

**A COMPARISON OF SCHOOL TO HOME COMMUNICATION  
SATISFACTION BETWEEN PARENTS WITH INTERNET ACCESS TO A  
SCHOOL WEB SITE AND PARENTS WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS AT  
NORTHWEST HIGH SCHOOL.**

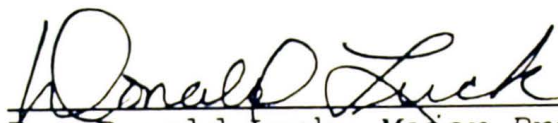
---

**LAURA DILLARD BARNETT**



To the Graduate Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Field Study by Laura Dillard Barnett entitled "A Comparison of School to Home Communication Satisfaction Between Parents with Internet Access to a School Web Site and Parents without Internet Access at Northwest High School." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Educational Specialist, with a major in Administration and Supervision.

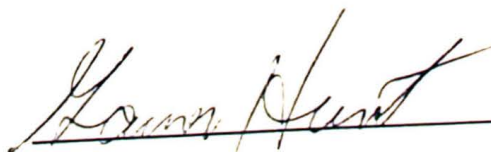
  
Dr. Donald Luck, Major Professor

We have read this Field Study  
and recommend its acceptance.

  
Dr. Carl Stedman, Second Committee Member

  
Dr. Allan Williams, Third Committee Member

Accepted for the  
Graduate and Research Council



## STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this field study in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Educational Specialist degree at Austin Peay State University, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library. Brief quotations from this field study are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgement of the source is made.

Permission for extensive quotations from or reproductions of this field study may be granted by my major professor, Dr. Donald Luck, or in his absence, by the Head of the Interlibrary Services when, in the opinion of either, the proposed use of the material is for scholarly purposes. Any copying or use of the material in this field study for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Signature Laura D. Barnett

Date 8-10-98

A COMPARISON OF SCHOOL TO HOME COMMUNICATION  
SATISFACTION BETWEEN PARENTS WITH INTERNET ACCESS TO A  
SCHOOL WEB SITE AND PARENTS WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS AT  
NORTHWEST HIGH SCHOOL.

A Field Study  
Presented to the  
Graduate and Research Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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

by  
Laura Dillard Barnett  
August 1998



## **ABSTRACT**

This research was conducted to determine if a school web site providing information to parents would increase the satisfaction level in regard to school to home communication on the part of parents with internet access. After the creation of a web site for Northwest High School, forty parent volunteers with children at all grade levels were surveyed for level of satisfaction and results were sorted by whether the parent had internet access or not. Twenty in each category participated in the project. Three surveys were conducted over the course of a semester and the web site was in place the preceding semester and the semester during which the surveys were taken. The returned response rate averaged 58% for these surveys. Few parents with internet access actively used the site and the conclusion drawn is that parents continue to rely on the printed newsletter and word of mouth from children rather than web-based communication.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER	
1. Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Hypothesis.....	3
Definition of Terms.....	3
Importance of the Study.....	4
Limitations of the Study.....	4
2. Review of Literature.....	6
3. Methodology.....	22
4. Results.....	24
5. Summary and Conclusions.....	27
REFERENCES.....	29
APPENDIX.....	32



## Introduction

Although the problem of school to home communication has been the subject of considerable concern, most of the research conducted to date has focused on written communications and parent-teacher conferencing. This has been primarily in the elementary schools, with less attention to secondary education. Findings have shown that parents continue to have a concern for being well-informed by the schools, but take less active roles in maintaining communication after elementary school years. Research has shown that most parents will read a newsletter sent from the school, but few will join a parent-teacher organization or attend conferences on a regular basis (Gotts, 1983).

Research also shows that the two main interests of parents are 1) to be made aware of what is happening on the larger scale at the school and 2) to be informed of their child's status in each class only if the child is in danger of failing (Gotts, 1983). These are two separate forms of communication and require an effort from the administration to address the first concern, and action on the part of each teacher to achieve the second. Until now, the most effective means of communicating school goals and activities to the parents in the community has been to send a newsletter home by the student. This requires an added responsibility on the part of each student for the information to make it into the hands of the parents. If the parents do not ask, or the child forgets or deems it unimportant, the correspondence may fail to be delivered.

