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The Relationship Between Readability Level of Mississippi's Middle Schools' Websites and Seventh Grade Language Arts MCT2 Scores

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READABILITY LEVEL OF MISSISSIPPI'S MIDDLE SCHOOLS' WEBSITES AND SEVENTH GRADE LANGUAGE ARTS MCT2 SCORES

by

Anna Marlene Graves Pickard

Abstract of a Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate School of The University of Southern Mississippi in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2011
ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READABILITY LEVELS OF MISSISSIPPI’S MIDDLE SCHOOLS’ WEBSITES AND SEVENTH GRADE LANGUAGE ARTS MCT2 SCORES

by Anna Marlene Graves Pickard

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Today’s educators face the unprecedented challenge of increasing achievement for all students. One response has been to increase and improve parent involvement and school-to-home communication through the use of school websites. The quantitative section of this study analyzed the readability grade level of the website as it relates to state test scores. For the qualitative section of the study, a sample of middle school principals’ levels of interest and involvement with parents through the website and other methods of communication for student achievement were examined through the use of principal interviews.

Seventh grade Language Arts MCT2 scores from 205 Mississippi middle schools were examined to determine if they were related to the readability grade level of middle schools’ websites. A Pearson correlation coefficient was used to analyze the data, and no relationship was found between student achievement and readability of websites.

Principal interview data indicated that all principals in the study were heavily involved with parents through the use of middle school websites and other methods of communication. The most important common method of communication was password protected links for parental viewing of grades and other class information. Data used in
the study led to the assumption that principals’ levels of involvement with parents are related to student achievement.
THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School of The University of Southern Mississippi in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

At the middle school level, according to Snow and Shattuck (2004), literacy skills must become increasingly sophisticated in order to meet more challenging expectations. Individuals who lack those strong skills for finding, understanding, and evaluating written information cannot easily arm themselves with the information needed to advance the causes they value. Simply put, literacy has been called the *cornerstone of freedom* (Snow & Shattuck, 2004). There are far too many students in the United States today who leave secondary schools without the advanced literacy skills they will need to succeed in higher education or to flourish in a knowledge-based economy. That is the bad news, according to this study. The good news is that creative researchers are pursuing ways to change the status quo. Policy makers and scholars are devoting increased attention to adolescents’ literacy needs and to distinctive challenges posed by those needs (Ippolito, Steele, & Samson, 2008).

Teachers have reported that school/parent relationships increase positive attitudes about teaching, improve staff interactions, and have resulted in the decrease of the stereotyping of families (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1997; Mitra, 2006). According to Mikulecky (1996), a growing body of research on how parents and children deal with literacy, language, and schools in general reveals a tapestry of complex relationships. The relationship between children’s literacy and their interactions with their parents has long been recognized as significant. These parent-child interactions are important to the child’s developing literacy abilities, and it seems to be increasingly clear that these interactions involve a good deal more than reading to
children and providing them with books. Mikulecky’s (1996) research indicated that the way a parent speaks to a child may have as much or more to do with later reading achievement of the child than the actual time spent reading to the child. However, these simple interactions are of limited success, and it is very difficult to bring about change that transfers to literacy.

In the United States, preparing all students to read and write fluently has long been a central responsibility of public schools (Ravich, 2000). The emphasis that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) places on students’ reading performance has only increased the importance of literacy instruction. Recent findings (Bowers, Kirby, & Deacon, 2010) indicated that morphological knowledge has the potential to affect literacy skills through word recognition, comprehension, and motivation. In so far as literacy involves interpreting, evaluating, and making use of the information in texts, advancing students’ literacy skills lies close to the heart of education (Chall, 2002). Literacy is seen as both timely and essential, according to Chall (2002), who noted that around the age of four years, students make the critical transition between “learning to read and reading to learn” (p. 99). It is this transition that makes adolescent literacy instruction both distinctive and challenging.

For decades, educational researchers, educational practitioners, and the public at large have assumed that socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the primary predictors of academic achievement (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1995). That theory has been supported since Coleman, Pettigrew, Sewell, and Pullum (1973). In spite of earlier testimonials to the strength of the relationship between SES and academic achievement, research findings vary widely (Elberts & Stone, 1988; White, 1982). Three elements
commonly associated with SES and student achievement are the income of the adults in the home, the education of the adults in the home, and the atmosphere in the home, which has the strongest relationship with student achievement (Coleman et al., 1973; Wang et al., 1995; White, 1982).

The effects of SES have historically been thought of as extremely large and impervious to change. However, White (1982) and Marzano (2003) provided great hope that the most important aspect of SES is the effect of the home environment, as opposed to the lesser effect of parental education and income. White (1982) reported that, on the average, the home environment accounts for 10.89% of the variance on student achievement. Home environment is composed of three basic elements: communication with school, supervision, and parental expectations and parenting styles (Marzano, 2003; White, 1982). The body of scholarly literature that focuses on family-based determinants of variations of students’ academic performance is currently known as the cultural deprivation theory (CDT) (Renzulli, Reis, Hebert, & Diaz, 1995; Wang et al., 1995).

Early adolescence and entry into middle school reflect change on multiple levels. The middle school years coincide with key changes in adolescent development. These include biological and cognitive growth, social development, and renegotiation of family relationships, especially the parent-adolescent relationship (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Parental involvement may entail communicating parental expectations for education and its value or utility, linking schoolwork to current events, fostering education and occupational aspirations, discussing learning strategies with children, and making preparations and plans for the future; that is, academic socialization. Parental
involvement in education that reflects academic socialization allows parents the
opportunity to maintain their involvement while also affirming adolescents’ autonomy,
independence, and advancing cognitive abilities. Academic socialization involves
communicating parental expectations for education, as well as making plans and
preparations for the future (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Not all home-school communication succeeds in supporting student learning
(Allen, 2009). Challenges to effective home-school communication and reflective
strategies for educators who work with diverse families have been explored. Those in
educational settings may feel that they communicate with families frequently and in many
ways, i.e., through school newsletters (good news or bad), calls home, weekly agendas,
parent-teacher conferences, parent-teacher association meetings (PTA), and notices
galore. According to Allen (2009), a meaningful dialogue must be established when
schools expand “communication” to more than routine practice and, whenever possible,
tailor the communication to individual families.

Federal legislation, such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2002),
mandated parental involvement in education and improved family-school relations across
elementary and secondary school levels. Despite consensus about the importance of
parents and schools working together across developmental stages, existing theories of
parental involvement have been focused on elementary school students and do not
account for changes associated with middle school and early adolescent development.
Some researchers (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Hill, Tyson, & Bromell,
2009) have shared that it is imperative to identify the extent to which parental
involvement in education is related to student achievement in middle school students and
to identify the most effective strategies. Substantial research (Mazur & Thureau, 1990) has determined that when parents are involved in their children’s education on a regular basis there is a rise in student achievement scores and an advance in student attendance, a reduction in student dropouts, and an improvement in student self-esteem, motivation, and behavior.

