new innovative communication methods so that change can occur. The PLC group will be there to encourage and support each other throughout the process.

Another limitation could be the obstacles of parents taking part in the study. Some parents may not return the Informed Consent form along with the *Getting to Know Your Child* (see Appendix A) survey. If I receive low participation I will not have adequate data for the study. There needs to be a certain number of participants of parents for the PLC to gain an understanding of their students. The information on the *Getting to Know Your Child* survey will give additional information needed for the teachers to provide interventions with students who need them.

**Conclusion**

Studies have been done on how to encourage parent involvement and how we need to educate our teachers on how to communicate with families; however, we are still
in the same district/school mandated methods of communicating. One study conducted by Lewis, Kim, and Bey (2011) “gathered interviews and observations on the different types of teaching practices and strategies of two teachers who taught at an inner-city elementary school” (p. 221). They found, “The five main teaching practices and strategies to engage parents are practicing parent outreach, establishing relationships with parents, creating a positive classroom climate, teaching to involve parents, and making the community-school connection” (Lewis, Kim, & Bey, 2011, p. 221). Their study offered insight that teaching practices in the classroom directly connected to parental involvement.

The parental behaviors that are most closely linked to academic success are those exhibited in the home. These behaviors include regularly monitoring school progress, setting high expectations, stressing effort over ability, and establishing homework routines at home. When parents engage in these behaviors the positive effects are realized from elementary school through high school. (Flynn, 2006, p. 12)

Parents and teachers need to build an alliance. These relationships need to be nurtured. Even though we have put a great importance on parent-teacher communication, this assumes teachers have been given the knowledge to do so. Lemmer (2011) discussed how pre teachers go through courses in the college systems, which teach about families, but not how to interact with families. There may be in-services on families, but teachers are not given methods or a design that will directly apply to their community. Lemmer stated (2011):
The notion of schools attracting the home and the community to enter into a close partnership assumes that teachers possess positive attitudes towards families and their contribution to education; that they are equipped with knowledge of the complex area of family relations; and that they possess the interpersonal skills to realize positive teacher-parent relationships. (p. 96)

Families are an essential component of the school community and in student success. Some teachers may not realize the importance of building relationships and communicating with the families at their school site. With teachers engaging in a relationship with the child’s parent, the child can show growth. The classroom environment as a whole will become positive with everyone supporting one another. “We know that teachers’ professional communication skills are important as they work with parents to promote the success of all children in the classroom” (Dotger, 2008, p. 93). If teachers have a support system in place, they may attempt to try different methods of family communication other than the mandated methods of report cards, progress reports, and school newsletters. Perhaps teachers will do home visits, arrange to meet at other places besides the school site to accommodate the parents, or start communicating to the parents both on positive outcomes in the classroom and improvements needed for the good of the child’s success through informal face to face meetings and positive notes sent home rather than just notes on negative behavior. These methods can show parents that teachers truly care about their child’s well being both academically and socially. Many teachers may need extra training in cultural competence and how to get past the barriers in place due to language, past negative experiences, parents’ and teachers’ belief
systems, parents’ self-confidence of their ability in education, and/or lack of time (Hornby & LaFaele, 2011). There needs to be mutual trust and respect built between the home and teacher.

All families within the district should have the opportunities to feel safe and comfortable being at their child’s school site and taking part in the school community. The families should have equal access to the information needed to help their child to be successful. Some teachers’ current belief systems on their current roles and responsibilities in communicating and developing relationships with families should be closely assessed. There should be cultural competency training at each individual school site that reflects the culture of that site. All families, regardless of their culture, language, or economic status should have access to information concerning their child’s education and feel like a respected member of the community.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will review the relevant literature on effective communication between teachers and families. The literature will review how teachers currently communicate with families and how this directly affects students’ achievement and students’ overall progress in school both socially and emotionally. The literature from various scholars will demonstrate what some teachers currently believe are their responsibilities. By analyzing cultural competency and power, the literature will indicate the barriers that inhibit effective communication between teachers and families. The literature will express in what ways teachers should effectively communicate and build relationships with families. Both the families and teachers collaborating together will improve communication systems. “Parents and teachers who work together are less inclined to blame one another for lack of student motivation, poor performance or misconduct” (Strom & Strom, 2003, p. 15).

Teachers, through the college system, teacher trainings, and offered professional development courses, are limited in their knowledge on how to communicate with parents. The literature will conclude with showing that communication through sustainable organizational theory can improve teacher-parent communication with changing a school’s current culture, which will support student success.
**Student Success and Parent Involvement**

Children spend about 6½ hours, 5 days a week, at school with the teacher. The remainder of their time is spent at home with their family. The teacher and the parent both share and spend a tremendous amount of time with the child and influence the child’s success. Teachers want their students to be successful. Regardless of a parent’s background or situation, parents want their child to succeed. Thomas and Mazer (2012) suggested, “the majority of parent-teacher communication can be characterized as action-facilitating academic support aimed at directly assisting the student in achieving success” (p. 134).

The National Institute of Education conducted a study and concluded that children with higher scores in achievement, competence, and intelligence had parents who held high expectations and aspirations for their child (Jacob, 2010). There is also an improvement in students’ attendance, motivation, self-esteem, and behavior that all contribute to academic success (Jacob, 2010). Children who have parents that help them at home with their schooling and keep in contact with their child’s teacher tend to have higher scores than children from similar backgrounds, whose parents are not involved (Bal & Goc, 1999, p. 6). We have just begun to include parents in school planning and decision making at school sites, along with developing parent education programs (Shartrand et al., 1994). Whatever it may be, teachers and parents need to build a partnership for children to be able to attain success.

The message Title I schools send parents needs to change from ‘you need to be a better parent’ to ‘by becoming an active member of our educational team we will
coach you in the skills you need to be more effective in the way you help your child learn at home. (Paredes, 2010, p. 24)

Despite the overwhelming evidence that parental communication is essential to become involved in their child’s education for student’s educational success, it has continued to suffer.

Parents welcome knowledge on how to continue to educate and support their child at home. Sirvani (2007) done research on whether students would improve in mathematics with parental support. He found “the experimental group outperformed the control group [because] parents in the experimental group were monitoring their children’s work twice a week; therefore, parental involvement was effective in improving student achievement in schoolwork” (Sirvani, 2007, p. 42). Parents want to see their child become successful in school. “Parents are clearly ready to help their children succeed academically, but they need better information and tools from the schools to do so – ranging from how to help with homework to how to get into college” (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, & Mason, 2008, p. 3). Teachers can give the resources and support to parents through communication. The teachers at school sites know the educational needs of the students in their classrooms. There is a need to develop a system to communicate with parents on how they can best support their child at home. “Parents desire more information and guidance from the school” (Morris & Taylor, 1997, p. 3). According to Morris and Taylor (1997) it is the role of the school to reach out to the parents and initiate the communication to start taking place. Children who know that their parents are communicating with their teacher think of the “communication positively because it is
communicated to students that their parents cared about their academic performance, thus representing a supportive action” (Thomas & Mazer, 2012, p. 135).

McDermott and Rothenberg (2001) performed a study with low-income families and the outcome of parent involvement with their child’s teacher. Some of the interviewed parents discussed teachers who had made a positive difference. These parents identified three essential qualities of good teachers: The teachers displayed respect and love for the children; they communicated frequently with families; and they visited the communities of their students. (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2001, p. 1)

Teachers and parents can communicate together on the areas a child can show growth and how they can support the child. “Changes in society and family structure has changed over the last twenty years have had a great impact upon schools” (Gallagher, 1994, p. 13). This is even truer now in light of increasing rates of unemployment, underemployment, and homelessness. Not all children live with two of their biological parents. Some children are being taken care of by extended family, foster parents, stepparents, and single parent households. “Single-parent and blended families have become more prevalent in society” (Aten, Mueller, New, & Peschang, 1998, p. 1). “Many informal ways of contacting and communicating with parents may provide opportunities in which teachers and parents gain insights into one another’s perspectives, for instance, casual conversations before school, afterschool meetings, and telephone calls” (Symeou, Roussounidou, & Michaelides, 2012, p. 67).
Communication between Teachers and Families

Teachers have been given many district-mandated practices to communicate with families; through report cards, progress reports, conferences, and SST (Student Study Team) meetings where the child is referred for interventions and if a student needs intensive support academically and/or socially. This could also include sending home letters, making phone calls, threatening that a student will be punished or will fail in order to get parents to become involved. “School communication with families is usually written or oral. Written communication might take the form of memos, lists, forms, permission notes, report cards, calendars of the school year, and notices of special events sent to the home” (Symeou et al., 2012, p. 66). “Schools usually establish some formal ways for achieving oral school–family communication and, for instance, parent–teacher conferences and open houses” (Symeou et al., 2012, p. 66). Parents are requested to attend conferences at specific times the teachers have designated for families to come.

Teachers discover that school documents sent home with students might not reach their parents. There may also be difficulty using e-mail during class time, and occasional computer downtime can keep teachers from accessing the system. Phone tag is tiring and time-consuming for teachers and parents. When the party is finally reached, conflict often results. It seems best to send and receive information without becoming upset since this affects the teacher's attitude in class as well as the parent's attitude at work. (Strom & Strom, 2003, p. 15)
All of these methods can be useful, however, if a teacher wants to build a partnership with the parent then they will need to find more effective ways to communicate and build relationships.

Teachers who put forth extra effort to work with parents help them to feel comfortable and welcomed, show that they are needed to be a part of their child’s education, and can be more successful in building a partnership with the parent.

“Teachers can foster alliances with parents by . . . employing some proven strategies for effective communication” (Flynn, 2006, p. 15). Studies have been done on how to encourage parent involvement and educate our teachers on how to communicate with families; however, a lot of educators are still using the district-mandated resources such as progress reports, report cards, and district/school mandated meetings as the main resources for communication. Lewis et al. (2011) “…gathered interviews and observations on the different types of teaching practices and strategies of two teachers who taught at an inner-city elementary school” (p. 221). They found that “The five main teaching practices and strategies to engage parents are practicing parent outreach, establishing relationships with parents, creating a positive classroom climate, teaching to involve parents, and making the community-school connection” (Lewis et al., 2011, p. 221). Their study offered insight that teaching practices in the classroom directly connected to parental involvement. The study illustrated the need to examine how the teachers collaborating together and being able to support one another in communicating with parents created a safe environment for teachers to try these new methods of communication.
“According to national polls, the number one fear of most teachers is talking to parents” (Flynn, 2006, p. 12). Symeou et al. (2012) found, without the proper training, teachers were less likely to use informal communication methods because of their lack of confidence in doing them. Parents and teachers building and nurturing relationships can result in student success. We have put a great importance on parent-teacher communication, but this does not necessarily mean teachers have been given the knowledge to do so. Lemmer (2011) discussed how pre teachers go through courses in the college system that teaches about families, but not how to interact with families. There may be in-services on families, but teachers are not given methods or a design that will directly apply to their community. Lemmer (2011) stated

The notion of schools attracting the home and the community to enter into a close partnership assumes that teachers possess positive attitudes towards families and their contribution to education; that they are equipped with knowledge of the complex area of family relations; and that they possess the interpersonal skills to realize positive teacher-parent relationships. (p. 96)

Symeou et al. (2012) conducted a study on training teachers how to communicate effectively with parents. The training was given to teachers on how to become active listeners where the teacher learned that when they displayed concern and were fully attentive, while holding their frame of reference or judgment, communication would be more successful. If a teacher is an active listener, they can gain insight into what is happening in their student’s life, which will aid in understanding any concerns with
behavior or academics (McNaughton, Hamlin, McCarthy, Head-Reeves, & Schreiner, 2008).