New technology in the homes, schools, and businesses across America is changing the way communications can be transmitted. The internet has become the information highway. Anyone with access to a computer linked to the internet can receive data. Consequently, many schools across the nation are creating web sites to convey data. If a web site is regularly updated, parents, students, and community members can be kept abreast of school information. The problem of transmitting the school's news on paper to students who in turn must deliver it home has been overcome. The money saved on photocopies and paper is eliminated, and updates can be made to the site at any time. Access may be available at a person's home or workplace and the information is not limited to a particular audience. The only drawback is for the family with no internet access. In which case, the monthly or quarterly newsletter is more informative.

The question of whether using an internet web site to improve school to home communication on the part of the administration is worthwhile remains unanswered. The school activities, especially at the high school level, are numerous, and a well-kept site could be very valuable in keeping current information at the fingertips of parents. To determine the usefulness of regularly updating a web site with activities, a survey of parents' actual use of a maintained site and their level of satisfaction with the site should be compared to the standard means of newsletters and word of mouth to parents not using the internet.



Additionally, information concerning the the success of the various current means of communication should be measured.

### Statement of Problem

Improving school to home communication, including informing parents of school activities, sporting events, and other related information of concern, is a constant issue faced by administrators. The introduction of technology in schools, homes, and businesses is changing the way this concern is dealt with all over the United States. Web sites on the internet are the newest form of communication and advertisement. Before someone is assigned to the weekly or monthly task of updating a web page, the usefulness to parents should be considered. This study will investigate the level of parental awareness of school activities as well as levels of satisfaction regarding the timeliness and appropriateness of the information. Parents using internet access to the school's web site will be surveyed as well as parents only receiving the regular school newsletter printed on the back of the six-week report card. The results should have further implications for schools across the nation in designing and maintaining a web site as a form of school to home communication.

### Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the communication satisfaction level of parents accessing a school information web site and parents receiving a newsletter.

### Definition of Terms

Internet - An electronic communication system connecting

computer networks and facilities around the world (Merriam-Webster, 1998).

School to Home Communication - Any form of written or oral notification initiated by a school to inform parents of student progress, activities, or school programs.

Web Page - Any computer on the internet running a world wide web server; identified by the hostname and url (Free On-line Dictionary of Computing, 1998).

Home Communication Satisfaction - The level of success achieved by schools in imparting information to parents.

#### Importance of the Study

This field study was important for a number of reasons. While various studies such as those by Reddick (1987) and Wiedmer (1995) have examined school to home communication using standard means of transmitting information, few have examined the use of an internet web page to improve communication. Such a study could be utilized by schools at all levels public and private to foster better communication with parents. As technology increases in the homes and businesses across America, the results of this form of communication will only become more effective. This study was important because it allowed Northwest High School to compare the current means of transmitting information to a new media source, and determine if there is an improvement as well as what types of information parents are using.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study was limited in that parents having no web access could not participate in evaluating the usefulness of



the school web site for retrieving information. This study was also limited by the fact that no study on use of web sites to communicate information from school to home was located and all literature reviewed pertained to various other forms of school to home communication or internet usage. Additionally, the relative newness of using this form of communication made it less common as a choice for parents with internet access available.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of the Literature

#### Scope of the Problem

"Communication is crucial to a good school-community relationship" (Reddick, 1987, p.1). Research suggests that schools can develop their reputation through good public relations; however, this communication is often unplanned and unstructured. This results in misunderstandings and a seeming lack of concern on the part of the school. "Parents cannot function as the 'home partners' of teachers and principals if there is a lack of communication - or of meaningful communication" (Reddick, 1987, p.2). It is a continuing process to provide understanding between schools and the community which they serve. Additionally, information to parents concerning school priorities, needs, and activities is vital to a healthy school-community relationship.