On April 11, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (P.L. 89-10) as he stood before a crowd gathered at the little school of his childhood in Cotulla, Texas. This proclaimed the most sweeping educational bill ever to come before Congress (Johnson, 1965). Since 1965, when the bill was passed, involvement in education has included a call for public commitment, and the 2002 NCLB reauthorization made academic socialization one of its four pillars (Chrismer, Hodge, & Saintil, 2006). The world’s foremost authority on partnerships between schools, families, and community developed a framework that described the different kinds of involvement that can lead to increased student achievement (Epstein, 1995). Epstein’s series of studies conducted on elementary, middle, and high school students (Epstein, 1986, 1995; Epstein & Dauber, 1991) generated the framework for six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2002).

*Positive parenting* can be referred to as many different behaviors, such as warmth, praise, reinforcement, or monitoring (Crone & Horner, 2003). An examination of parenting practices was informed by work in educational psychology that refers to *positive behavior support* as a nonaversive set of strategies designed to promote growth
in students in the school context. Some forms of communication typically employed in schools today include parent-teacher conferences, handwritten notes sent home by the teacher or the school, report cards, and parents’ signature on homework, books, or tests. Some parents find certain modes of communication to be very challenging because they are not comfortable with notes either to or from school, or they have had a previous experience that was unfavorable (Crone & Horner, 2003). Further, traditional methods of communication which are required and effective for certain purposes simply do not and realistically cannot occur often enough to provide the basis for systematic and continuous parent-teacher communication (Cameron & Lee, 2001).

As more and more parents have access to e-mail and the Internet, schools and teachers are increasingly finding that using technology communication tools can play a vital link in increasing academic socialization. Research studies show that involving parents and families is one of the most important ways to improve schools and help students succeed (Davenport & Eibs, 2004). Parents who have access to information about their children’s progress on a daily or weekly basis make better decisions about family activities to make time available for homework and special assistance. Classroom Web pages are a powerful way for teachers to communicate with parents and students. Skilled teachers can create and update their class Web in as little as 10 minutes per day. Editing the Web page requires only standard word processing skill, and schools report that response from parents has been very positive. Teachers use the tool as they add to their schedule (Davenport & Eibs, 2004).

Perhaps in recognition of the importance of partnering with parents and the difficulty some schools have in making this a reality, the federal government requires that...
schools receiving federal funds (Title I, 1965) must have a comprehensive parent involvement policy in place. In some school districts, a laptop initiative, paid for with Title I funds, provided low-income students with much-needed access to Web-enabled computers (Furger, 2006). This program also reached out to the schools’ parent population at the same time. In order to participate in the laptop program, parents were required to attend workshops that taught them to use and take care of the new computers, as well as how to use the laptops to support their children’s learning and access information. The goal of this strategy was to transform the entire school into a learning community (Furger, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

According to Chrismer et al. (2006), it is imperative to identify the extent to which parental involvement in education is related to achievement for middle-school students and identify the most effective methods of communication. Reports of reading results in America’s schools were released on March 25, 2010, by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and have been deemed disappointing after many years of intensive attention to improving the reading skills of students. In the NAEP report, commonly known as The Nation’s Report Card, eighth graders scored 264 on a 500-point scale on the 2009 exam. That is only one point higher than the previous time the reading test was given in 2007. At the fourth grade level, 2009 scores averaged 221 points, the same as in 2007. Given the considerable amount of effort devoted to improving reading over the past 2 decades, there has been only slight improvement. Even the one point eighth grade gain, while statistically significant, is not sufficient. For
generations, the model for providing education to students has basically gone unchanged (NAEP, 2009).

For generations, government, through the public school system, determined where a child went to school, and school systems have dictated to parents the time, place, form, and manner of education for their children. In past years, parents have, by and large, acquiesced to the system, in part because the existing system seemed to be meeting their children’s needs and also because there were no visible alternatives (Paige, 2006). Over the past 5 years, a new set of parents have brought into this world the next generation of students, and the experiences of these and future students will be vastly different from the past. These new, young parents are beginning to show up on soccer fields, attend Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, and walk their children to the school buses every morning. According to Paige (2006), they are a different breed because they have grown up in a society surrounded by choices and options in nearly every aspect of their lives.

These parents have limitless options, from a vast array of car models and prices, to 115 television stations and 15 types of lettuce at the grocery store. They can go to the Internet and download music from a list of songs measuring in the tens of thousands, select the best ticket from a half-dozen airlines, and examine scores of real estate without ever leaving their homes. Their lifestyle consists of a series of choices, from the mundane issues to issues that have a profound impact on their lives and the lives of their children. In other words, both parents and parenting have changed, and like it or not, the education system will be forced to respond to the expectations and demands of this generation of parents (Paige, 2006).
According to a well-known researcher (Epstein, 2004), there should be an emphasis on two-way communication between the parents of today and children’s schools. School-to-home as well as home-to-school interactions are necessary parts of effective parental involvement for student achievement. The role of parental involvement in schools has recently come full circle with the emphasis on collaborations and partnerships. Since traditional methods of communication may be required and effective for certain purposes, they realistically cannot occur often enough to provide a basis for systematic and continuous parent-teacher communication.

Alternative methods, such as the telephone, an answering machine, or a voice-mail system alleviate feelings of anxiety of writing associated with sending notes to the teacher. Communication through these methods and other available technology could allow parent and teacher to build a comfortable relationship for the good of the child (Cameron & Lee, 2001). The importance of school websites as an essential addition to the school landscape has also become very evident (Hartshorne, Friedman, Alcozzine, & Isibor, 2006).

Teachers and principals are held responsible for enhancing and measuring students’ learning within their classrooms/schools and must motivate them for high-stakes testing. The number of students tested annually has skyrocketed, and even more grades are required to administer tests. As shared by Supon (2007), teachers and principals must examine, develop, and implement strategies to help students obtain educational goals that will increase their test scores.
Purpose of the Study

Although research on parental involvement in the education of middle school students is extensive, available findings on its impact on academic achievement are limited. This study was designed to further explore the effects of active communication between homes and schools to adolescent achievement.

Middle school principals’ level of interest, participation and active involvement in communication technology, and other methods implemented to involve parents were considered. A determination was made as to principal influence on student achievement, and results are available for future researchers.