Many teachers who are not given the proper training on how to develop these partnerships are not able to communicate effectively with parents. Shartrand, Krieder, and Erickson-Warfield (1994) did research on what is offered to students coming into the teaching profession. The researchers stated, “The vast majority of courses addressing parental involvement deal with parent-teacher conferences and parents as teachers. Parent involvement is most frequently addressed in discussion and required readings” (Shartrand et al., 1994, p. 16). Teachers are given training on how to teach curriculum, but not how to work with parents. Yet this is one of the important components in children being successful in the classroom.

Teachers attend universities and colleges expecting to be prepared to go into the educational system. Hornby and White (2010) argued this point on how important courses are for teachers to acquire the skills needed to work with parents. However, they discussed United States government policies do not require teachers to take these types of courses on how to establish relationships and form communication with parents. If classes are taken in the areas of parent communication, this still does not properly prepare teachers to work effectively with parents (Hornby & White, 2010, p. 36). The Harvard Family Project believes in providing teacher education in developing relationships with families and setting standards for family engagement. The standards should be part of the “professional preparation” (Caspe et al., 2011, p. 1). Caspe, Lopez, Chu, & Weiss (2011), believed teachers needed to be offered continuous professional development on how to
effectively engage families. “To be effective, teachers must be prepared to collaborate with families to support student success. When teachers understand families and communicate and build relationships with them, students benefit” (Caspe et al., 2011 p. 1). “If school’s are going to be successful in making significant improvement in the education of children, teachers entering the profession must possess the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and strategies that will enable them to work effectively with students and families” (Morris & Taylor, 1997, p. 9).

There is still a lack of professional development in the area of learning how to communicate effectively with families in schools. Muller (1993) suggested administrators at the school site needed to become involved in this process. School districts, which offer professional development on how to collaborate with parents and families, can improve student success in the classrooms. Teachers should be given professional development in, “learning about family dynamics and nontraditional family structures, improving two-way communication between school and home, reducing barriers to family involvement, and understanding diverse cultures” (Ballen & Moles, 1994, p. 2). Since some teachers are not prepared to communicate with parents and families, there is either a lack of communication or miscommunication taking place between the teacher and the family. If teachers are able to collaborate together and learn new innovative methods of communication they may feel more secure taking a chance to communicate with parents in new ways. Teachers who communicate with parents will receive more information about the child who is in their classroom. When a teacher communicates less with a parent, they receive less information from a parent (Patel & Stevens, 2010, p. 119).
A parent who is an active participant in their child’s education is knowledgeable of what the expectations are for their child to be successful in school. It is the role of the teacher to communicate this information to the parent. “Educators need to view partnerships with families as an integral part of good teaching and success” (Ammon et al., 1998, p. 8). Being an empathetic listener is a key component to successful collaborative communication (McNaughton et al., 2008). This two-way communication can be helpful in whether or not a student is successful.

Educators may expect the families to make the effort to become a part of the school community instead of making the effort themselves. Caplan (1998) explained schools needed to take initiative in building partnerships with families in the community. He further explained that it is both the home and the school’s responsibility to teach the child; a partnership. McCoach et al. (2010) found through their study “that parental involvement and parental perceptions are key variables that help to explain differences of the overachieving and underachieving schools” (p. 453). Teachers who are welcoming will communicate they want the parents to be active participants.

**Communication Barriers**

Communication and relationships between teachers and parents is critical. A school, like any other organization, has its own culture, strategies, and methods on how the system is organized. The school culture has been formed by the district, community, administration, teachers, staff, and parents who have been involved in the school environment. The customs and behaviors of the school site reveal the climate. In order for the organization to change these deep imbedded beliefs and values, the behavioral norms
will need to be reevaluated. Before developing the relationships and opening the lines of communication between teachers and parents, trust needs to occur. Hosmer (1995) explained trust as a part of organizational theory being “the loss of trust if broken will be much greater than the gain when trust is maintained” (p. 390). When trust is broken most likely it will not be regained.

The school has developed the power structures put in place at the site. This influences the communication between the teachers and the families. Teachers sometimes are believed to have the power over the parent because of the knowledge they hold to educate the child. If the knowledge of how to support the child is shared, the child will have a better chance of becoming successful. When teachers and parents first start communicating they hold a certain amount of fear of how to communicate with this person (Thompson, 1996). Teachers may fear they may not be able to answer the questions asked of them, while parents may feel they need to be on the defensive from past experiences. Starting a conversation with both parties knowing they have the child’s best interest in mind will relieve some of the fear.

Teachers working collaboratively on changing the communication systems at the school site develop collaborative systems of communication. Teachers learning new design methods in communicating and developing relationships with families will be presented with positive effects. These changes will be positive on their students and on their teaching. Parents begin to feel empowered, teachers begin to have positive attitudes, and the overall school and community environment shows improvement (Shartrand et al., 1994). Sometimes “teachers and parents carry many preconceived notions about each
other that make communication even more difficult” (Joshi, Elberly, & Konzal, 2005, p. 12). When one sees the positive outlook of change they are more likely to move forward towards that change and show improvement. Teachers and parents may both be reluctant to move towards change in communication, but knowing that it could improve a child’s academic performance and behavior is incentive enough to try.

Guerra and Nelson (2007) quoted teachers as they expressed their frustrations.

> The kids are hard to teach. They don’t come with experiences. A lot of these kids are from broken homes. These kids come to school hungry. We’re working hard, but we can’t do this alone. We need these parents to get involved. (p. 60)

Perhaps teachers focusing on how they can overcome these obstacles should be a primary concern. Teachers have an exceptionally demanding profession. If parent-teacher communication becomes part of classroom management and routine and is seen as a positive factor for the teacher, perhaps they will be more willing to learn the methods on how to better communicate with the families in their classroom. Some teachers may be accustomed to the parents taking on the responsibility first to start the line of communication. While other teachers might just believe that the parents do not care if they are not involved in their child’s education. If teachers start communicating with the parent that they care about their child’s success parents might be more interested in becoming part of the communication process.

> The many barriers of parent-teacher relationships continue to get in the way of students success. The article, Examining the Unexpected: Outlier Analysis of Factors Affecting Student Achievement stated, “One potential barrier to parent involvement is the
parent’s perception that teachers lack knowledge about the student’s culture (Ramirez, 2003). “If a parent perceives the teacher to be sensitive to the student’s culture, the parent is more likely to become involved with the classroom and the school (McCoach et al., 2010, p. 434).

“Building strong, trusting, and mutually respectful relationships between parents and teachers who share similar cultural backgrounds are difficult enough. Doing so between parents and teachers who come from different backgrounds is even more difficult” (Joshi et al., 2005, p. 11). The lack of communication, due to a lack of knowledge of the family’s background, culture, and language barriers, can put a strain on a child’s success. “Increasing diversity in the student population intensifies the need for and the difficulties of establishing culturally sensitive and meaningful communication between teachers and parents” (Elberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007, p. 7).

**Effective Communication between Teachers and Parents**

Student success academically, socially, and emotionally can be promoted through teachers and parents communicating regularly and building relationships. If the lines of communication are open between the teacher and the parent, the knowledge about the child will be shared between the two. Having teachers keep the lines of communication open is especially important when developing relationships with families of different cultures other than their own (Joshi et al., 2005). Joshi, Elberly, and Konzal (2005) studied how teachers understood their students’ families’ culture and how this affected the communication that takes place between them and the parent. They found that lack of not knowing the culture of their students and their families closed the lines of
communication. It is the role of the teacher to take the time to get to know the parent as an individual and become sensitive to that individuality before any of the current barriers will be removed and communication can start to take place. “Past family engagement research has focused primarily on parent-initiated behavior and measuring tasks that parents perform either at the program setting or with their children in the home” (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark, & Moodie, 2009, p. 4). Teachers’ assumptions and belief systems are hindering the success of parent-teacher communication and collaboration.

Even though parents have busy lives and are overwhelmed they “are looking for assistance in educating their child successfully” (Anderson, 2004, p. 7). Pryor and Pryor (2009) found that teachers’ attitudes and beliefs were a contributing barrier for parent involvement. “Educators may also have developed negative perceptions of parental involvement based on a lack of knowledge of culture and changing family needs” (Davies, Palanki, & Burch, 1993, p. 16). Some teachers assume parents are not interested or do not want to be involved in their child’s education. Teachers who learn how to get to know families on a personal level will support parents to feel comfortable being a part of the school community.

McCoach et al. (2010) stated, “If a parent perceives the teacher to be sensitive to the student’s culture, the parent is more likely to become involved with the classroom and the school” (p. 435). In one study, McDermott and Rothenberg (2001) found that “low-income parents wanted to take part in their children’s education; however, because they perceived that teachers saw them negatively, they often felt excluded” (McCoach et al., 2010, p. 435).
Parents come to school with their own belief systems and views about school. By performing a focus group of teachers who spoke out about their opinions of other cultures Elberly, Joshi, and Konzal (2007) found

Teachers must come to recognize that their beliefs about good childrearing practices are culturally bound and that there may be other, equally good ways. And even if the parent’s practices may be problematic in some way, projecting negative judgments will not lead to trusting relationships between the parent and the teacher. (p. 11)

Teachers and parents may have different views on educating and the needs of the child. “This lack of understanding of the underlying beliefs about the parents’ goals for child-rearing and education may lead to an unarticulated clash with educators’ values and beliefs” (Joshi et al., 2005, p. 12). Realistically, both the teacher and the parent know the needs of the child in different circumstances. The parent knows the child’s emotional and physical needs, while the teacher knows the intellectual needs.

Parents who are not literate or do not speak English are less likely to become knowledgeable of their rights. Sending home forms of communication, which is not in their home language, can become a source of confusion and miscommunication. If written communication is not clear and concise “this may alienate parents and cause them to feel separated from the school” (Davies et al., 1993, p. 17). When the teacher acts as though the parent is not needed to participate in the student’s education, the conversations stop and communication becomes nonexistent. “Parents resign their own involvement in the education of their children, despite the fact that teachers and parents may have
different views on the matter” (Tveit, 2009, p. 298). Some teachers do not have the education and tools needed to relate to parents of different cultures or to communicate effectively with all families in the community. Teachers at school sites, specifically Title I schools, are not bilingual which leads to language barriers between the teachers and parents. Nuri-Robins, Lindsey, Terrell, and Lindsey (2005) stated

Unawareness of the need to adapt and resistance to change is evident when stakeholders do not recognize the need to make personal and organizational changes in response to diversity. These stakeholders believe that other people and groups need to change and adapt to them. Expecting others to change and clinging to practices that no longer serve the students or families are forms of resistance. (p. 20).