The media, including newspapers, radio, TV, and magazines, may give schools in general bad publicity. They seldom report what is occurring in good schools. The impression that all schools are represented by those which are reported on is often erroneously assumed. National pronouncements about the decline of schools as well as legislation being passed in several states bolsters that misconception (Gilchrist, 1989). Good public relations in an individual school is the only way to promote that school.

Public relations in the school environment has a different connotation than when used in the public sector.



The objective of public relations for a business serves to improve company image for increased profit. Schools on the other hand, provide essential information to assist with instructional decisions and as a public service (Wiedmer, 1995). Educators prefer to think of the two-way communication between schools and homes as "community relations" rather than "public relations" (Wiedmer, 1995, p.6). These two terms can be used interchangeably in discussing the nature of the information disseminated to a school's community.

In any good organization there is a concern for communication. The questions to ask are: How will this affect others? and How can I let them know? Communication is an ever-present challenge. Schools should use as many channels of communication as often and as effectively as possible.

Effective schools do not rely on the printed word alone, nor do they communicate only through meetings. News is gathered constantly and disseminated through group meetings, as well as one-to-one contacts. News goes to the community through school newspapers, mass media, and a planned public relations program (Gilchrist, 1989, p.138).

Schools must have a planned system for placing communications in front of the public they serve.

School administrators have been forced to pay increased attention to school to home communication and relationships. A study by Wiedmer and Kowalski in the 1993-94 school year in 168 school districts of 200 superintendents in the Midwestern

states of Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin elicited an eighty-four percent response rate. Findings showed that many school districts were doing little in the public relations area. Forty-two percent did not have a plan or policy directing public relations activities and twenty percent did not have a designated person responsible for public relations. Most schools used news releases as a primary source of school to home communications and saw their role as providing information to the public. Respondents identified two barriers which were time and funding. Superintendents in these districts gauged success by gains in public support. There is a growing importance placed on making public relations an integral part of school administration. Current practices, problems, successes, and the future of school to home communications should be considered.

### Perceptions of Schools

In a study performed by Steve Dinham et al. (1993), decision making and communication methods in three schools were examined and implications drawn for school leadership, staff morale, and staff, student, and community attitudes. An in depth interview was done with approximately twenty-five percent of the student population in a random selection. Teachers were interviewed on an individual basis, and parents volunteered for telephone interviews. Three major themes emerged from the data analysis. These were school reputation, perception of school, and communication.

Some of the key elements in good communication identified were an open door policy and principal



accessibility, consultation and collaboration with stakeholders, and the importance of a school's physical environment. The principal was seen as the source and facilitator for both formal and informal communication within and without the school. Also, true and representative parent and community involvement was deemed important, and yet elusive.

In a study by Mavrogenes (1988) with the Department of Research and Evaluation for the Chicago Board of Education, readability of school to home communications was investigated as a factor in parents' perceptions of schools. Mavrogenes first surveyed parents in six representative schools to determine highest level of education. Bilingual parents said they had attended school through some of the elementary grades at a rate of sixty-nine percent. This appeared to be where most of these parents stopped in formal education, with only eighteen percent continuing beyond this level and six percent graduating from high school. Non-bilingual parents reported a rate of fifty-eight percent graduating from high school. This seemed suspicious since the welfare recipient rate was ninety-one percent in this district and statistics indicate that typically only twenty-five percent or less in this situation receive a high school diploma. The bilingual parent statistics seemed much more accurate.

An examination of readability of the communications sent out in English by the six schools determined that forty-five percent of them were written at the tenth grade level or higher. There is not a direct correlation between number of

years of school attended and a person's reading level, however, it is an indication (Mavrogenes, 1988). Therefore, it seem reasonable to assume that a significant number of parents in these school programs were unable to read the communications sent to them by the schools. "In many cases these parents...do not have the interest and motivation to figure out the letters they receive from their children's schools" (Mavrogenes, 1988, p.8). It would seem that the schools should work to make the letters and newsletters they send home easier to read and understand if the parents' perceptions of the school program are important.