School websites should be designed to be easily accessible and readable for the comfort and comprehension of parents. This study explored the reading level of websites and the outcome on academic achievement of students. Research on school websites and parent involvement is very limited, and there is a need to know more about a possible relationship.

Justification of the Study

Results of the study provided data in the form of information for possible redesign and enhancement of websites for accessible, reader-friendly communication. Middle school principals were made aware of results of the study for the purpose of assessing their involvement and dedication to parental communication and the use of the school website for this purpose.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:
1. Is there a relationship between the readability level of Mississippi’s middle schools’ websites and seventh grade Language Arts scores on the MCT2?

2. Are Mississippi’s middle school principals involved in the use of school websites and other methods of parental involvement?

3. Is there a relationship between seventh grade Language Arts MCT2 scores and principals’ interest and involvement in the two-way communication of school and home?

Definitions

*Academic socialization* - includes communicating parental expectations for education linking schoolwork with current events, as well as making preparations and plans for the future (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

*Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)* - the use of the computer for school/home communication (Thompson, 2009).

*Correlation* - a numerical expression that indicates how strongly one construct (i.e., parental involvement) is related to another (i.e., achievement) (Horowitz, 1981).

*Cultural deprivation theory* - family-based determinants of variations in academic performance (Renzulli et al., 1995).

*Crystallized intelligence* - learned knowledge of facts, generalizations, and principles (Marzano, 2004).

*Demandingness* - rigid parental monitoring of adolescent behavior (Baumrind, 1991).

*Digital divide* - the gap between students who have easy access to a computer and those who do not (Hirsch, 2006).
Flesch Readability Formula - Rudolph Flesch’s Reading Ease Formula designed to determine grade level of written material (Flesch, 1948).

Fluid intelligence - innate cognitive processes and not subject to alteration from environmental factors (Marzano, 2004).

Information and communication technology (ICT) - technology for school/home communication to enhance student academic achievement (Hayes, 2005).

Kiosk - an area in a school, usually small, set aside for parents’ use of a computer (DeBoer, 2009).

Language Arts - the subjects, including reading, spelling, and composition, aimed at developing reading and writing skills, usually taught in elementary and middle school (Judson, 2010).

Matthew Effect - a phenomenon in sociology where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The poor will always be with us (Pretorius & Currin, 2009).

Mississippi Curriculum Test, Second Edition (MCT2) - customized criterion referenced reading/language arts and mathematics assessments that allow Mississippi to be in compliance with federal legislation No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Mississippi Department of Education, 2002).


Parental involvement - the participation of parents in a regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving student learning and school activities (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).
Readability - described as “the ease of understanding or comprehension due to the style of writing.” The term “readability” can be dissected into “read” plus “ability” (Klare, 1963).

Readability level - text has been written for a particular grade level (Klare, 1963).

Socioeconomic status - the position of an individual on a socioeconomic scale that measures such factors as education, income, and type of education (Coleman et al., 1973).

Time poverty - lack of adequate time to meet demands of work and needs of family (Chin & Newman, 2001).

Title I Elementary and Secondary Education Act I (20 U.S.C. 6301 et. seq.) - federally funded program for improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged (1965).

Transition to high school - the period following the completion of middle school and moving up into a higher grade or facility (Eccles, Roeser, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1997).

Assumptions

The assumptions of the study included the following:

1. Data collected from school websites for the purpose of this study will be accurate and readable.

2. MCT2 Language Arts data taken from the Mississippi Department of Education will be accurate, reliable, and up to date.

3. All principals in the study will answer all interview questions honestly.

Limitations

Limitations of the study are given below:
1. The MCT2 Language Arts scores of seventh grade students in middle schools across a southeastern state were included in this study.

2. Middle school principals within a southeastern state and their level of involvement and participation in school website/communication were a part of this work through interviews.

3. A southeastern state’s middle school websites and their readability level were examined as a part of this study.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Times are exciting for adolescent literacy research. Adolescents’ reading and writing abilities are being examined like never before as scholarly efforts are aimed at improving classroom literacy instruction for adolescent learners. According to Moore (2008), it takes a broad, disciplined inquiry view of research, embracing use-inspired action research at local levels, along with randomized field trials at the national level to establish productive links between adolescent literacy research and practice (Moore, 2008).

Adolescent Literacy

It is popular these days to raise concerns about the adolescent literacy crisis. The term adolescent literacy refers to the set of skills and abilities that students need in grades 4 to 12 to read, write, and think about the text materials they encounter (Moje, Overby, Tysaver, & Morris, 2008). Becoming literate is a developmental and lifelong process, which in the 21st century includes becoming literate with electronic and multimedia texts as well as conventional written material. Grade 4 is a crucial time when students experience a shift in emphasis from learning to read to learning from reading text. America’s adolescents need to be literate not only to succeed in school, but also to succeed in life (Biancarosa & Berman, 2004).

During the last decade, the country’s attention has been focused on improving reading education. This focus led to the generation of reports, reviews, curricula, redesigned professional development, and the provisions of the Reading Next: A Vision
for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy initiative (Snow & Shattuck, 2004). Attention to the core of reading—comprehension, learning while reading, reading in content areas, reading in the service of secondary or higher education, as well as employability and citizenship—has been somewhat neglected. Snow and Shattuck (2004) contended that getting third graders to read at grade level is a very important and challenging task, one that needs ongoing attention from researchers, teacher educators, teachers, and parents. It has become apparent that many excellent third grade readers will falter or fail in later grade academic tasks if the teaching of reading is neglected in the middle and secondary grades. Educators must now figure out how to ensure that every middle school student gets beyond the basic literacy skills of the early elementary grades to the more challenging and more rewarding literacy of the middle and secondary ears (Snow & Shattuck, 2004).

A central challenge of adolescent literacy instruction lies in recognizing that effective literacy skills vary among disciplines and in helping students develop the range of skills that facilitate success in many contexts (Ippolito et al., 2008). A second distinctive challenge of adolescent literacy instruction lies in attending to adolescents’ developmental needs as they mature from children into young adults. Ippolito et al. (2008) suggested that literacy instruction must capture students’ minds and speak to the questions they have about the world as they contemplate their place within it, to engage adolescents. This would also allow them to interact with intellectually challenging content as it sharpens their ability to derive meaning from texts. Pedagogy and content that relate too closely to what works with young children are not likely to hold the attention of curious adults, nor will they prepare those young adults for the rigors of a
postsecondary education, where disciplinary knowledge and critical, independent thinking are prized (Ippolito et al., 2008).

According to Ippolito et al. (2008), students should be able to find representatives of themselves in the available books, but they should also be able to find representatives of others about whom they wish to learn. High-interest, low-difficulty texts play a significant role in adolescent literacy programs. They are critical for fostering the reading skills of struggling readers and the engagement of all students, in addition to using appropriate grade-level textbooks that may already be available in the classroom that link to multiple ability levels and connect to students’ background experiences (Ippolito et al., 2008; Sawyer, 2006).