Summary

There is plenty of literature on the critical nature of parent-teacher communication. There is little literature on how to organize and implement the changes needed to build the communication and relationship needed to improve student academics. Since every classroom is unique and filled with diverse families with different needs, there is not one formula for parent-teacher communication. Teachers are at different levels on communication and building relationships with their families. Some teachers may be able to build the relationships needed to communicate effectively, while other teachers need more support. Some parents are more comfortable communicating with teachers whereas other parents are not. There is a definite inequity within schools in communication between teachers and parents. In addition, “comprehensive
communications and personnel support” (Rahschulte, 2008, p. 43) would contribute to
the communication success between parents and teachers. For teachers to make
communicating with parents a part of their daily practice, they will need to reform their
current practices of communication. They are changing their current behavior and
thought process of what it means to communicate with parents and starting a new
behavior, which will be a part of their current practice. It is the role of the leader to aid in
putting the practice in place.

Some teachers are better at building trusting relationships with parents than
others. These teachers should take on the leadership role in leading the school through the
necessary changes. Teachers and parents who learn how to work together collaboratively
will assist students in becoming successful. By teachers and parents communicating
about students, this would be promoting the children’s success academically, socially,
and emotionally. Joshi et al. (2005) studied how teachers understand their students’
cultures and how this affects the communication that takes place between them and the
parent. They found that the lack of knowledge of the culture of their students and their
families closes the lines of communication. “When dealing with parents from cultures
different from their own, open lines of communication with parents are even more
essential” (Joshi et al., 2005, p. 12).

Classrooms are their own entity within the school. Teachers can feel as if they are
completely isolated at times. Teachers who begin to collaborate together can develop a
more positive climate and culture where collaboration and trust is developed.
Collaboration and trust develop so that honest conversations can take place to move
change forward for all stakeholders. Teachers can work together on building this trust amongst them to be able to support each other while change takes place. When a teacher is trying a new method of communication they will have the support of the collaborative team. After performing a study on teachers working with families across cultures, Elberly et al. (2007) found that we need to listen first to parents in order to build trust. During the change process, there is positive feedback and incentives to continue to encourage the change to keep moving forward. When the change finally takes place is when it is sustained by finally becoming a part of the climate and culture of the classroom.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to encourage teachers to try new forms of communication with the families so students would show academic improvement. Through participatory action research, the collaborating team of teachers and I worked in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) on the current communication taking place at Thomas Elementary School. Through dialoging and reflecting on the current communication and relationships between teachers and parents, the PLC looked at what types of communication have been effective in the past and what has been nominal. The participating teachers and I also analyzed the students who may have a need for more intervention in motivation, participation, attendance, and behavior which has a direct effect on student overall success.

This study was organized through action research where four teachers from second and third grade participated in implementing strategies of communication with all the families in their classroom. The teachers and I collaborated in a Professional Learning Community on ideas of how to communicate with their community of parents. The study was organized around the following research questions.

1. How do teachers learn to build effective communication skills with parents to support students’ academic and social success?

2. What patterns and forms of communication are effective for the teacher and parent to improve their relationship in order to increase student success?
This chapter is organized in first looking at this study’s logic and rationale of communication systems between teachers and parents. The participants who took part in the research will be introduced. Data collection will be presented through the forms of data used, how it will be analyzed, and the limitations of this study. I will discuss my position on this study and the rationale of why this subject needs to be studied for effective social justice to occur in the educational system.

**Research Design and Methodology**

This was a mixed methods study utilizing participatory action research. The study used surveys from the parents to learn about their children and best communication methods. This survey helped the teachers to gain an understanding of what the children’s interests and needs were and identified parents’ concerns. The *Getting to Know Your Child Survey* (See appendix A) provided information for us so we could begin to understand which children may need interventions and intensive communication between the teacher and the home.

This study’s primary focus was on the Professional Learning Community (PLC) group of four teachers including myself. Through participatory action research (PAR), the PLC used the cycle of inquiry to first look at what was currently being used in the classrooms for communication. The PLC brought their ideas and knowledge to support one another regarding other forms of communication that can be used in the classroom to reach out to the families. Each teacher analyzed what their level of comfort was in choosing the methods they would like to attempt with their parents. The PLC also considered the diverse families they served inside their classrooms and whether the
methods they wanted to use would be productive. The meetings were held at least twice a month to celebrate successes, support one another, and problem solve.

The PLC examined if there were changes in family communication and relationship building in their classroom compared to prior years. The teachers had in-depth discussions on communication and relationship building between families. These conversations were recorded, transcribed, and common themes were found throughout to understand what the teachers’ needs were to be able to become better communicators with parents. I also took field notes during the meetings to make sure I was keeping a log of who attended the meetings and the main points, which needed to be remembered. The teachers looked at the children who needed more intensive interventions and created additional forms of communication between those families. The PLC assessed whether the methods of communication were effective and if there was more communication taking place between the home and school. For the intensive child, the PLC looked for growth in motivation by turning in homework and class work, coming to school, and paying attention in class. We also assessed behavior such as if the child was able to follow directions and get along with their peers. These assessments showed whether the communication methods were successful.

At the end of the study the PLC evaluated the process and the methods, which were used in the final meeting. The parents were given a post-survey inquiring if they saw any differences in communication with the teacher or with their child’s conduct, both academically and socially.
Participating Teachers

This study took place at a Title I school site where 48% of the population of families were from low-income, socio-economically disadvantaged (SED), and eligible for federal aid and services. The participants in this study were four teachers, two second grade teachers, two third grade teachers and I working in a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The other participants were the families from each of the classrooms. There was more participation from parents whose children needed more intensive communication between the teacher and the home. These children had additional methods implemented to support and create interventions needed to assist the child in becoming successful.

The school site had approximately 386 students grades K through sixth. The highest enrollment was Hispanic students at 36%. Thirty-three percent of the student population was English Language Learners, 48% free/reduced lunch, and 54% of students were in compensatory education. The school had been in Program Improvement (PI) for two years. This means the student population was not meeting the testing standards. The growth in test scores between the years 2009 – 2012 moved the school out of PI status. From 2009 – 2012, Thomas Elementary School had a total growth of 129 API points. After the teachers had intensive trainings and the students were given additional interventions which were offered because of the monies given from being in Program Improvement the school was very successful on implementing academics. Teachers knew how to read and disaggregate data to implement academic interventions. However, the social/emotional characteristics of the students were not as likely being
addressed. At the time of the study the school had a high transient rate where students were constantly leaving and new students were enrolling. This made it particularly difficult for the student, teacher, and parent to connect and build a relationship.

In this study four teachers and I worked together through participatory action research in a Professional Learning Community (PLC), dialoguing on communication strategies to improve the relationship between the teacher and the parent. The PLC shared what was currently in place in communicating with their families. All parents took part in completing, at the beginning of the year, the *Getting to Know Your Child* (see Appendix A) survey and the *Parent Satisfaction* survey. The PLC developed intensive methods to improve parent communication for students with specific needs. The results showed growth in academics, turning in homework and class work, attitudes becoming more positive about school, and an overall more positive morale of some of the participating students. The parents had been notified that I was doing a study on improving teacher-parent communication to better serve their child.

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) met twice a month for approximately 45 minutes. The meetings took place at the school site mostly during lunch, which was the most convenient time. The team of teachers developed strategies to improve communication with the families in their classroom. The dialogue within the PLC assisted in developing some methods of communication between the parents and teachers. After analyzing the *Getting to Know Your Child* survey sent home to the parents, teachers had a better understanding of which students needed more intensive communication systems.
Through the cycle of inquiry, the teachers and I discussed what methods currently used had been successful and what changes needed to take place. The PLC’s goals were to share ideas with each other on how to develop methods for specific interventions with certain families. Through the PLC, communication systems were designed to adapt to the specific community of families and specific students’ needs. The PLC also needed to support each other to build the communication systems needed. The PLC meetings were tape recorded and transcribed. Notes were taken at the PLC meetings to keep track of students who had specific interventions in place and to recall information discussed previously.

At the end of the study, parents were given a Parent Satisfaction (see Appendix B) survey in both Spanish and English to identify if the communication models and strategies were successful with their child. The objective of the survey was to understand if there was a change in building communication and relationships with the teacher and the family.

All data collected and stored followed the IRB protocol. All participants’ rights were protected.

**Data Collection and Procedures**

The PLC looked at their current obstacles and what type of communication had occurred with parents so far. After we analyzed the Getting to Know Your Child survey (see Appendix A) sent home at the beginning of the school year in both Spanish and English, the teachers and I looked for any noticeable concerns a parent had where the child needed extra support. This was based on the parents’ responses with what their
children were struggling with on the *Getting to Know Your Child* survey. The teachers and I collaborated within the Professional Learning Community (PLC) and discussed the current strategies used in their classrooms to communicate with families.

The PLC developed a design and methodology in communicating and developing better relationships to be used with all of the parents participating in the study. We used the knowledge I had gained through the literature and research and the knowledge the teachers already learned through experience to produce various methods of communication via the teacher and the parent. The method of communication was also based on the direct needs of the student who required extra support. Some children were unique cases and needed to be treated as such. These children needed support with academics, attendance, and/or behavior. Some of the teachers within the PLC observed the child in the classroom setting and took notice of any changes in academics or behavior. During the PLC group meetings we discussed what had been learned, successes, and obstacles. As a group we used the cycle of inquiry in developing other methods of communication if the current forms were not effective.

**Sources of Data**

As stated, the study used mixed methods including interviews, surveys, observations, and artifacts from the field. Much of the data was generated through the authentic work of the PLC as its members entered into cycles of inquiry around improving communication with parents. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the sources of data for each of the research questions.
Table 1 was used to guide the group and the facilitator on what was specifically discussed. This supported and guided the PLC in being more productive and successful, along with supporting the work of the facilitator/researcher. The primary function of Table 2 was to guide the researcher through the process of data collection and analysis.

### Table 1

#### Professional Learning Communities’ Strategies on Communication with Families

**How do teachers build patterns of communication with families that will contribute to a child’s academic and social success?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributing Questions</th>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
<th>Methods of Obtaining Data</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How do teachers build norms and habits of practice for using the PLC as a laboratory of learning? | - PLC meeting activities  
- Informal contacts with participating teachers | - Observation notes from the meetings  
- Meeting agendas & artifacts  
- Researcher field notes & journal  
- Recorded conversations/transcribed | -Ongoing |
| **•** How does the facilitator support them in building a trusting relationship?      |                                                                               |                                                                                          |                   |
| **•** How does the facilitator support them in doing useful work in the PLC?          |                                                                               |                                                                                          |                   |
| What questions do teachers ask about improving their communication?                   | - Individual teachers in PLC meetings  
- Informal conversations and interactions with teachers | - Observation notes from meetings  
- Meeting agendas & artifacts  
- Researcher field notes & journal  
- Recorded conversations/transcribed | -Ongoing |
<p>| <strong>•</strong> Where do they direct their attention (to which kids and families)?              |                                                                               |                                                                                          |                   |
| <strong>•</strong> Why these “targets?”                                                           |                                                                               |                                                                                          |                   |
| <strong>•</strong> What would they like to see improve in their                                    |                                                                               |                                                                                          |                   |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Evidence Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Why do they think improving this would make a difference for their students? | - Individual teachers in PLC meetings  
- Informal conversations and interactions with teachers |
| How do teachers judge the effectiveness of their communication?        | - Observation notes from meetings  
- Meeting agendas & artifacts  
- Researcher field notes & journal |
| What would success look like to them?                                  | - In the beginning of the study  
- Ongoing/can change throughout the study |
| How do they “keep track” or document effectiveness of communication?   | - Individual teachers  
- Focus students  
- Teacher records of student performance |
| What do they do with the information they gather?                      | - PLC meetings  
- Meeting agendas & artifacts  
- Researcher field notes & journal |
| How, if at all, do they use it?                                        | - In the beginning of the study  
- Ongoing/can change throughout the study |
| What evidence do teachers use to judge whether targeted students are doing better academically and/or socially? | - PLC meetings  
- Meeting agendas & artifacts  
- Recorded conversations/transcribed |
| How do teachers utilize the PLC community to support them with their struggles in communicating with parents? | - PLC meetings  
- Meeting agendas & artifacts  
- Researcher field notes & journal |
| How do the teachers choose which students receive implemented intervention communication strategies? | - In the beginning of the study  
- Ongoing/can change throughout the study |
- Do all of the students need to be struggling academically & socially?