Recommendations from the study included the following. Complex sentences should be simplified, difficult and unfamiliar terms should be defined. Careful proofreading should be exercised. Placement and sizing of items should be considered. All print should be standard, and headlines should introduce the main ideas. It was determined that these suggestions were not difficult and simply required a new point of view. "Such care would be one more step in improving the schools' efforts to involve parents in their children's education" (Mavrogenes, 1988, p.10). A study cited by Roit and Pfohl in 1984 stated that "If the comprehensibility of materials is inappropriate, rather than inform, they may create confusion and even discourage parent participation" (p.496-497).

#### Need for Planned Communication

In a study of public relations by Wiedmer and Kowalski in four Midwestern states during the 1993-94 academic year,





the need and receptivity for training and development workshops for district officials" (Wiedmer, 1995, p.23).

In 1985 Gould studied planned communication. She sent a questionnaire to fifty-six administrators of child care programs in the public schools and privately owned businesses and received a fifty-eight percent response rate. Many directors seemed to aim communications toward the parents only and not the teachers, staff, community or others. Full use of the news media was not evident, and generally the administrators in the study indicated that effective public relations was not a priority for them. "They were unsure of the purpose of a planned public relations program" (Gould, 1991, p.61). Most believed the goal of public relations was to increase profit through enrollment and promote fundraising for a "good program". It appeared that these directors saw their role primarily as an educator and that public relations should be left to the business sector. Planned communication was not a priority for these directors.

Davies (1991) reported on a planned program of public relations and the results of the program. The program is entitled "Schools Reaching Out" and had been in effect for two years at the printing of this article. It began in Roxbury, Massachusetts and set its purpose to redefine and expand parental involvement in urban schools. The program currently has a membership of forty-one elementary and middle schools. Parents becoming a part of the academic and social success of students was a main goal, and the strategy was three part: establishment of a parent center, home visitors,



and developing an action research team. Within each school a location for parents to gather in the building was established. There they could chat, have coffee, receive information, volunteer to help teachers, plan activities, and so forth. Parents reported feeling more positive about the school and their children's education because they were welcomed into the buildings. Estimates are that around forty-percent of parents were reached through this avenue. The home visitor program required that community members with some training in counseling or education be recruited and trained to make home visits to parents with little or no contact with the school. Permission for visits was obtained from the parents. These visitors were paid and met with approximately five families per week. They provided information about school expectations and programs, and discussed concerns and interests with the parents. These visits were used to provide information to the schools as well as the parents. The third means of planned communication was the action research team. This team was made up of teachers who meet at least monthly and after studying school to home communications, lead the faculty in planning projects aimed at increasing collaboration between the school and its families. Including parents is being considered as a future modification.

This three-pronged approach has been considered a success in planned public relations and leadership is deemed the essential aspect of successful partnership in this program.

Headington and Howson (1995) found that the publication of a school brochure called *Parent's Charter* provided a more standardized form of communication between the home and school than methods previously used. This study considered the value of the school brochure from a number of different perspectives. It reviewed content, presentation and distribution. It also determined attitudes of the provider and the receiver of the brochure. Four schools using this format of communication were studied. Each school prepared its own brochure. Parents of both professional and non-professional groups were asked to evaluate the brochures of the four schools and remark on which seemed the most suitable for their children. The three schools with the most clear and concise information and format were preferred. Of those three, one placed too much emphasis on what students' were not allowed to do, and thus was not a favored choice. Teachers in these schools showed a lack of interest or indifference to the material printed and its influence on the parent population. Headington and Howson concluded that the school brochure has the potential to be a key marketing tool in promoting the positive aspects of a school and conveying information to the parents. Format continues to be the key to relaying valuable information to all parents.