Snow and Shattuck (2004) found that adolescent students need instruction in the writing process, but they especially need that instruction to be connected to the kinds of writing tasks they will have to perform well in high school and beyond. Attention, therefore, should be given not only to increasing the amount of writing instruction students receive and the amount of writing they do, but also increasing the quality of writing instruction and assignments (Snow & Shattuck, 2004).

The term critical media literacy refers to a pedagogy that enables middle school students to analyze relations among media and other technology in order to produce alternative media texts that challenge messages in the dominant printed text (Kellner & Share, 2007b). The importance of literacy education is highlighted to focus on critical thinking while broadening the definition of text increasingly digitized world (Gainer, 2010; Kellner & Share, 2007a).
Professionals and lay people are increasingly voicing support for inclusion of technology in literacy programs because technology plays an increasingly central role in today’s society. Reading Next (2004) described technology as both a facilitator of literacy and a medium of literacy and effective adolescent programs therefore should use technology as both an instructional tool and an instructional topic. As a tool, technology can help teachers provide needed supports for struggling readers including instructional reinforcement and opportunities for guided practice. For example, there are computer programs that help students improve decoding, spelling, fluency, and vocabulary, and more programs are being developed to address comprehension and writing. As a topic, technology is changing the reading and writing demands of modern society. Reading and writing in the fast-paced, networked world will require new skills unimaginable a decade ago (Reading Next, 2004).

Socioeconomic Status and the Achievement Gap

In the United States, ethnic minority populations are growing at a rapid pace and in the near future they will be the numerical majority (Hernandez, 2004). Immigration has increased such that schools serving the development, health, and mental health needs of diverse families are forced to struggle with multi-culturalism and language diversity in both urban and rural areas. It is commonplace today to identify certain children in this modern, complex society are “at-risk” of failing to succeed in life simply because of the diversities in their young lives. Poverty, family discord, violence, substance abuse, and illness are among the hazards. Policy makers worry not only that such children stand little chance of reaching their potential as adults, but also that they are likely to become so dysfunctional that they may not be capable of self-support or rewarding relationships with
others. Many children are identified as at-risk because of both biological and environmental factors (Rak & Patterson, 1996).

Socioeconomic status is probably the most widely used contextual variable in education research. Increasingly, researchers examine educational processes, including academic achievement, in relation to socioeconomic background (Bournstein & Bradley, 2003). The past 3 decades have witnessed numerous efforts to enhance the quality of family life, with particular attention to improving child-rearing conditions. These efforts have met with varying degrees of success (Bakersman-Kranenburg, van Ijzendourn, & Bradley, 2005). Although SES has been at the core of a very active field of research, there seems to be an ongoing dispute about its conceptual meaning and empirical measurement in studies conducted with adolescents and children (Bornstein & Bradley, 2003).

Researchers continue to be plagued by the inconsistencies in parental involvement literature. Even a meta-analysis by Fan and Chen (2001) determined that while overall there is a significant association with parental involvement and student achievement, there is a great amount of variation among individual studies that it may be parental expectations and parental desires for their children’s school success that actually lead to school success. Barnard (2003) explored the association between parent involvement in elementary school and success in high school. Results indicated that even after controlling for background characteristics and risk factors, there was a significant association between parental involvement and lower rates of high school dropout, increased on-time high school graduations, and highest grade completed. Seventy percent of high school dropouts who were surveyed in a more recent study (Bridgeland, Dilulio,
& Morrison, 2006) reported that if their parents had been more involved with their child’s schools, this may have prevented them from dropping out of school. These results clearly propose that parent involvement in school is an important link between early childhood education and long-term effects on life.

Mazur and Thureau (1990) concluded that when parents are involved in their children’s education there is a rise in student achievement scores, an increase in student attendance, a reduction of student dropouts, and an improvement in student motivation, self-esteem, and behavior. According to this study, it is important for parents to engage children in activities and participate with them to challenge, teacher, and act as role models for them. Parents should spend more time listening, questioning, and becoming involved in mutual discovery in support of their school activities. High risk students can be reached most effectively by involving parents as well as teachers and pupils (Mazur & Thureau, 1999).

Because of the Matthew Effect, which is at the heart of SES, early opportunities for enhancing language comprehension, once wasted, may have been permanently lost. The Matthew Effect refers to the idea that in reading, as in other areas of life, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer (Pretorius & Currin, 2009; Stanovich, 1986). To bring all children to reading proficiency and at the same time narrow the academic gap between racial and ethnic groups are goals that continue to elude American schools. Educators have, in recent years, deplored the unfairness of the “digital divide.” This phrase is used to signify a gap between students who have ready access to computers and those who do not (Hirsch, 2006). As schools strive to overcome such unfairness in material distribution, educators are challenged to focus on the significant knowledge gap among
children from different economic strata and the “knowledge deficit” between the majority of American students and those who attend schools in other nations (Hirsch, 2006).

It has been noted that the belief in the strong relationship between SES and student achievement is so pervasive that it has rarely been questioned (White, 1982). White (1982) reported the strength of relationship among four elements that are commonly associated with SES and student achievement, including (a) the income of the adults in the home, (b) the education of the adults in the home, (c) the occupation of the adults in the home, and (d) the atmosphere in the home, which has the strongest relationship with achievement. This finding could have far-reaching effects on the education of students. White (1982) explained that this provides great hope, given that the home environment is the most important aspect of SES, as opposed to factors such as parent income and education. While a school cannot change the income, education, or occupation of adults in the home, it can have a potential impact on the home environment while implementing active methods of meaningful communication with parents (White, 1982).

Studies by Trusty (1998) and Conger, Elder, Lawrence, & Simoens (1994) concluded that SES in itself is not independent as a predictor of educational achievement and aspirations because families with low SES backgrounds have parents with lower levels of education and they may not be involved with their children’s education resulting in lower academic achievement. Zuckerman (1981) suggested that the mothers’ level of education will have a greater impact on their children’s educational aspirations and academic achievement than their fathers’ level of education on education.
According to research (Darling, 1999), parental involvement has a positive impact on children’s reading acquisition, regardless of their families’ socioeconomic status. Darling (1999) recommended that some parents just need a few tools to help them maximize their children’s education, while other parents who struggle with literacy problems of their own may need more intense services. It is time to stop bemoaning literacy problems and start treating their cause with an intergenerational approach to literacy (Darling, 1999). Child development experts believe that “unhurried time” with a few loving adults is as good as health and a safe environment (Clinton, 1996). The word *development* means an unfolding in time of what one can potentially do from birth (Hirsch, 2006).