If a parent is requesting specific communication how will that be addressed?

Table 2

* Examining How Teachers Improve Communication Skills*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributing Questions</th>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
<th>Methods of Obtaining Data</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What types of communication do teachers currently use?      | - Individual teachers in PLC meeting activities  
- Informal conversations with teachers | - Observation notes from meetings  
- Meeting agendas & artifacts                              | - Ongoing                            |
| What limits the range of communication actions that teachers use? | - Individual teachers in PLC meetings  
- Informal conversations with teachers | - Researcher field notes & journal  
- Recorded conversations/transcribed | - Bi-weekly meetings                  |
| How do teachers assess their communication competencies?   | - Individual teachers in PLC meetings  
- Informal conversations and interactions with teachers | - Observation notes from meetings  
- Meeting agendas & artifacts                              | - In the beginning of the study       |
| * What communication skills do teachers believe they are good at? |                                                                             | - Researcher field notes & journal  
& journal                                                       | - Ongoing                            |
| * What do they think they are not so good at?               |                                                                             |                                      |                        |
| * What changes do they observe over time?                   |                                                                             |                                      |                        |
| How do teachers “try on” new types of communication?       | - Individual teachers in PLC meetings | - Observation notes from meetings  
- Meeting agendas &                           | - Ongoing                            |
| * What support do they need?                                |                                                                             |                                      |                        |
Data Analysis

Two “streams” of data analysis occurred throughout the study. The PLC group generated and analyzed data relating to their communication activities and the perceived effectiveness of the strategies that they adopted. This analysis followed a typical inquiry cycle format.
• What do we want to know more about?
• What information will help us understand the phenomenon of question?
• How shall we gather that information?
• What does the information tell us?
• What does our analysis suggest about next steps toward reaching our goal?

A second “stream” of analysis was carried out simultaneously as I examined the data from the PLC meetings with an eye towards understanding what this information revealed about how well the group was functioning as a PLC, particularly with respect to my facilitation. The goal here was to use the experiences of each meeting as a way of adjusting the focus, activities, and facilitation of subsequent meetings. This ongoing analysis was a result into a deeper understanding of the role of the facilitator to help guide the PLC.

The data analyzed was initially the *Getting to Know Your Child* (see Appendix A) survey from the parents. This survey was given in both Spanish and English. The survey gave teachers more personal information on the students’ needs in their classroom. We analyzed the data on the surveys to notice if there were students that needed specific interventions. Through participatory action research, the Professional Learning Community, including two second grade teachers, two third grade teachers, and I, developed and put into place methods of communication with the families of the students in their classroom to increase student motivation and positive behavior. Through dialogue in the PLC, we found common themes in current communication practices and belief systems between them and the families. The PLC began to meet to develop a design of
effective communication systems. During PLC meetings we discussed if there were any obstacles and how to resolve them, along with celebrating successes.

Through this research I proposed the methods put into place would help develop better communication skills for both the teachers and the families taking part in the study. The students of the families would benefit from gaining self-esteem in showing interest in school by turning in class work and homework, paying attention, and behavior changes. The expectation was that the relationships between the parent and the teacher would allow for the type of communication to take place so parents would be able to help their child with school and be a part of their child’s education.

The goal was for the PLC to develop communication methods, which would work with all parents and parents whose students need specific interventions. Through participatory action research these teachers were able to continue to use the methods after the study had ended. They would be able to share these methods with other teachers at the school site, which will start to create a community of teachers and families communicating effectively for students to be successful within school.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. The *Getting to Know Your Child* survey (see Appendix A.) would be difficult to receive back from every child from each of the classrooms. There might not have been enough to get a sample size. Teachers at this school site have many school and district mandates, along with the state mandates. Because of this teachers have had difficulty attending all of the meetings. During the meetings trust took time to build and this study was done in a short amount of time.
Along with the consent form, I reminded the PLC at each meeting that what was said in the meeting was confidential. Since there is a high transient rate at Thomas Elementary, the students who participated in the study or received the intensive interventions were not necessarily there through the entire study. The high transient rate affected teachers to choose multiple students to study and do intensive interventions with. All of the obstacles and limitations became part of the study.

The study followed the proper protocols of district and IRB policy. Permission and support from the superintendent and administrator at my school site was obtained before beginning the study.

**Subject Position**

Throughout this study I was an active participant in the Professional Learning Community. I facilitated the group while adding any information to the group’s conversations that I had from the knowledge I had acquired through working with parents myself and with my research. I offered my assistance in developing systems of communication for the teachers within the Professional Learning Community through typing newsletters, updating their websites, and other technology requests.

While the Professional Learning Community was having discussions and going through the cycle of inquiry I observed what was occurring. I studied the interactions taking place during the collaboration. During this time I took field notes while the discussions were being tape recorded. I was also working in the community with the families participating in family events and attending PTA meetings. I encouraged the four teachers to take part in these events with me.
Conclusion

This study was a collaborative Professional Learning Community (PLC) of teachers working together to improve parent-teacher communication. The support systems for teachers to be able to work together and share ideas in a safe environment was not always there. Sometimes teachers do not have the proper training to be able to work effectively with parents. This support system developed within the PLC allowed for teachers to share successes and obstacles. The teachers were able to ask for advice and for ideas. The interaction between the teachers was part of this study.

The teachers were communicating with the families on the intensive interventions they were putting into place with the children in their classrooms. These children would have more opportunities to become successful with the interventions that were being put into place because of their needs. The teachers communicated with the home in order for the student to become more successful in their education. The purpose of this study was for students to become more successful through parent-teacher communication.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS/OUTCOMES

Introduction

In Chapter 3 I described the design and methodology of my research. Participating teachers assessed the current communication they were using with parents in order to implement interventions socially and academically for students in need. The research examined the following questions.

1. How do teachers learn to build effective communication skills with parents to support students’ academic and social success?

2. What patterns and forms of communication are effective for the teacher and parent to improve their relationship in order to increase student success?

The primary data was gathered during the Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings of the four teachers and me. The surveys from parents aided in guiding the meetings and determining what the next steps in supporting the students and parents would be. Parent surveys provided insight to what students’ particular needs were socially and emotionally, whereas a teacher might not ever know. The teachers were able to use this knowledge to provide intensive interventions socially and academically for students in need. A post-survey was also distributed to the group of parents who had completed the pre-survey and given consent for their child to participate in the study.
The participating teachers taught in either second or third grade. In one grade 3 class the teacher (Ms. Decker) took a new position a month into the school year. She was replaced by a temporary substitute (Mr. Seester) for a month and a half. In November, Mrs. Fernstein assumed responsibility for the remainder of the academic year. The teachers participated in a Professional Learning Community (PLC), which met twice a month for approximately 45 minutes from November 2012 to December 2013. The meetings took place at the school site mostly during teachers’ lunchtime. This did not include the informal meetings I had with teachers when they would stop by my classroom to ask questions or to vent about a child or parent they were having difficulty with and needed support.

We used the Professional Learning Community to support each other in giving advice for whatever obstacles the teacher was facing with a child in the classroom and communicating with the parent. The goal was to involve the parents in the communication process of what interventions were being used with their child; this may be through a letter, an email, or a meeting. The interventions used were both academic and social.

To help represent the data in a logical way with respect to the two questions, this chapter addresses question #2 first. By doing this, I intend to offer the reader a view of not only the types and patterns of communication that teachers attempted to build with parents in support of student success, but also of the interventions that the teachers used with the students themselves and the perceived impact of those interventions. Thus, the
first major section that follows, Teachers’ Learning about Communication with Parents, includes the following primary subsections.

- Results of the Parent Satisfaction survey (see Appendix B).
- Types of interventions.
- Impact of interventions as reported by teachers and parents. [This section will have two subsections, Teacher perceptions and Parent perceptions.]
- Forms and patterns of communication and their impact.

Having examined communication with parents, I will then address question #1 of the study in a section

**Teachers’ experiences in the professional learning community.** I will begin by describing the content of the PLC meetings throughout the period of the study and participating teachers’ patterns of participation. The description of teachers’ patterns of participation will be the primary way of capturing teachers’ methods of learning; this information allows both the researcher and the reader to make inferences and draw conclusions about the appropriateness of the PLC model as an “intervention” for building teachers’ communication skills. This will lead directly to the implications of the study and recommendations in Chapter 5. The second major section that follows, Teachers’ Ways of Learning in the Professional Learning Community, contains the following subsections

- Description of the monthly PLC meetings.
- Teachers’ learning goals.
- Teachers’ participation in PLC meetings.
**Teachers’ Learning about Communication with Parents**

**Results of the survey.** One piece of data was a survey, *Getting to Know Your Child* (see Appendix A), to provide insight to the teachers and me of the students’ social and academic needs. This would aid in providing specific interventions for these students. The survey also provided information for the teacher on various methods of how to communicate with the parent and what was the best method for them.

After receiving all of the surveys, I created a table for each of the teachers with the information given by their participating parents. There was a section in the table where I showed the expressed needs of the parent for their child. I highlighted a student if there was a need for a specific or immediate action for interventions to be put into place to bring to the teacher’s attention. This was to help guide the teachers when placing students in interventions (see Appendix C). The table also included best methods in communicating with that specific parent. Table 3 summarizes the number of parents who participated in the *Getting to Know Your Child* survey and what the parents expressed were intervention areas needed for their child.

Table 3

*Parents’ Perceptions of Interventions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th># of Participating Students *</th>
<th>Positive Impact</th>
<th>No Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Redner</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Baca</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Decker/Mr. Seester/Mrs. Fernstein</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were parents who participated who did not have a concern in either academics or social behaviors.

Parents who expressed concern about their child’s academics were mostly concerned with math, reading, and writing. One parent wanted their child to “learn to love to learn.” There was also a parent who expressed concern that a child should be taught at their current level and brought up from there. The social concerns were fear of their child being bullied, use of bad language, shy and intimidated easily, does not listen, and does not want to learn.

**Types of interventions.** For the students with academic concerns, the teachers planned on putting several methods into place. One was for the student to meet with the teacher in a before/after school intervention class. Another was homework club after school that would provide extra support in continuing to learn the concepts in the homework. The other method was for students to meet with an intermediate buddy during recess at designated days and times to be tutored. The buddy system also improved self-esteem.

The students with social concerns were on contracts between the child, the parent, and the teacher. These contracts had a daily log for students to track their behavior throughout the day. The log would go home to the parent to be reviewed and signed. This provided constant communication of how the child was doing behaviorally in class. The students who needed support with self-esteem, but did not need support academically, were assigned to either a kindergarten or first grade buddy. They would help their buddy with their academics. The parents were to be notified of any and all interventions taking
place with their child. Table 4 shows the distributions of interventions implemented by teachers. In some cases, students were placed into both types of interventions.