Adams and Davison (1990) developed a community survey to determine the opinions of the public on school issues. The superintendent and school board were concerned about lack of community support for local schools and improving communication. A ten percent random sample of the community



was selected to receive a questionnaire and thirty-one percent returned usable responses. In general, the public believed that the local schools were slightly above average in educating students; teachers and administrators were good, but not excellent; and drug use and lack of discipline were major problems. The element of the questionnaire on sources and quality of communication indicated that official school publications or communications were not the primary resources for information on schools. Most reported that newspaper, word of mouth, and comments by students, parents, and others in the community comprised the knowledge these community members held. The consensus of the survey was that the schools and the school board must play a more active role in informing the public of the programs in the local schools. "Passive one-way and highly cognitive communication vehicles primarily directed to parents are now viewed as inadequate information vehicles. The survey data suggested the district needed strategies that provided more opportunities for two-way communication" (Adams, 1991, p.9). Basically, the school system found a need to be more aggressive in marketing information on the schools.

Gotts (1983) studied school to home communications at the secondary level. He found that little knowledge about practices beyond elementary grades existed. Within a large school system he sampled parents from two high schools with a mixed rural and urban locales and varied socioeconomic statuses. Interviews were conducted by telephone with 120 families. Secondary parents preferred mediated forms of

communication such as newsletters, and special notification in the event of student difficulties or problems.

Overwhelmingly, parents were not interested in attending advisory councils or parent-teacher meetings. It is believed that these parents do not have a lesser interest in their children's academic progress than elementary age students. However, they are more interested in being informed on an as-needed basis rather than a constant line of communication. Results suggest the need for a regular and timely newsletter and individual contacts from teachers or administrators for academic or behavioral problems. Further studies with similar interviews with several hundred parents from four counties found the same results.

Reddick and Peach (1987) studied how parents receive information from schools concerning their children and how they would prefer to receive it. In Middle Tennessee parents in fifty-two schools and twenty school systems were surveyed by questionnaire. Results obtained listed parental preferences, in order, to be report cards, school newsletters, regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences, their children, and personal visits to the schools. However, most parents reported that they received information about the schools primarily from their children, then from report cards, and personal visits on their part. It would appear that parents are not dissatisfied with the current means of school to home communication, but would appreciate more direct means initiated by the schools in receiving information.



## Relationship Between Communication and Student Success

Anderson et al. (1993) report that research indicates several benefits to parental involvement through home-school communications. There is agreement that this parental involvement can effect student achievement. A survey was developed to study this and was distributed to 444 families. The return rate for the survey was twenty-six percent. Areas of greatest interest to the parents were: first, whether students are progressing; second, competencies of students; third, how students are performing in subject areas; and fourth, areas needing improvement. Mixed in with these rankings is a desire for notification of any particular problems. Many parents noted difficulty in ranking importance of various types of information. Results of this study should indicate to teachers and administrators what focus to place on school to home communications if parents are to feel involved in their children's education.

In a study of school-community interactions by Brooks (1995) the relationship between ten schools and the communities they served were investigated. These ten schools had varied degrees of contact and communication with the parents and community at large. All schools were in a locale of low socio-economic Mexican-American students, so the the populations were very similar. Interviews and observations were used to investigate the relationships between each school and community. It was found that the schools with the highest levels of interaction and communication were serving the students most effectively. These schools became a

resource for education beyond the students and included programs for the parents as well. Strong communication was seen as the key factor in establishing these schools. Some methods employed included celebrating Mexican holidays with parent volunteers, hiring a parent coordinator, regular newsletters, and providing programs through the school nurse and guidance counselors.

In a 1996 study by Allen, federal funding of the National Head Start program was investigated to determine barriers and successes of implementation. It was found that the communities with the highest levels of success in implementing the program were the schools with strong parental involvement and lines of communication. With this in mind, researchers looked at the characteristics of these schools. They were primarily rural and parents felt they were tightly linked to their children's school. Parents were well-informed of happenings and felt involved with the education process. Results indicated that policy makers should capitalize on the "school-family-community relationship". This study indicates that when good communication practices exist, support for new programs is more openly received.

In a study of family-school bonding by Pryor (1994) 310 ninth grade students and their parents were questioned about home-school relationships. Results indicated that the greater the parent's bonding the greater the student's bonding. Student bonding was directly related to academic achievement. Personal contact by teachers was cited as a



significant source of school to home communication. Bulletins, memos, and contact about special services were other frequently mentioned means of successful communication. Parents who felt most bonded with the school also reported being well-informed by the school. It is reasonable to conclude that the line of communication is directly relation to parental bonding which in turn leads to more successful students in the schools.