**Background Knowledge**

Commonly, researchers and theorists refer to what a person already knows as background knowledge. Numerous studies have confirmed the relationship between background knowledge and achievement (Marzano, 2004). Academic background knowledge affects more than just “school learning” (Hirsch, 2006; Marzano, 2004). Studies have also shown its relation to occupation and status in life. Enhancing students’ background knowledge is a worthy goal of public education from a number of perspectives. Given the relationship between academic background knowledge and academic achievement (Marzano, 2004), one can make the case that it should be at the top of any list of interventions intended to enhance student achievement. If not addressed by schools, academic background knowledge can create great advantages for some students and great disadvantages for others. The scope of the disparity becomes evident when considering how background knowledge is acquired (Marzano, 2004).
The term learned intelligence might strike some as an oxymoron, and the coupling of this phrase with the factor of background knowledge is certainly not common. The terms intelligence and aptitude are often used interchangeably by educators and others. According to Ackerman (1996), intelligence is thought of as consisting of two constructs—intelligence as knowledge, crystallized intelligence, and intelligence as cognitive processes, fluid intelligence. Within this theory, crystallized intelligence is knowledge of facts, generalizations, and principles while mental procedures and abstract reasoning, working memory capacity, exemplify fluid intelligence.

Rolfhus and Ackerman (1999) explained where fluid intelligence is considered to be innate, and not altered by environmental factors, crystallized intelligence is believed to be learned. It is also assumed that fluid intelligence is associated with the development of crystallized intelligence. Therefore, the more fluid intelligence individuals have, the more easily they acquire crystallized intelligence as they interact with the world. This study suggested that there is little relationship between academic knowledge and fluid intelligence, but a strong relationship was found between academic knowledge and crystallized intelligence (Rolfhus & Ackerman, 1999).

In an old study of intelligence measurement (Binet & Simon, 1916), it was reported that intelligence tests should be designed to measure or at least predict behaviors that are relevant to the sociocultural context in which the individual tested is familiar and has lived. The creators of the seemingly artificial types of problems found on intelligence tests have defined intelligence as adaptations to one’s real-world environment (Wechsler, 1958). According to Sternberg (1985), the notions of purposive selection and shaping of environments should be added to Binet and Wechsler’s notion. What this means is that
there may be no one set of behaviors that is “intelligent” for everyone in that people can adjust to their environment in many ways (Sternberg, 1985).

Marzano (2004) held that innate ability to process and store information dictates whether or not individuals’ experiences are stored as background knowledge. To illustrate this conjecture, Marzano (2004) suggested the consideration of two students visiting a museum and seeing exactly the same exhibits. One student has an enhanced capacity to store information, or high fluid intelligence. The other has a diminished capacity to process and store information, or low fluid intelligence. The one student with enhanced capacity will store most of the museum experience as new knowledge, committed to permanent memory, while the student with low fluid intelligence will not (Marzano, 2004). What is critical and most interesting is not only the sheer amount of experience but rather what one has been able to learn and do with the experience (Sternberg, 1985). Sternberg (1985) suggested that it is the interaction of students’ information processing abilities and their access to academically oriented experiences that produces their academic background knowledge. Differences in these factors create differences in their background knowledge and, therefore, differences in their academic achievement. This examination of the interactions of these two factors create a sobering image of the academic advantages of some students and not others (Marzano, 2004).

Stakeholders

When addressing auto theft in one district of a city, stakeholders may include car dealerships, neighborhood watch groups, victims, and elected officials. To clarify, in a school-based partnership to address a particular problem, stakeholders may include parents, students, school leaders and administrators, teachers, school support personnel,
school board members, and even school bus drivers. An educational stakeholder is defined as a person or group that has an interest in the activities of a school and the educational process (Maassen, 2001; Rinehart, Lazlo, & Brisco, 2001; Smith, 2008).

In the United States, students have a responsibility to attend school. To maximize this experience, students are encouraged to work appropriately and to fully participate in school as an institution (Saam, 2010). Further, according Saam (2010), the parent should support school sanctions against the student in the case of misbehavior, ensuring that the student receives medical/dental/optical treatment as needed. The government’s responsibilities are to provide funding and to create guidelines and standards for all aspects of education and those factors involved in education (Saam, 2010).

Parents play key roles as educational stakeholders. They bring a valuable quality to the educational experience of their children because they may better understand their own children and can have significant influence on student behaviors such as time management and study habits (Saam, 2010). Parents’ involvement through attending school functions, participating in the decision-making process, encouraging students to manage their social and academic time wisely, and modeling desirable behavior for their children represent a valuable resource for schools across this nation (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001). Smith (2008) explained that parents want their children to have an education so that they are equipped with skills that will allow them to leave home and flourish along the lines of their unique potential, thus affirming the parents’ wisdom and sacrifice in raising them.

An area of research in education, sociology, and psychology today is school-family-community collaboration. A study by Godwin (2006) stated that educators should
take their cues from the successes that businesses have enjoyed by identifying, learning from, and involving their stakeholders. One study conducted by Anaxagorou (2007) used interview techniques for a comparative study of stakeholders in both rural and urban communities concerning the perceptions of school teachers and community stakeholders regarding school and community relationships. When the qualitative data were analyzed, it confirmed that both teachers and community stakeholders in both urban and rural areas confirm that school and community cooperation have deemed this involvement an important and positive factor in their common spheres of interest (Anaxagorou, 2007).

Teachers were found to be more conservative toward these relationships in the belief that their professional autonomy could be threatened by interferences of stakeholders (Symeou, 2002a). A divergence of perceptions was noted between rural participants and their urban counterparts in regards to the extent of involvement taking place. Both community stakeholders and teachers in rural areas were more willing to extend their communication and relations in additional areas. Contrarily, urban sites stakeholders perceived that these other areas of communication should be limited (Symeou, 2002b).

According to Mendel (2005), theorists have found that school, family, and community partnerships build trusting relationships and strengthen children’s educational resources and opportunities. Goodnow (2002) suggested that religious groups should also be added to the list of educational stakeholders. Epstein and Sanders (2006) recommended that teachers, families, school leaders, and institutions of higher learning must be change agents and team builders in the preparation of future educators who will be responsible for building programs and practices for school, family, and community.
Parenting Styles

According to Marzano (2004), parenting expectations and parenting styles are most important elements of the home environment. Studies of parenting expectations usually focus on parenting styles and can be organized into three categories: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative (Marzano, 2004). These were originally referred to as disciple methods before researchers realized the importance of the embedded role of parental communication.