### Table 4

*Services Students Received*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th># of Participating Students in Interventions</th>
<th>Types of Interventions *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Redner</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Baca</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Decker/Mr. Seester/Mrs. Fernstein</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Yowder</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Some of the students participated in both academic and social/emotional interventions.*

Teachers were directly providing interventions for students needing extra support academically in math and English language arts. These included providing extra academic interventions during class time in addition to before and after school. Another way of providing academic support was the buddy program. This is a program that takes place during lunch recess twice a week in which an intermediate student mentors a primary student. During the buddy program time, the intermediate student works with the primary student on social/emotional skills as well as academics. A third academic intervention teachers provided for their students was a contract. The contract could be for academics or for behavior. The student, the parent, and the teacher signed the contract.
After the contract was signed a chart was implemented into the child’s daily routine that showed how well they were doing. For example, a child who was talking out and not staying in their seat would have a behavior chart that would be utilized daily. The child would be informed as to how he/she was doing by coloring in either a happy face for doing a great job, a non-emotional face for possibly making one mistake, and an unhappy face if the student was not behaving during that time period of the day. This chart would go home to be signed by the parent and returned the following day to the teacher. Other charts could be daily or weekly, depending on the behavior or academic need. Thus, academic interventions included before and after school with the teacher as well as during class and school time; these included a homework contract, the buddy/mentor program, and teachers’ direct interventions.

**Impact of interventions.** This section includes both the teachers’ and the parents’ perceptions of how the interventions made an impact. Because parents were apprised of student progress through the various types of teacher interventions, as well as formal grades, the parents’ perceptions of impact focus primarily on how well the teachers’ ways of communicating with them were making a difference.

**Teacher perceptions.** Teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of whether the interventions were effective for students were gathered in one of the PLC meetings in written form. Teachers reported if students had shown growth academically in the areas of fluency, comprehension, turning in their homework, and overall academic success. They also reported if the student had become successful socially by staying in their seat and a decrease in recess detentions. The daily behavior charts were used to report
whether or not this strategy was positively affecting the student to want to do better behaviorally and academically. Table 5 summarizes those perceptions.

Table 5

Teachers’ Perceptions of Interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th># of Participating Students</th>
<th>Positive Impact</th>
<th>No Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Redner</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Baca</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Decker/Mr. Seester/Mrs. Fernstein</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Yowder</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the teachers reported interventions having a positive effect. Not all of the students were at grade level yet, but there was a definite improvement exhibited by most of the students who participated in the before/after school programs for academics. Improvement in English language arts skills included reading at least twenty words per a minute more in fluency and comprehension test score percentages going up. Students were also showing improvement in math test scores. The buddy program and the daily behavior charts increased self-confidence in the students. These students were being more successful socially/behaviorally and academically by not receiving detention slips, having recess time-outs, and turning in their class work and homework.

Mrs. Redner had nine students participating in interventions. She found most of her students showed growth in academics. Students’ fluency and test scores improved. One student who was on a behavior contract in the beginning eventually no longer
needed it. There were two students who continued to struggle academically and did not show much growth. One student was in resource and another student was referred to the Student Study Team (SST) to possibly be tested for a disability and perhaps be placed in resource the following year.

Mrs. Baca’s students who participated in the buddy program and received a behavior contract showed a lot of improvement in self-esteem, confidence, being respectful, and in overall behavior. The student participating in the after school intervention program with her showed improvement in either language arts or math, whichever academic area was being concentrated on. She specifically stated that there were four students who took part in a different after school program where they did not show any growth academically.

Most of Mrs. Fernstein’s students showed growth academically or behaviorally. The after school intervention program she conducted for her students helped them grow in language art and math. She also saw improvement in behavior and responsibility when using the contract and charts with her students. One of her students was given advanced work.

Mrs. Yowder saw a lot of improvement in behavior and self-confidence with the students who participated in the buddy program. Mrs. Yowder also had students in after school programs. One was on academic intervention in language arts and math. The other was a computer-based program where students were able to practice math concepts and skills needed to progress within their grade level. She saw improvement in all but one of the students that participated in these programs.
Parent perceptions. At the end of the study the Parent Satisfaction Survey (see Appendix B) was given to all of the parents who participated at the beginning of the study. The parents were given a series of eight questions about whether they felt informed about their child’s progress, the communication between the parent and the teacher, and if the parent experienced the teacher meeting the needs of their child. These surveys were given directly to me when the teacher received them. Not all of the parents who were involved in the study turned in the survey.

This survey was on a scale ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Table 6 summarizes parents who chose Agree and Strongly Agree.

Table 6

Parent Satisfaction Survey (Appendix A)
(N = The Number of Participating Parents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Mrs. Redner (N = 11)</th>
<th>Mrs. Baca (N = 8)</th>
<th>Mrs. Fernstein (N = 7)</th>
<th>Mrs. Yowder (N = 7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) I am well informed about what my child is doing in class. (Homework, Class work, Tests, Projects)</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) I am well informed on how my child is doing in class.</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) I feel that my child’s teacher is aware of my child’s needs.</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) I feel comfortable speaking with my child’s teacher.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Out of 11 of Mrs. Redner’s parents, the same two parents who took the survey felt they were not informed on either what or how their child was doing in class. One of these parents had their child participating in the buddy program for reading. The other parent felt the teacher was not aware of their child’s needs. This parent had responded at the beginning of the study that they were concerned with their child academically. The parent had written above one of the survey questions “lack of communication.” This child was not placed in any interventions. However, all parents felt comfortable speaking with Mrs. Redner.

Two of Mrs. Baca’s parents did not feel they were informed on what or how their child was doing, as well as the teacher not knowing the needs of their child. An additional two parents did not feel that how their child was doing in class was conveyed to them on a regular basis. According to the teacher, these parents’ children were participating in behavior contracts, the buddy program, and/or after school intervention. All of Mrs. Baca’s parents felt comfortable enough to approach her when they needed to speak with her.

Even though Mrs. Fernstein came into the classroom midyear, parents that took part in the survey felt there was an open line of communication on what their child was doing in class. One parent reported that Mrs. Fernstein was not informative on how their child was doing and knowledgeable on what their child’s needs were. This parent had not specified any concerns at the beginning of the study; therefore, Mrs. Fernstein had not placed him/her into any interventions.
Mrs. Yowder had one parent who did not feel informed on what their child was
doing in class. This parent’s child was in an after school program for mathematics. All of
the other parents were well informed on how their child was doing. Mrs. Yowder’s
parents all felt she was aware of their child’s needs and stated that they were comfortable
communicating with her.

**Forms and patterns of communication and their impact.** The data in this
section represents how parents responded on the post-survey regarding various types of
communication used by the teachers and their perceptions regarding the impact of
communication with them. Table 7 summarizes parents’ reports of how teachers
communicated and what the parents’ preferences were regarding these various forms of
communication.

Table 7

*Parent Preferences Regarding Types of Communication*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Types of Communication Utilized by Teacher</th>
<th>Types of Communication that was most helpful to the Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newsletter</td>
<td>Email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Redner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Baca</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While all teachers implemented contracts in their classrooms, this method was not reported as being successful for any of the teachers. Newsletters, notes home, and meetings were a common use of communication among most teachers. However, notes home and meetings were reported as being the most helpful means of communication. Even though Mrs. Redner’s parents stated that she was utilizing newsletters, they did not feel that it was successful in communication. All but one of Mrs. Baca’s parents felt that at least one of the means of communication was successful. Mrs. Fernstein and Mrs. Yowder’s parents both stated the means of communication being used had been successful in helping the parent. One parent did not mark that Mrs. Yowder was using email, but had responded that it was most helpful.

More important than the above were parents’ perceptions regarding the impact of teachers’ communication. In this regard, parents responded to questions about the impact for their child in both social and academic areas. In addition, they also responded to questions about their own improvements in their own capacity to help prepare the child to be successful. Table 8 summarizes this information.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mrs. Fernstein (N = 7)</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Yowder (N = 7)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents’ Perceived Impact of Communication
Most parents felt their children’s academics had improved because of communication with the teacher. Mrs. Redner’s parents felt communication attributed to their child’s success in academics more than socially. Fewer than half of the parents reported that communication contributed to attitude. Fifty percent or less of Mrs. Baca’s parents reported that communication contributed to both academics and/or attitude. Mrs. Yowder’s parents felt that there was improvement in all areas. Because of communication with teachers, the parents were able to help their child with studying and homework. Mrs. Yowder’s parents again were confident in being able to prepare their child to be successful because of the communication. Mrs. Fernstein had low participation of parents who felt communication improved and that they were able to help their child to become more successful in academics, but they were more confident in helping their child make good choices and have a positive attitude. This could be because of the many teacher transitions in the year.

**Teachers’ Experiences in the Professional Learning Community**
**Description of the monthly PLC meetings.** During each PLC meeting we had a specific agenda to review regarding items from the previous meeting to discuss any obstacles or concerns anyone in the group was having, and to discuss new methods of interventions with students and communication with the parents for their students to become successful. Table 9 summarizes the monthly meetings.

Table 9

**Professional Learning Community Meetings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Teachers Present</th>
<th>Response to Topic</th>
<th>Suggestions Offered</th>
<th>Accepting Suggestions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>-Discussed Norms of the PLC</td>
<td>All Teachers</td>
<td>-Discussion of new methods of communication with parents</td>
<td>-Update websites, monthly newsletter, and mass emails to parents</td>
<td>- Going to try at least one of the methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 1</td>
<td>-Ideas of communicating with parents</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>-Challenges</td>
<td>Mrs. Redner</td>
<td>-Discussion of possible solutions to challenges</td>
<td>-Parent come in observe child -Behavior Contract -Share Spanish Materials</td>
<td>-Wanted to try the behavior contracts -Was willing to contact the district or look for Spanish materials for parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 2</td>
<td>-Follow-up on the new methods of communication with parents</td>
<td>Mr. Seester</td>
<td>-Discussion of what has been tried</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Yowder</td>
<td>-What Spanish materials available to parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>-Identifying and properly placing students in interventions</td>
<td>Mrs. Redner</td>
<td>-Based on Parent Survey identified and placed students into interventions</td>
<td>-Possible interventions – Contracts, Academic before/after school, buddy/mentor program</td>
<td>-Wanted to try all possible interventions with students that it applied to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Baca</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Seester</td>
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<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>-Met Individually with teachers because of Parent/Teacher Conferences</td>
<td>All teachers</td>
<td>-Outcome of Parent/Teacher Conferences</td>
<td>-Follow through with contacting parents regarding the interventions discussed at conferences</td>
<td>-Would contact parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>present</td>
<td>-What interventions were introduced to parents?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December Meeting 1</td>
<td>-Current implementation of contracts</td>
<td>All teachers present</td>
<td>-Status on Implementation of contracts currently in place</td>
<td>-Behavior/ Academic Contracts with charts shared and how to implement</td>
<td>-Will implement new contracts with parents and students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-New types of contracts to possibly implement</td>
<td>-How was student success being measured?</td>
<td>-Daily charts with students in class will be used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Discussed Table 8 questions</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Continue with other interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December Meeting 2</td>
<td>-Goals and outcomes of current interventions</td>
<td>All teachers present</td>
<td>-What specific students were responding to certain interventions was discussed.</td>
<td>-If interventions implemented for students were not working other types of interventions were suggested.</td>
<td>-Continue to use daily behavior/academic charts, notes to parents, observation, grades, detentions/infractions as measurement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>-Continue with interventions having a positive effect.</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>-Implement other interventions for students in need of additional services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January Meeting 1</td>
<td>-Are interventions being utilized?</td>
<td>Mrs. Redner Mrs. Fernandez Mrs. Yowder</td>
<td>-What interventions had the most positive outcome?</td>
<td>-Reflection on the overall process of the PLC.</td>
<td>-Would have liked to have more time with the PLC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January Meeting 2</td>
<td>Were interventions successful? With students? With communicating with parents?</td>
<td>All teachers present</td>
<td>-What interventions had the most positive outcome?</td>
<td>-Reflection on the overall process of the PLC.</td>
<td>-Would have liked to have more time with the PLC.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 represents the primary discussion and outcomes of each PLC meeting. I directed the majority of the PLC meetings with some discussion. Some of the time teachers would write down the answers to questions on the agenda rather than discuss the topics. Towards the end of the study teachers seemed to become more confident in having discussions. Most teachers were having positive experiences in utilizing the interventions and in communicating more successfully with parents regarding their child’s progress academically and socially.
These meetings utilized the cycle of inquiry by teachers and me reflecting at the end of each meeting and using that information to shape the next steps. The teachers discussed many methods of how to communicate with the parents at the first meetings. Even though contracts and daily charts were a direct communication between the home and the teacher, more often the topic of discussion began to change to discussing interventions for students in their classrooms. The teachers were concerned with the social/emotional well being of the student. They were more confident in developing interventions in academics.