### Technology and Communication

In a study by Trachtman et al. (1991) technology was introduced and researched as a means of school-community communication. In this study all participants in a small midwestern town were to have a personal computer installed in their home free of charge. This computer was to be linked to the neighborhood network through the telephone lines. About 500 hundred families participated in this program. The cost to families to receive the service was ten to twenty dollars per month. The service provided a variety of electronic bulletin boards and mail services. The main goal of this program was to link teachers, administrators, counselors, and parents electronically. Approximately eighty percent of the users had personal computers or a familiarity with the use of computers. A telephone interview was conducted at three points during the project. A large majority of those who tried the system rejected it. Over forty-three percent of the comments reflected the relative advantages and the fact that their were easier ways to communicate. Comments included the following: "The telephone is easier to use to

talk to people", "Poor software", "My son's teacher doesn't use it", and "The school doesn't use it well; we just get school lunch menus." Remarks on the part of the teachers were quite similar and teachers concluded that traditional methods of communication media were sufficient for teacher tasks.

The conclusion drawn was that the system failed for four fundamental reasons. First, technical flaws and inadequacies. Next, no unique communication niche was filled. Also, it was not mandated for all homes or all teachers. And lastly, no commitment to the system was made by leaders in the school or community. This study suggests that though technology may be the wave of the future, school to home communication was not improved by this attempt to link the two electronically.

Consoli (1997) surveyed internet usage by Americans and found a steady increase. The current number of internet users in this country at the time of the survey was 31.3 million. It is expected to increase to as many as 45 million by the end of 1998. In this research it was found that fifty percent of users log on daily and sixty-six percent are seeking news. Additionally, this survey found that 9 million who had tried the internet are not current users and twenty-seven percent of those polled described the internet as "not at all indispensable." Thirty four percent of those surveyed did indicate an interest in becoming a more frequent user. These results lead to the conclusion that the internet will



continue to draw users and is "more than a fad" in the lives of American consumers (Consoli, 1997, p.26).

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

This research was conducted to determine parental satisfaction levels concerning current forms of school to home communication as well as parental use of a school web page on the internet for receiving information about programs at Northwest High School in Clarksville, Tennessee. All parents involved had children enrolled at Northwest High School during the 1997-98 school year. The web page was created in September of 1997 and was updated monthly with current events and activities. It included a listing of administrators, staff, and faculty by department; a page of extra-curricular clubs and activities with sponsors; a page of athletic activities and coaches; and a detailed monthly calendar of events. The web page address was advertised to parents on the newsletter printed on the reverse of the report card sent home every six weeks. It was also featured in the Leaf-Chronicle youth beat section in the fall.

In October of 1997, English teachers at each grade level asked students to volunteer their parents for participation in a three time survey to be conducted during second semester. Letters of explanation and information/consent forms were sent home for parents to complete. At each grade level, ninth through twelfth, ten families with internet access and ten families without access were identified for a total of forty participants. Three times during the second semester of the school year the same survey was sent home via the students for completion by the parent - once in early



February, again the end of March, and the third in mid May. Each time the survey was enclosed in an envelope with the student's name and a cover letter was attached to the outside asking for return by a date and offering the student a candy bar for hand delivery by that date. Surveys were anonymous once removed from the return envelope and each was marked as being completed by a parent with or without internet access. The survey was acknowledged for face validity by Dr. D. Luck and was approved by the Austin Peay State University committee on human subjects review.