The authoritarian parent will establish and implement all household rules without or with almost no discussion (Marzano, 2003). The family rules are absolute, and when broken they are punctuated with swift punishment accompanied with negative emotions from parents. The authoritarian parent is defined not by the restrictions, but by the fact that they are imposed with little or no discussion or input from the children. Restrictions could include the sports the children pursue, the friends they are allowed to have, and the types of recreation they are allowed to engage in (Marzano, 2003). This parent is highly demanding and directive, and often unresponsive. Parents of this nature are obedience and status oriented and expect their orders to be carried out (Baumrind, 1991). Children and adolescents raised in authoritarian families tend to perform moderately well in school and be uninvolved in behavior, having poorer social skills, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression (Baumrind, 1991; Weiss & Schwartz, 1996).

According to Marzano (2003), the permissive parent will establish few if any household rules, and inappropriate child behavior is rarely punished. Children are left to follow their own rules for conduct and are often left to their own devices in making day-to-day decisions. There are usually no restrictions about activities, friends, or even
It might seem that this style would foster independence, which enhances academic achievement, but no research supports that. The permissive parenting style is actually harmful to academic achievement and seems to have a negative effect on school accomplishments (Marzano, 2003). Permissive parents are nontraditional and lenient, do not require mature behavior, allow ample self-regulation, and avoid confrontation. Children and adolescents from permissive (indulgent) homes are more likely to be involved in problem behavior and perform less well in school. They tend to have higher self-esteem, better social skills, and lower levels of depression (Baumrind, 1991; Weiss & Schwartz, 1996).

Marzano (2003) contended that the preferred style is the **authoritative style** of parenting. It has been characterized by parental warmth, fair and proper discipline, and punishment and consistency in child rearing. Transgressions are met with consequences but they are not punitive and they are met with little or no negative emotions. To sum it up, authoritative parents regularly communicate interest in the day-to-day lives of their children (Marzano, 2003). Authoritative parents monitor and impart clear standards of conduct, while being assertive, but not intrusive or restrictive. Children are expected to be socially responsible and self-disciplined as well as cooperative. Children and adolescents from authoritative homes appear to be able to balance the claims of external conformity and achievement demands with their need for autonomy (Baumrind, 1991; Weiss & Schwartz, 1996).

Two points are critical (Baumrind, 1991), as pointed out in this earlier study on parent involvement. First, parenting style is meant to describe normal variations in the parenting process. The topology (Baumrind, 1991; Epstein, 1995) developed should not
be understood to include forms of deviant parenting, such as may be found in abusive or neglectful homes. Second, it assumed that parenting revolves around issues of control. While parents may differ in how they try to control or socialize their children and the extent to which they do so, findings assume that the primary role of parents is to teach, influence, and control their children (Baumrind, 1991).

A fourth parenting style, *uninvolved parenting*, has not been officially grouped with other known styles of parenting (Darling, 1999). Uninvolved parents make up a large number of parents and they are low in responsiveness and demandingness. In extreme cases, this group could be made up of both rejecting and neglectful parents, although most uninvolved parents fall within the normal range. Children and adolescents of uninvolved parents usually perform most poorly in all domains (Darling, 1999). It is a reasonable assumption that the characteristics and behaviors of the home do have indirect effects on the relationships between home and school.

**Parental Involvement**

The relationship between children’s literacy and children’s interactions with their parents has long been recognized as significant, and this is worthy of repeating. A growing body of research on how parents and their children deal with literacy, language, and schools in general reveals a tapestry of complex interrelationships (Mikulecky, 1996; Thurston, 2005). According to Mikulecky (1996), dozens of research studies revealed that approaches to changing parent-child interactions are generally successful. Most of these studies also reveal that simple interventions are of limited success and that it is very difficult to bring about change that will transfer to improved literacy in the home (Mikulecky, 1996).
Parents who are actively involved in their children’s education at the elementary level will likely become less involved during their middle school years (Berthelson & Walker, 2008). It may be that parents are anxious about assisting with more challenging subjects as secondary school approaches (Berthelson & Walker, 2008). It is unlikely that parents care less about the academic progress of their child because they become less involved. It is just as important for schools to build a relationship with parents to foster adolescent achievement as it is in the early grades. If a school does not have a formal participation plan for parents in place, it is important that parents take the initiative to continue their collaboration and involvement in their children’s school (National Committee for Citizens of Education [NCCE], 1991; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwak, 2005).

The results of a meta-analysis of 35 years of research conducted by Marzano (2003) has been organized into three general factors that influence students’ academic achievement: (a) school-level factors, (b) teacher-level factors, and (c) student-level factors. Student-level factors are generally associated with student background (home environment, learned intelligence, and background knowledge and motivation). Although the guidance from research is clear, researchers and the public continue to debate whether public education is up to the task of following it (Marzano, 2003).

Based on information gathered from a graduating class of 1994, over 60% of high SES students had been enrolled in a college preparatory program before graduating from high school versus just 13% of the low SES group (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007). Four years later, over a third of the low SES group and just 3% of the high SES group were “permanent dropouts,” meaning high school dropouts who still lack high school
certification of any kind. According to Berthelson and Walker (2008), almost all parents expect their children to complete high school and almost half felt that their children would attend some form of post-secondary program or vocational course.

The goal of improving parental involvement in schools has enjoyed bipartisan support at the national level and has been part of major legislation (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1964; No Child Left Behind, 2002). Most educators believe that students who are successful at all ability levels have parents who stay informed and involved in their children’s schools. However, many middle and high school level teachers report that the only time they contact families is when students get into trouble (Epstein, 2007).

Despite years of studies and initiatives, educators are wringing their hands over the need for more parental involvement, yet most have only a vague understanding of what effective parenting really is (Moore, 2008). Family involvement matters for young children’s cognitive and social development (Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006). Learning support comes from families, early childhood programs, schools’ out-of-school programs and activities, higher education, health and social service agencies, businesses, museums, libraries, and other community-based institutions. This network of support has been labeled as a complementary learning (Harvard Family Research Project, 2008).

The Harvard Family Research Project (2008) explained that complementary learning is characterized by discrete linkages that influence learning and developmental outcomes for children. In the years from birth through adolescence, these linkages are continuously in place, but the functions of this network change over time as children mature. Positive family involvement over time can predict children’s academic readiness
and even performance and social development as they progress from early childhood programs through K-12 and into higher education (Weiss et al., 2006). This involves bringing parents into the management process. If a student does not meet a criterion for behavior in class, then the parents or guardians get involved as a positive influence and a powerful intervention (Miller, Ferguson, & Simpson, 1998).