**Teachers’ learning goals.** At the second meeting in December, the teachers discussed their goals and responded in writing to the five questions. Table 10 shows the results.

**Table 10**

*Goals for Intervention and Communication*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Mrs. Redner</th>
<th>Mrs. Baca</th>
<th>Mr. Seester</th>
<th>Mrs. Yowder</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Where have you been directing your attention (to which kids and families)?</td>
<td>- Behavior issues</td>
<td>- Low performing students</td>
<td>- Poor academic performance</td>
<td>- Need students to be academically proficient</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Underperforming</td>
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<td>- Behavior issues</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Classroom management</td>
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<td>- These are the students who</td>
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<td></td>
<td>can benefit the most from this help.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Parental contact</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Be more patient, gentle, and in</td>
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<td></td>
<td>control. Not feel out of control on</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>how to get kids on the</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Why are these kids and families the targets?</td>
<td>- Most need</td>
<td>- Communication with all parents</td>
<td>- Parental contact</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. What would you like to see improve in your own practice?</td>
<td>- Communication with all parents</td>
<td>- Parent contact</td>
<td>- Be more patient, gentle, and in</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>control. Not feel out of control on</td>
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<td></td>
<td>how to get kids on the</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4. Why do you think improving this would make a difference for your students?

- Targeted Support from home and school
- Time and a happy, working class
- Communication with the child’s parent is essential to improve student success.

5. What evidence do you use to judge whether targeted students are doing better academically or socially?

- Observation
- Test results
- Student work
- Assignments
- Tests
- Observation
- Homework
- See visual record of progress or lack of it

Early in the study teachers were able to choose if they wanted to utilize contracts with the parent and the child along with behavior/academic charts to be used in the classroom. I gave different examples on how I used my contracts and charts within my classroom and offered copies of samples. Since we had previously recognized the students in need for specific interventions they had already presented academic and behavior contracts to certain parents at parent-teacher conferences and explained how this would be implemented into the students’ daily schedule. This was also a way for the teachers and the parents to be able to communicate. Mrs. Redner and Mr. Seester were already using a similar method but decided to use the contract and charts I had available. Mrs. Baca and Mrs. Yowder wanted to have more of a discussion and guidance on what exactly is done in my classroom with the contracts and charts. We discussed our previous goals and if some of them had changed. The interventions needed currently were behavior and academic for students and having the parents involved in the process.

All four teachers were concerned about behavior problems in the classroom. They directed their attention to these children because they were in the most need and this was
a necessity for classroom management for all the other students to learn. The teacher wanted to improve their communication skills and to be more patient with their students. They wanted to have the support from the parents to reach a common goal, which was for students to be successful. They would be able to see results through observation, effort in getting work done, and how well they did on tests and assignments. The teachers were very optimistic on beginning our work with the children and parents.

**Teachers’ participation in PLC meetings.** Each teacher had been teaching for at least five years at the current school site. Each teacher’s level of comfort was different regarding what he or she wanted to share about what they were struggling with and what was currently working for them. Mrs. Redner is a young teacher who has been teaching for six years. She was willing to ask questions and add advice to the conversations. Mrs. Baca, who had been teaching for 17 years, was more willing to write down what we had on the agenda rather than discuss it. She was willing to share advice on how to handle situations with parents who were reluctant to communicate or with whom the teachers were having difficulty relating. Mr. Seester, a veteran teacher who was there for the longest period of time for the class that went through many different transitions, was open to any advice and wanted to listen and participate in every meeting. Mrs. Fernstein continued with the interventions that were put into place; she had been teaching for 13 years. Mrs. Yowder had been teaching for 15 years. She was open to advice from the Professional Learning Community members.
Each meeting was recorded and then transcribed. The communication and interactions that took place in each meeting and what was expressed at the meetings is the information used to describe each teacher’s experience below.

**Mrs. Redner**

During the meetings Mrs. Redner was an active participant. She attended most of the meetings. She would offer advice to another teacher if they were having difficulty with communicating with a parent about their child. She would ask questions and was open to new ideas on how to better communicate with her students. She had students in her class with the needs of interventions, which were not part of the participating parents. However, these students needed the contracts for behavior and academics and other interventions we were putting into place. So she had other students participating that were not on her table for interventions put into place because the parents were not participating in the study.

When I would pass out the agenda to be able to keep us on task and for the teachers to have a visual for discussion, Mrs. Redner would start to discuss her thoughts. However, since the other teachers were less likely to have a discussion, she would then write her thoughts down. Mrs. Redner would stop by my room several times throughout the study to discuss some of her challenges with students. She was open to any suggestions and sometimes just needed to vent.

**Mrs. Baca**

Mrs. Baca did not attend all of the meetings. There were times where I would have to ask to meet with her individually so I could keep her informed on everything that
we had discussed in the meeting. When she attended the meetings, she was willing to participate in writing down information for whatever needed to be discussed. There were a couple of meetings where other teachers were voicing some concern on how to properly communicate with certain parents. Her reply was, “Just try to not have them volunteer” (Mrs. Baca, personal communication, DATE HERE). Mrs. Baca implemented academic interventions during class and after school. She had her students participating in the buddy program for self-esteem. She also had many academic and behavior contracts with students. One of the meetings Mrs. Baca did not attend included discussions about how the new methods were working and sharing of behavior contracts to put into place for some students. I went to her individually to share this information. The PLC focused and discussed the effects of the interventions on the students at another meeting she missed. We were able to discuss alternative interventions if a certain one was not working with a child.

**Mr. Seester/Mrs. Fernstein**

Mr. Seester was very open to working with parents and putting students into interventions they needed. He attended all meetings and was a willing participant in all conversations. He has been a substitute teacher at this school site for over 10 years. He knew most of the children and the parents. He was not going to do any interventions before or after school, but he had small group interventions in class and implemented behavior and academic contracts. He also referred many students to the buddy program. Mrs. Fernstein was also very willing to participate in the meetings. Mrs. Fernstein was very comfortable working the parents of her students. She continued with the
interventions Mr. Seester had already put into place along with implementing after school intervention for her students that needed extra support academically. At her previous schools she had implemented contracts and daily charts for academics and behavior. She was confident in continuing with this intervention.

Mrs. Yowder

Mrs. Yowder was the most active participant in the meetings. She had a lot of questions and concerns and was open to anyone’s opinion. Mrs. Yowder and I met individually on several occasions. She had stated that she really wanted to improve her communication with her parents this year. Whenever she had a question or wanted advice she would stop by my classroom. Mrs. Yowder was very willing to try new methods to communicate with her parents. She started emailing when in the past this method was not used. She sent home a newsletter. She also tried to implement contracts. Students in her class participated in the buddy program and after school interventions for academics.

Summary

This section is organized around the two key research questions that follow.

1. How do teachers learn to build effective communication skills with parents to support students’ academic and social success?

2. What patterns and forms of communication are effective for the teacher and parent to improve their relationship in order to increase student success?
The participating teachers used the Professional Learning Community for support and giving advice to one another on any obstacles teachers were encountering either with a child in their classroom and/or communicating with the parent. As stated previously, the goal was to involve the parents in the communication process and to notify them of the interventions being used with their child academically or socially.

The participating teachers and I tried to develop an open forum of communication during the Professional Learning Community meetings. All of us had a common goal, which was to improve communication with parents in order to help the students academically and/or social/emotionally. Throughout the PLC meetings, teachers needed a lot of guidance from me through agendas and with prompting questions. Many times the teachers preferred to write down the answers to the questions on the agenda rather than discuss them. Through discussions and implementation, teachers showed they were more comfortable implementing academic interventions than social/emotional interventions.

The different forms of interventions were primarily selected for students according to what their parents had requested on the *Getting to Know Your Child* survey (see Appendix A). The students were placed in before/after school academic interventions. Some students had a behavior and/or academic contract between the parent, student, and the teacher along with a daily chart. Other students were in a lunchtime buddy program, either to promote self-esteem while they helped in kindergarten or to work with an intermediate student on an academic area.
Parents’ involvement was through behavior and academic contracts and by using various methods of communication. The parents were observing their interaction with their child’s teacher. They were able to report their opinions on how effective communication with the teacher was and whether or not they could identify any results academically or socially with their child in the Parent Satisfaction survey (see Appendix B).

The types and patterns of communication that teachers attempted to build with parents were put into place to support student success and to examine the impact of those interventions. The results of the Getting to Know Your Child survey assisted teachers in providing meaningful interventions for students. In most cases, teachers reported positive impact of these interventions at the end of the study. The teachers’ perceptions corresponded, for the most part, with parent responses on the Parent Satisfaction survey. While the teacher’s implemented interventions for students in response to most parents’ concerns, there were some students who did not receive any interventions that their parent requested. These parents did not respond to the Parent Satisfaction survey.

Chapter 5 will discuss in more depth how teachers depended on me to implement the social/emotional interventions and to lead the conversations. The extent of the implementation and participation will be discussed and what possible changes could have been made during the study to change this. The relationship between the parents’ expressed needs for their child and what interventions were provided will be examined more closely.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Throughout the study teachers and I worked together to improve communication with parents through implementing interventions that would improve student achievement both academically and socially. The study also looked at how teachers communicated within a Professional Learning Community. There were several factors that had an effect on the meeting component of the study. One of the primary factors was whether or not the teachers had previous experience working and communicating within a Professional Learning Community. Another was whether teachers knew the positive implications of a PLC. Time and attendance were two other factors that affected the group.

The basis of the study was to analyze the following.

1. How do teachers learn to build effective communication skills with parents to support students’ academic and social success?

2. What patterns and forms of communication are effective for the teacher and parent to improve their relationship in order to increase student success?