Questions ranged from general information about the number of family members attending Northwest to more specific questions regarding the means of receiving information and the level of satisfaction experienced by parents. Parents with internet access were asked to rate the web site and offer comments on improving the site as a form of communication. Results of questions three and eight were entered onto a spreadsheet and were then compared using an independent analysis t-test to determine significance. A copy of the survey is located in the Appendix.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

Of the 120 surveys sent to parents, there was an average of a 58% response rate over the course of the semester. Results on questions regarding parental satisfaction with communication were analyzed to prove the hypothesis. Communication satisfaction of parents with internet access to the web site was not dissimilar from that of parents with no internet access. These results were determined to be not significant with a  $p > .05$ . (See Table 1)

When asked, "How well informed are you about what is happening at Northwest High School?", two-thirds of parents responded "somewhat informed." When asked, "At the end of every six weeks, a newsletter is sent home on the back side of the report card. Have you ever read this newsletter?", ninety-four percent of parents reported "yes". The question, "All things considered, would you say the newsletter is very worthwhile, somewhat worthwhile, or not at all worthwhile?" was answered by fifty-three percent as somewhat worthwhile and forty-six percent as very worthwhile. All parents were asked, "Have you ever viewed Northwest High School's site on the internet?" Of the forty parents polled, four in the first round of surveys had, and three in each of the following surveys. These parents were asked to respond to the query, "All things considered, would you say the internet site is very worthwhile, somewhat worthwhile, or not at all worthwhile?" In each case parents reported that the site was somewhat worthwhile with the exception of one saying very



worthwhile and one responding not at all. Parents using the internet did not appear to become more or less satisfied with this method of communication over the course of the survey period. (See Table 1)

Table 1

## Information Satisfaction

	N	Mean	S.D.	t-values (df)	P.
With Internet	35	*2.17	.51		
Without Internet	33	*2.03	.64		
Total	**68	*2.10	.58	1.002 (61.52)	P>.05

\* 1 = not too well informed, 2 = somewhat informed, 3 = well informed

\*\* Total does not correspond with 70 respondents because not all respondents answered each question.

Most parents cited that the majority of information they received on the school came from their own child or other students. Parents also indicated that the item of most concern to them was notification regarding how their child or children were doing in general. Parents were asked to grade the school with an A,B,C,D, or F. Sixty-nine of the seventy parents answered this question and the mean of responses was 2.27, indicating that parents rated the school between a grade of B and C on this scale. Parents with internet access

did not grade the school significantly differently from those parents without internet access. (See Table 2)

Table 2

## Evaluation of the School

	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value (df)	P.
With Internet	36	*2.17	.65		
Without Internet	33	*2.39	.56		
Total	**69	*2.27	.60	-1.559 (66.62)	P>.05

\* 1 =A, 2 = B, 3 = C, 4 = D, 5 =F

\*\* Total does not correspond with 70 respondents because not all respondents answered each question.

Overall, parents rated the newsletter from the school to be very worthwhile and the internet site to be only somewhat worthwhile. Most parents indicated that they read the newsletter and only 25% of the parents with internet access indicated that they had viewed the web site. When parents who had visited the internet web site for Northwest were asked to comment on how the site could be changed to be more informative, few parents responded. However, suggestions such as including more specific club activities, links to other sites, and the ability to access student grades were mentioned.



## CHAPTER 5

### Summary and Conclusions

#### Summary

School to home communication continues to be a challenge in our society today. The innovation of computer networking and internet web pages for communication is becoming a common outlet for conveying information. Schools across the country are subscribing to this method of providing information to the public. This study involved creating a web site for Northwest High School, surveying parents who had access to this source as well as parents who had no access, and comparing their levels of satisfaction in regard to being informed. Results at this time indicated that there is no significant difference in these two groups and therefore internet access to a web page did not provide a better form of communication from school to home.

#### Conclusions

Based on the data retrieved in this study, parents are not actively using their internet access to retrieve school web site postings. Parents are still primarily relying on the school newsletter and their children to be informed of activities and events. Additionally, there was an indication that if academic standings were available through this site, parents might be interested in accessing grades. The question remains unanswered as to whether students with internet access are using the site to keep updated on dates and times of monthly events and in turn relaying this to parents. It seems that a change of habits on the part of the

parents is in order to successfully utilize a school web site for improving school to home communications.



## REFERENCES

Adams, C. F., & Davidson, R. G. (1990). The Community Survey: A Basis for Policy Analysis and Planning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 339 075).

Allen, S. M. (1996). Changing Educational Practices: An Ethnographic Study of How Schools Have Changed. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 399 668).