One of the challenges facing schools is improving communication between middle class teachers and disadvantaged minority parent and reaching a level of understanding (Cooper & Jordan, 2003). Because student discipline and academic achievement depend on building school communities, urban schools are often frustrated by their inability to facilitate dialogue across cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic lines (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Miretzy, 2004). Widespread beliefs among teachers that SES parents are not comfortable in the school involvement process and the opinion of low-income, Hispanic parents that teachers do not want them involved in their children’s education hinders home-school communication (Brown & Beckett, 2007).

School districts began experimenting with alternate forms of education for at-risk of failing high school students during the 1960s and it continues as today’s alternative schools (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002). It was only during the last 20 years that alternative schools were designed for elementary and middle school students at risk of failing. Unfortunately, parental involvement in these schools is reported to be minimal (Carpenter, Aeby, & Aeby, 2001).

Nowhere is there a greater need for building strong school communities than in these alternative schools and nowhere is the challenge greater than in schools that are resented by parents as stigmatizing their children and isolating them from positive
educational opportunities (Becker, 2010; Dunbar, 1999; Fenzel & Monteith, 2008).

Unfortunately, this reputation of alternative schools, widely held among regular school teachers who have no direct contact with the schools and parents whose only direct contact with the schools is to attend the required entrance and exit meetings when their child is transferred and receiving social services designed for SES families (Brown & Beckett, 2007). The system reports these rare encounters as parental involvement. Though student behavior is said to improve somewhat in alternative schools, these improvements are not sustained when students return to their regular schools and, as a result, school districts conclude that these programs have failed to bring about academic success (Brown & Beckett, 2007).

What is the difference between a professional learning community and a school learning community? A professional learning community emphasizes communication of principals, teachers, and staff to identify goals, improve curriculum, and enhance education. This team is important while it falls short of producing a true community of learners (Prince, 2002). A school learning community is made up of educators, students, parents, and community partners who work together to improve the school and improve students’ learning opportunities (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). Research shows that such programs improve schools, strengthen families, invigorate community support, and increase students’ achievement and success (Epstein, 2001). An active home, school, and community connection also makes schools more meaningful for students (Epstein, 2002).

For over 20 years, Johns Hopkins University has worked with education, students, parents, community partners, and other researchers to learn how schools develop, implement, and maintain programs of partnership with parents. Dr. Joyce L. Epstein, a
sociologist at Johns Hopkins University, is Director of the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships and other entities in the field of education and the principal research scientist for education at the university. Dr. Epstein has become a well-known authority in the field of parental involvement in education and educational research. She developed six examples of parent and school involvement that improve communications and student success in school by changing the behavior of both teachers and parents.

According to Epstein (2002), the six suggestions include:

1. Parenting activities (providing immunizations, etc.)
2. Teacher communications (teacher notes, flyers, etc.)
3. Volunteering (playground, library, etc.)
4. Home learning (homework, etc.)
5. Decision-making (PTA, teams, etc.)
6. Collaborating with community (after school programs, etc.)

Cultural and demographic changes of recent years have brought into question the relative influence of parent residence and parent gender on parental involvement on today’s children. Attitudes have shifted toward the view that fathers and mothers should be equally involved in their children’s lives and therefore education, especially when mothers work out of the home, but the changes in men’s behavior continue to lag behind changes in attitude (Hawkins, Amato, & King, 2006; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Although fathers’ engagement with children has increased in recent decades, mothers continue to be responsible for about two-thirds of all child care and educational issues (Pleck & Maxciadrelli, 2004). Educators continue to see a larger number of mothers at school functions and communicate with them on a more regular basis than
they are able to communicate with both resident and nonresident fathers. Family structure remains an important area of investigation for researchers and practitioners who work with adolescents because, unlike other indicators of academic achievement, adolescents have little or no control over the structure of the environment in which they are raised (Jeynes, 2005; Lee, Kushner, & Chou, 2007). Another little-studied type of parental involvement is related to potential management of adolescents’ time spent on literacy activities and nonliteracy activities (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Berthelson and Walker (2008) explained that because schools exhibit and represent middle-class values and forms of communication, teachers will be more likely to interact effectively with those parents from middle and higher SES with whom they have more in common. Teachers will likely have difficulties relating to some parents due to socioeconomics or ethnic background (Berthelson & Walker, 2008). The bias of schools to promote more middle-class values places many parents at a disadvantage, which makes communication difficult. Teachers offering class information in “parent-friendly” language and offering information in the home language of the parents builds comfort between the parent and the teacher, according to the Alaska Parent Information Center (AKPIRC, 2010).

Wile the focus has been on parental involvement and academic achievement, a parallel body of research (McNeal, 1999) examined causes of truancy and dropping out in relation to parental involvement. Shifting the independent variable, parental involvement’s influence, to a range of dependent variables, especially dropping out, was one goal of this research. By addressing outcomes other than academic achievement and modeling the variation across race/ethnicity, home structure, and socioeconomic status,
findings explain past inconsistencies between parental involvement and adolescent outcomes. The inequities seem to go deeper than just differential levels of parent involvement. Even at comparable levels of involvement, single parents, minority parents, and lower SES parents simply get less for their involvement. Whether the form of social capital is different for these groups or because members of the educational institutions simply react more negatively toward them cannot be answered with these data (McNeal, 1999).

Respondents of a similar study, who were high school dropouts, reported that more than half of their parents were not aware or just somewhat aware of their child’s grades or that they were about to leave school. However, more than half of those same parents were only involved when there were discipline problems (Bridgeland, DiIuiolo, & Morrison, 2006). Three-fourths of the dropouts in the study said they would definitely or probably enroll in a high school for people their age if they could. They all wished they had listened to those who warned them about dropping out, or that the voices had been more persistent.

According to Barber (1996), parental involvement usually includes the monitoring of adolescent behavior, also known as *demandingness*. This factor is essential in order for children to learn self-regulation and eventual independence. This factor serves as an induction into the norms of society for teaching appropriate conformity. Because parents socialize their children through the rules of communication patterns in the family, the degree and quality of parent involvement have a major impact on positive adolescent development. By educators putting a focus on family and community involvement with how students learn and grow, future teachers’ education programs may be improved as
well as the policies and practices in school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Parental demandingness, also known as behavior control, refers to the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family as a whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, discipline efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys (Baumrind, 1991). Interested developmentalists (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostleris, 1997) saw parental involvement in education as an aspect of parenting that shapes and responds to the changing needs of youth. Adolescents generally achieve more when parents become involved, provide cognitive stimulation, meet with school personnel, and participate in school activities (Alexander et al., 2007; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

The theoretical and policy focus on parental/school involvement has come to be considered as a two-way connection between families and schools (Crosnoe, 2009). Youth now start high school in higher level math when parents, middle school personnel, and high school personnel were in contact with each other and when middle school personnel bridged middle school and high school (Crosnoe, 2009). Children live concurrently between the worlds of family and school, moving between the two at the beginning and at the end of each school day (Symeou, 2002b).