At the start of the study the Getting to Know Your Child survey (see Appendix A) completed by the parents was completely filled out. There was substantial information for teachers to learn what the parents of their students concerns were. There was also information on how to efficiently contact the parents. The teachers worked with a couple of the students from the parents who took part in the survey, but did not direct their
attention only to those children. In the end I saw some of the students in the study were not taking part in the programs we were implementing. Teachers may have thought there were students who were in greater need of interventions, but these parents should have had some type of communication so they could express their concerns to the teacher. This would create an open line for the parent to continue to communicate any other concerns with the teacher.

**Summary of Findings**

*Teachers in the professional learning community.* The teachers in the group seemed to have a definite concern with communicating with the parents of the students in their classrooms. Some were open to suggestions and would offer some suggestions to one another to offer assistance if they were handling a difficult situation with a parent with whom they wanted to build a relationship. When the Professional Learning Community (PLC) group of teachers and I would meet there was a range of confidence on how to effectively express themselves to parents. Some of the teachers had positive experiences communicating with parents while other teachers had not which made them apprehensive to try any type of communication.

One teacher expressed a concern about a parent volunteering in her classroom. She had had parents volunteer in her classroom in the past and she felt they had been watching her so they could tell the principal if she did anything they did not agree with. One teacher in the group suggested to, “tell her that you don’t need any help at this time” (Name here, personal communication, Date here). Being that we were there to try new methods and support one another, I suggested that she agree to the parent volunteering at
a time when she did centers and the parent would be concentrating more on a group. This way she would be able to be a part of the classroom, and the teacher would feel like the parent was not watching her. The teacher did have the parent volunteer in the classroom.

Throughout the study, the teachers and I met twice a month. I also met with each individual teacher one-on-one several times. At the one-on-one meetings teachers were more straightforward and honest with the experiences they were having. The agenda for each PLC meeting had questions that guided our conversations. Many times these conversations did not happen. I learned that when I passed out any paperwork to help guide the conversation the teachers seemed to be more comfortable filling it out or writing on it quietly rather than discussing aloud. They would then turn it into me. I was able to see what each teacher was thinking, but the meaningful conversation I had hoped for did not take place. While I encouraged conversations among members of the group, it seemed that teachers did not know exactly why these conversations might be important or how to participate in them. I also found that I was looked upon as the leader of the group to direct the meetings. I wanted the meetings to be more fluid where everyone was having a discussion and I was more of the observer. I have led meetings before, but not group conversations, which likely contributed to the phenomenon described in this paragraph. At these meetings I should have asked more guiding questions to help teachers open up and start the conversations.

There were several other factors that limited the effectiveness of the PLC meetings. However, the teachers were willing to listen and try new methods of interventions with their students. Because the meetings were at lunch, it always seemed
like we were rushed. We might have been able to start these conversations if the environment was more relaxed and time was not a factor. Unfortunately, I was not able to get teachers to meet after school. The only way I could get most of them to volunteer was to hold the meetings during lunch. Perhaps if the teachers were given a stipend or an incentive for their time this might have changed. Most of the teachers had after school interventions themselves for their students and it was difficult to do anything extra.

I also observed during a couple of conversations that took place where teachers had some negative experiences communicating with parents, which had resulted in negative feelings. Having direct communication with parents such as phone calls and conferencing put off teachers. These types of communication put a lot of stress on them. Training teachers how to handle difficult situations with parents without becoming defensive would benefit both the teacher and the parent. Teachers sometimes do not realize that the parent is not directly angry with them, but there are underlying factors and the parent needs someone to listen to them. Teachers have their child in their hands.

Even though some of the methods the teachers performed were not new and innovative, the methods were new to them. Some teachers were not used to sending out emails on a regular basis to parents. Even having one-on-one conferencing had been a negative experience in the past. Within the PLC, we encouraged each other. This alleviated some of the stress level so that teachers were able to take on the challenge.

**Teachers’ experiences with interventions.** When providing interventions for the students, teachers knew exactly how to implement academic interventions; academics were relatively straightforward. The teachers were comfortable discussing the
implementation of these interventions with the parents. Academic interventions were also much easier to monitor.

Whether or not the social interventions with the students were showing improvement was more difficult to detect. Teachers were able to use the daily charts and the amount of detention slips given to the child were a smaller amount to determine if there had been progress. But a majority of improvement in behavior was measured by teacher observation. The interventions were put into place, but how is social/emotional success measured? There should be some thoughtful opportunities in this area for teachers to recognize the positive implications of social interventions. From experience, when implementing appropriate social interventions, a student’s behavior and attitude will become positive. The student will show positive growth academically and will show effort. Social interventions will directly lead to academic interventions. Because social interventions are not as likely to be practiced as often as academic intervention with teachers, there needs to be training in this area.

All of the teachers were able to utilize the behavior and homework/class work contracts. This was a method of communicating daily with the parents. Overall, the teachers saw positive change and growth in these students academically and socially. Three out of the four teachers intended on making this part of their classroom management and parent contact routine for the following year. Teachers saw the buddy program also being successful in raising academics and self-esteem with their students. Parents were notified that their child was participating in the program through the teachers. Some parents reported to the teachers that their child was showing definite
growth academically. However, teachers reported that they implemented contracts and
daily progress charts with students to be sent home daily to be signed by the parent;
whereas, the parents did not report this method either being used or attitude being a main
attribute because of communication on the Parent Satisfaction survey (see Appendix B;
see Appendix C).

Teachers were able to remark about their experiences at the final meeting. They
wrote down their answers to some of the questions that were on the agenda. There were
some answers that stood out. Mrs. Redner, who seemed most confident, wrote, “I get a
little nervous dealing with parents” (Mrs. Redner, personal communication, DATE
HERE). All of the teachers reported they continued to communicate with parents through
notes and phone calls, except for Mrs. Fernstein. Mrs. Fernstein reported that she met
with a parent at the park with her own children to get to know the family. She had also
done home visits at her previous school. Mrs. Yowder reported that when she had to
work with parents who were verbally abusive or aggressive she would “cry.”

Recommendations for Change

The teachers who took part in the study needed more guidance in being part of a
Professional Learning Community. Rather than having open conversations there was
more note taking and questions to me where I was giving the answers. The teachers also
brought in some other ideas, but teachers needed to know how to be a part of a PLC in
order for it to work. At many meetings at school sites and the district, there is a
person/people presenting and a crowd of teachers listening and asking questions. This
does not prepare teachers to work together collaboratively and learn from one another. If
there were trainings on how to properly be a part of a PLC and the positive implications, perhaps school sites would implement them more. Teachers would have more meaningful conversations that would lead to better ideas.

At the end of the study, the parents who were part of the study were given a Parent Satisfaction survey (see Appendix B). This was to give me a sense of what the parents experienced during the study. The names of the students were written on the survey. When the parents were done with the survey they were to have the student turn it into their teacher. One parent turned the survey into the office with a note. The note stated, “How do you expect me to be honest if I have to turn this into the teacher?” I realized that even though other parents may not have thought about this, I should have had the surveys turned directly into me.

More and more parents have been becoming a part of the school community. There is still a separation between the teachers and the parents. The literature indicated that both parents and teachers could feel intimidated or have had past negative experiences that lead to a lack of communication. In this group of teachers, one of the four teachers had a very negative attitude toward parents. In the past, Mrs. Baca and Mrs. Yowder have both had some assertive parents and communication had become an issue. Parents of these students eventually ended up in my class and did not always feel comfortable approaching Mrs. Baca or Mrs. Yowder.

What is disturbing is that we are trained for academics within the school and the district; however, the social/emotional is not a subject of concentration. How are we to use social and emotional interventions for students if we do not know what they are?
Some people are not as empathetic or have not gone through adversity to be able to relate to a child’s situation. Some teachers need to be taught the proper social skills to work with parents. They need to learn how to be empathetic and/or what empathy is. In order for a child to learn the teacher needs to be teaching the whole child – academically, socially, and emotionally.

Student academics seem to be the primary concern of the discussions taking place between teachers and parents. Some teachers only communicate once during the year at parent-teacher conferences or through negative notes going home to be signed such as detention slips and progress reports. Both teachers and parents need a comfortable arena to work together and communicate. Both teachers and parents need to work together in meetings to help improve student success. One of the ways of improving this issue might be to encourage teachers and parents to come up with a model of a parent-teacher professional learning community and then take it to the school sites. The school sites can make this part of their staff or collaboration meetings. So instead of being talked to, everybody is part of the discussion. There needs to be open, honest conversations on concerns of how student success is being impacted because of the lack of parent-teacher communication and how it can be improved. The parents need to take part in the process of coming up with ideas for student success both academically and socially.

Conclusion

The research states that there are many barriers that get in the way of communication between parents and teachers. One barrier is that most forms of communication are written and go home with the child. We need to try other forms of
communication with parents besides progress reports and notes home, which can have a positive effect on parent-teacher communication. The research suggested to not only try other forms of communication, but that parents needed to be a part of the decision making process so they could advocate for their children. Parents need to feel like they are welcomed and part of the school community. Some teachers have had more positive experiences communicating with parents. These teachers can help guide other teachers to success. Teachers who communicate with the parents will learn more about the students in their classroom and the parents will be able to learn what the expectations are. This communication will lead towards a common goal, which is student success.

This study could have had more positive effects if I was able to have more time with the teachers. It would have been more effective if the group knew how to have meaningful, in depth conversations. In the beginning of the study I would have brought in research and information on PLC groups so the teachers could have a better idea of what it should be like. A group of parents should also be included in the group. Parents’ involvement at some of the meetings might have opened up the conversations and the teachers could learn those communication skills needed. I would like to have training in the area of how to guide such meetings so I can learn to ask the probing questions to guide meaningful discussions. Teachers should have some training on how to have these meaningful discussions. Many meetings are led and teachers are allowed to ask questions. This does not create a meaningful discussion and most teachers feel these types of meetings are a waste of time. In order to have a Professional Learning Community of teachers, teachers need to first learn how to have these discussions.
Meetings where there is a group having a discussion on a specific subject matter in the middle of another group observing could help develop these skills. Teachers need to be able to collaborate and learn from each other. We need to first learn how to effectively communicate with one another. Then we can develop more effective methods of communication with the parents so the students can be successful socially, emotionally, and academically.