Anderson, S. & the Amerman PTA. (1993). School-Home Communications: A Qualitative Survey. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 364 349).

Brooks, Dr. A. K. (1995). School-Community Interactions that Contribute to Effective Schools. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 390 168).

Consoli, J. (1997). Online Usage: More Than a Fad. Editor & Publisher, 26.

Davies, D. (1992). Schools Reaching Out. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 384 473).

Dinham, S., et al. (1993). School Leadership and Decision-Making: A Critique of Leadership Style and Decision-making Processes in Three Comprehensive High Schools. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 366 046).

Howe, D. (1998). Free On-line Dictionary of Computing, <http://wombat.doc.ic.ac.uk/foldoc/contents.html>.

Gilchrist, R. (1989). Effective Schools: Three Case Studies of Excellence. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 340 796).

Gotts, E. E. (1983). School-Home Communications at the Secondary Level. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 231 037).

Gould, N. P. (1991). Early Childhood Administrators: Are They Using Planned Communication to Reach Key Publics? Young Children, 60-61.

Headington, R., & Howson, J. (1995). The School Brochure: A Marketing Tool? Educational Management and Administration, 23, 89-95.

Mavrogenes, N. A. (1988). Readability and Parent Communications: Can Parents Understand What Schools Write to Them?. Reading Horizons, 5-12.



Merriam-Webster Dictionary (1998). <http://www.m-w.com/netdict.htm>.

Pryor, C. B. (1994). Family Bonding and Student Success. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 374 369).

Reddick, T. L., & Peach, L. E.. (1987). A Study of School-Community Communications Based on Responses of Parents of School Children in Middle Tennessee. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 294 321).

Trachtman, L. E. et al. (1991). Response to a Community-based Information and Communication System. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 344 256).

Wiedmer, Dr. T. L., & Kowalski, Dr. T. J. (1995). Practice in Public Relations: A Study of Superintendents in Four Midwestern States. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. Ed 389 086).

## Appendix

### Parent Survey



Please mark your answers on this page by circling the response which is most accurate for each question. Return this survey to Northwest with your child, or mail in the envelope provided.

1. How many children do you have attending Northwest High School?
  - a. one      b. two      c. three or more
  
2. What grades are they in? ( Mark all that apply)
  - a. 9th      b. 10th      c. 11th      d. 12th
  
3. How well informed are you about what is happening at Northwest High School?
  - a. well informed      b. somewhat informed
  - c. not too well informed
  
4. Where do you get most of your information about Northwest High School?
  - a. my child or other students
  - b. my child's teacher
  - c. the principal
  - d. other school employees
  - e. the parent newsletter (on the back of report cards)
  - f. the school calendar
  - g. first-hand knowledge
  - h. newspaper
  - i. Parent Advisory Council
  - j. school's web site
  - k. other (please specify \_\_\_\_\_)
  
5. What types of school news are especially interesting to you?
  - a. how my child is doing in general
  - b. how our school/students compare to others
  - c. what is being taught
  - d. classroom activities
  - e. extra-curricular activities (clubs, sports, etc.)
  - f. school calendar
  - g. information about staff
  - h. other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

6. At the end of every six weeks, a newsletter is sent home on the back side of the report card. Have you ever read this newsletter?
- a. yes                      b. no      (skip to question 8)
7. All things considered, would you say the newsletter is...
- a. very worthwhile    b. somewhat worthwhile  
c. not at all worthwhile
8. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, F. If you were to grade Northwest High School on the same scale, what grade would you give the school overall?
- a. A              b. B              c. C              d. D              e. F
9. Have you ever viewed Northwest High School's site on the internet?
- a. yes                      b. no      (skip to question 12)
10. All things considered, would you say the internet site is...
- a. very worthwhile    b. somewhat worthwhile  
c. not at all worthwhile
11. If you have visited the internet site, how if at all, would you change the site to be more informative?
12. In your opinion, what is the single biggest problem at Northwest High School?
13. In your opinion, what is the single best thing about Northwest High School?