Site leaders need to demonstrate communication skills with their staff. Being able to be open with your site leader and seeking advice without being judged is important. Depending on the site leader, teachers could be in meetings being discussed. They are not learning how to develop into a Professional Learning Community. The norm is not teacher collaboration at all school sites. Academics are a primary concern for the success of the school leader and their site. The social/emotional does not seem to be as important of an area to be learned or discussed. Only by changing the norm at school sites on how to communicate within the school site with site leaders and between teachers will the communication change between teachers and parents.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

This study suggests several avenues for further investigation. For example, parent perceptions around teachers’ communication could be explored in more depth using methods such as focus groups. Another area of further study would be to study the dynamics of teacher interactions in the PLC group by analyzing the transcripts of the meetings along with doing one-on-one interviews. A larger study could be completed on the culture of the school and how the site leadership contributes to the teachers’
confidence and attitudes in collaboration and communication with each other and with families at the school site. This would be a more extensive study involving all of the teachers at the school site. Individual meetings, group meetings, and whole staff meetings would be part of the study and analyzed to observe any changes in confidence and differences in topics of discussion. Furthermore, the interaction between the teachers would be observed within the different meetings and when the school site leader was present. Studies such as these would contribute to our understanding of how to build more effective patterns of interactions between the site and the community through teachers’ communication with the parents of their students.
References


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Building Effective Communication Methods Between Teachers and Parents for Student Success in Title I Schools
Getting to Know Your Child
2012-2013

1. Describe your child's strength. (Do not limit to academic ability, please include physical and social strengths too.)

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

2. What does your child enjoy doing?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

3. What do you want your child to achieve in the 2nd/3rd grade?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

4. Describe any concerns you would like addressed this school year?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
5. Please list any additional information about your child, which would be helpful for me to know.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Contact Information

Student Name ___________________________

Male         Female
(Please circle one) (Please circle one)

2nd 3rd Grade
(Please circle one)

Guardian(s) Name(s) _____________________ ______________________

Home Phone # ____________________________

Cell Phone # ____________________________

Work Phone # ____________________________

Best Time to Call ____________________________

Email ____________________________

What is the best form of communication?

☐ Phone ☐ Email ☐ Notes between school and home
APPENDIX B

Parent Satisfaction Survey

Building Effective Communication Methods Between Teachers and Parents for Student Success in Title I Schools

Parent Survey

My child is a (please circle one)  Boy        Girl

He/she is in the (please circle one)  2nd     3rd     Grade

For each question in this section please circle the appropriate response using the following scale:

4 = Strongly Agree (SA)  
3 = Agree (A)  
2 = Disagree (D)  
1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)  
N/A = Not Applicable

1) I am well informed about what my child is doing in class. (Homework, Classwork, Tests, Projects)  
   SA  A  D  SD
   3  2  1  N/A

2) I am well informed on how my child is doing in class.  
   4  3  2  1  N/A

3) I feel that my child’s teacher is aware of my child’s needs  
   4  3  2  1  N/A

4) I feel comfortable speaking with my child’s teacher.  
   4  3  2  1  N/A

5) What means of communication does your child’s teacher use?  
   (Please circle all that apply)
   ○ Newsletter  
   ○ Email  
   ○ Phone Calls  
   ○ Contracts  
   ○ Note Home  
   ○ Meeting
6) Which means of communication has been most helpful?
(Please circle all that apply)

○ Newsletter
○ Email
○ Phone Calls
○ Contracts
○ Note Home
○ Teacher Website
○ Meeting

7) Have you seen improvement in any of the following areas because of communication between you and your child’s teacher?
(Please circle all that apply)

○ Academics
○ Attitude toward going to school
○ Attitude toward homework
○ Getting along with their peers
○ Choosing to make good choices in classroom behavior (paying attention, listening, staying in their seat).
○ Knowing how I can help my child at home

8) As a result of communicating with my child’s teacher I feel better able to help my child be successful at school in-
(Please circle all that apply)

○ Helping with Homework
○ Helping my child have a more positive attitude toward going to school
○ Helping my child study and get ready for tests
○ Helping my child choose good choices in classroom behavior (paying attention, listening, staying in their seat).
## APPENDIX C

Mrs. Baca’s Data Gathered from Parents’ Getting to Know You Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student name</th>
<th>parents name</th>
<th>Phone contact</th>
<th>email contact</th>
<th>Best contact</th>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Concerns</th>
<th>Interests</th>
<th>Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Names Given</td>
<td>xxxx-xxxx call anytime</td>
<td>Contact Given</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Extremely kind heart - Generous - Giving - Athletic - Intelligent</td>
<td>Doesn’t have a lot of friends</td>
<td>-Gymnastics trains 12 hours per week. -Reading -Video Games</td>
<td>-Continue to build solid educational foundation -Build friendships -Student does not respond to lecturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Names Given</td>
<td>Home – xxxx-xxxx Cell – xxx-xxxx</td>
<td>Contact Given</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Very affectionate - Charmer - Gets along with others</td>
<td>Homework is too easy. -More writing please</td>
<td>-Doing crafts - Eating sweets -Spending time with his brother and grandparents</td>
<td>-To read and write simple sentences with word fluency about 100 -Perform simple math operations without using fingers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>Names Given</td>
<td>Cell – xxxx-xxxx</td>
<td>Contact Given</td>
<td>Phone email and notes</td>
<td>Social - Intelligent - Sensitive</td>
<td>There isn’t a lot of support for the parent.</td>
<td>-Play -Watch T.V. -Dance -Sings</td>
<td>-Is very helpful at home -Wants to help the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Names</td>
<td>Home –</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Physically</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>-Reading</td>
<td>-Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Names</td>
<td>Home –</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Given</td>
<td>xxx-xxxx</td>
<td>Given</td>
<td>strong and fast</td>
<td>-Clever with putting things together</td>
<td>-Dancing</td>
<td>in math</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>Names</td>
<td>Home –</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Given</td>
<td>xxx-xxxx</td>
<td>Given</td>
<td>Would like to know how he is doing weekly or biweekly</td>
<td>-Fast Leaner</td>
<td>-Please recognize that even though a child isn’t up to grade level they are still trying.</td>
<td>-Computer</td>
<td>-To be a great reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cell –</td>
<td>Given</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Kind hearted</td>
<td>-Reading books</td>
<td>-T.V.</td>
<td>-To do well at math.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>xxx-xxxx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Loves his family</td>
<td>-Math</td>
<td>-Does not want him to hate academics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>-Baseball</td>
<td>-Riding bike</td>
<td>-Very active</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Tricks on bikes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 6</td>
<td>Names</td>
<td>Cell –</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>-More aggressive, independent, &amp; outgoing</td>
<td>-To make sure that the staff stays focused on bullying</td>
<td>-Art</td>
<td>Learning all grade level academics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Given</td>
<td>xxx-xxxx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-She is very emotional</td>
<td>-Playing games on the computer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 7</td>
<td>Names</td>
<td>Home –</td>
<td>Both Parents</td>
<td>-Gets along with others</td>
<td>-Would like for him to be more confident in himself</td>
<td>-Likes playing</td>
<td>-Improve in:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Given</td>
<td>xxx-xxxx</td>
<td>Contacts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>language arts, fluency, and reading skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cell –</td>
<td>Given</td>
<td>Phone, email or notes</td>
<td>-Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>xxx-xxxx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Wants to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work –</td>
<td>xxx-xxxx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Legos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phone, email or notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Names</td>
<td>Cell</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
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<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Given</td>
<td>xxx-xxxx</td>
<td>xxx-xxxx</td>
<td>Given</td>
<td>-Energetic and active -Likes his games -Sensitive</td>
<td>know how they can help at home. Would not mind if he goes to summer school</td>
<td>-Video games -Sometimes reading</td>
<td>reading, spelling, grammar, and a little in math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Names</td>
<td>Home – xxx-xxxx</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>-Playing with friends -doing art</td>
<td>-To do her best in everything -To be independent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Given</td>
<td>Cell – xxx-xxxx</td>
<td>Given</td>
<td>-Friendly -Helpful to her friends -Warm personality -Eager to learn</td>
<td>-Draw -Math</td>
<td>-To read faster -Improve in comprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Names</td>
<td>Cell – xxx-xxxx</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>-First year at Durham; please -That the teacher is in close contact with the parent and teaches every student to their level</td>
<td>-Active; -Turning in -Reading -Completing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Given</td>
<td>xxx-xxxx after 6 p.m.</td>
<td>running -Reading</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>homework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX D

Mrs. Baca and her Parents’ Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student name</th>
<th>Parent Request</th>
<th>Parent Request Intervention</th>
<th>Teacher Reported Intervention</th>
<th>Teacher Reported Outcome</th>
<th>Parent Reported on How Well Informed and What Means of Communication Used</th>
<th>Parent Reported Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Requested Method of communication</td>
<td>Beginning of Study</td>
<td>Provided Intervention</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree or Agree (A)</td>
<td>1. What means most helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Needs friends</td>
<td>Behavior Contract/ buddy to kinder/</td>
<td>More self esteem</td>
<td>3. None marked</td>
<td>4. None marked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree or Disagree (D)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Needs advanced work</td>
<td>Behavior Contract/ buddy to kinder/ Intervention after school</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>1. D not informed; A comfortable speaking with teacher</td>
<td>3. Email, notes home, meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree or Disagree (D)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>Phone Email Notes</td>
<td>Wants to help in class; sensitive, would like</td>
<td>Behavior Contract/after school intervention</td>
<td>“Changes in behavior; shows more respect”</td>
<td>1. A</td>
<td>3. Newsletter, notes, meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree or Disagree (D)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Strongly Agree or Agree (A)/Disagree or Strongly Disagree (D)

2. What types of communication were used by the teacher

3. Parent more prepared to help child to become successful
| Student | 4     | Email       | Improve in math       | Behavior Contract/Jiji after school | 1. D not informed; A aware of needs and comfortable with teacher  
2. Email, notes | 3. Notes  
4. None marked  
5. Helping child make good choices |
|---------|-------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
|         | 5     | Notes / Phone | -Wants him to like school | -Behavior Contract  
-academic contract  
-after school intervention | Behavior respect, cooperative  
1. A  
2. Newsletter, Meetings | 1. Newsletter, meetings, notes  
2. All areas  
3. All areas |
|         | 6     | None stated  | -No bullying  
-Learning all academics – up to grade level | Behavior Contract; academic contract; after school intervention/Jiji math after school program | | 1. Newsletter, meetings, notes  
2. All areas  
3. All areas |
|         | 7     | Phone / Email | -More confidence | Behavior Contract; “Comprehension improved – | | |
|-----------------|-------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|------|-------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Student 9 Phone | Phone | -To do her best and be independent | After school intervention | None reported | 1. D; informed/A; child’s needs and comfortable with teacher | 2. Newsletter, notes home, meetings | 3. Meetings | 4. How to help child at home | 5. Help with – homework and studying |
| Student 10 Notes | Notes | -To be in close contact with teacher -Improve in fluency and comprehension | -Behavior contract -Academic contract -Before school intervention -Jiji math after school program | -“Improved in reading and math” -Changes in behavior | | | | | |
| Student 11 Phone | Phone | -Turning in work/completing homework | -After school intervention | -Improved in reading | 1. A | 2. Phone | 1. Phone | 2. Academics | 3. More positive attitude |
Appendix E

Daily Behavior Chart

Name ____________________________________  Date ______________________

- = Doing Great!
- = Okay/ room for Improvement
- = Needs Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30 – 9:15</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:15 – 10:00 Prep</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 – 10:10 Recess</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:10 – 11:00</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Icon 1</td>
<td>Icon 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 – 11:40</td>
<td>😊😊😊</td>
<td>😞😞😞</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:40 – 12:20</td>
<td>😊😊😊</td>
<td>😞😞😞</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>😊😊😊</td>
<td>😞😞😞</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:20 – 1:35</td>
<td>😊😊😊</td>
<td>😞😞😞</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:35 – 1:45 Recess</td>
<td>😊😊😊</td>
<td>😞😞😞</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:45 – 2:20</td>
<td>😊😊😊</td>
<td>😞 снижен</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:20 – 2:59</td>
<td>😊😊😊</td>
<td>😞 снижен</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Signature ______________________________ Date ___________________

Teacher Signature ______________________________ Date ___________________

Parent Signature ______________________________ Date ___________________