Parental involvement in education is widely viewed as influential in boosting academic progress and reducing academic disparities. Bethelson and Walker (2008) reported that parent involvement in schools tends to increase when student learning difficulties emerge. However, this viewpoint is not without its critics, who question the underpinning assumption of causation and make the case that it focuses too much on parents at the expense of schools (Berthleson & Walker, 2008; Hoover-Dempsey &
Sandler, 1997). As explained by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), it is of utmost importance to determine the mechanisms of parental involvement that influence student achievement. When educators, parents, and other stakeholders (Chandler, 2006) work together in pursuit of common goals, the learning environment and outcomes improve accordingly.

Student Perceptions

Students’ perceptions of how their parents and teachers actively support them and participate in their education are powerful and have been quite neglected in the field of educational research (Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007; Regner, Loose, & Dumas, 2009). Two facets of parental and teacher academic involvement, academic support, and academic monitoring contribute to students’ achievement goals. The importance of parental involvement and the achievement theory has become the dominant frameworks for probing students’ achievement motivation and all related outcomes. This includes helping them with homework, supporting the choices they make at school, and working with them through academic difficulties (Chien, 2008; Patrick et al., 2007; Regner et al., 2009).

Students who perceive their parents and/or teachers to be actively involved in their academic activities report higher competence levels, greater motivation, task engagement, and academic achievement. According to Regner et al. (2009), parents’ and teachers’ concerned with involvement may communicate to students how much parents and teachers value their education which, in turn, motivates them to engage and succeed in school. Students’ perception of active parent and teacher involvement is very likely to
increase students’ interest and enjoyment in achievement tasks and their desire and willingness to improve (Rickards & Fisher, 2004).

Since teachers are the first evaluators of students’ academic outcomes, teacher academic motivation may have a greater weight than parental academic motivation on students’ goals and performance (Choinard, Karsenti, & Roy, 2007; Marzano, 2004). When focusing on parent and teacher academic involvement from the students’ perspective, it has been established that students’ academic outcomes are more influenced by their own perceptions of the home and school contexts than by the actual contexts themselves as they can be reported by parents and teachers (Grolnick et al., 1997; Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002). An indirect link between parents’ educational expectations, reading, play, and affective behaviors and active parental involvement was found (Davis-Kean, 2005).

Present findings helped complete the whole picture in regards to the specific aspects of the parental and teacher academic involvement that contributes to students’ achievement goal adoption. Students’ perceptions of parental and teacher academic involvement varies, clearly distinguishing parental academic monitoring from teacher academic support while perceiving teachers as the authority (Regner et al., 2006). An important factor to consider is whether students’ perceptions of teacher-student interpersonal behavior are the same as their teachers. A within-families analysis (Dearing, Kreider, & Weiss, 2008) was done (N = 329) denoting that changes in family involvement in schools were directly associated with changes in children’s relationships with teachers and indirectly associated with changes in children’s attitudes about school. As Marcoulide, Heck, and Papanastasiou (2006) noted, variables concerning students’
perceptions of learning environment furnish helpful information about quality of
students’ educational experiences and can explain why achievement across classrooms
and school is educational experiences and can explain why achievement across
classrooms and schools is important.

In a study of student/teacher perceptions conducted by Rickards and Fisher
(2004), it was assumed that the behaviors of participants influence each other mutually.
The behavior of the teacher will influence the behavior of the students and, in turn, the
behavior of the students will influence the behavior of the teacher. Circular
communication processes develop which can determine behaviors of students and
teachers (Rickards & Fisher, 2004). It has been noted (Epstein et al., 2002; Hoover-
Dempsey & Sandler, 1995) that developmentally appropriate demonstrations of parent
involvement during childhood often change as children move into and through
adolescence.

Teacher Perceptions

A recent study (Bethelson & Walker, 2008) reported that 60% of parents were
very involved in communication with teachers while 37% of parents were somewhat
involved. No data were gathered on uninvolved parents. Yet, literature has not addressed
the negative side of parent/teacher e-mail. Pedagogically, teachers and other educators
have concerns that parents will become overly involved in school communication
(Schwartzman, 2007), an issue magnified by today’s ready access. Parents who are too
involved can hinder both academically and socially. Because of the recent expansion of
e-mail activity, research is warranted to find strategies to address problems for both
educators and parents (Thompson, 2009; Wong, 2008).
It has been reported that the most significant parent-teacher issue, misinterpretation, has surfaced in parent and teacher e-mail communications. They could possibly misread each other’s e-mails because there is no room for inflection in the written word and also because they do not know each other well (Thompson, 2009). Teachers often fail to engage parents because of the perception that parents do not wish to be involved when, in fact, they do not know how to be involved (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). A large number of teachers and principals feel unprepared for engagement with parents in the education process (Chandler, 2006). A 2005 survey (MetLife) of American teachers revealed that 20% of new teachers and nearly one fourth of principals consider parental relationships as the cause of significant stress in their jobs. A large percentage of teachers in a similar study believed that student academics improve when parents are involved, while many parents felt that children whose parents are not involved “fall through the cracks” in school (Johnson & Duffet, 2003; MetLife, 2005).

Gender Differences

The topic of parent involvement in children’s education has been the subject of research for several decades and continues to be of great interest. Positive relationships between the overall level of the involvement of parents and adolescents’ academic performance are a part of research findings (Muller, 1993, 1998; Garg, Melanson, & Levin, 2007). However, there is little information about whether parent involvement differs for sons and daughters. Wigfield and Eccles (1994) suggested that family involvement differs for sons and daughters and educational literature has suggested that family socialization practices often result in daughters being short-changed which seems too ambiguous for practical use (Garg et al., 2007; Sang, Kushner, & Ho Cho, 2007).
The investigation of variances in parent involvement for sons and daughters is important because gender differences in educational experiences of older adolescents could be explained. Findings could contribute to knowledge about conditions that foster gender stratification in work outcomes (Wigfield & Eccles, 1994). Because society has accepted equality in the sexes, one would expect parents to treat their male and female children equally. Nevertheless, recent studies suggest that parents favor sons over daughters in many ways. Fathers who have sons are likely to be more involved with their children (Carter & Wojkiewicz, 2000; Harris & Morgan, 1991), while mothers of sons are more concerned about child obedience and the possible negative effects of their own employment. Additionally, parents of sons are less likely to divorce (Morgan, Lye, & Condran, 1988). Eccles, Midgeley, Wigfield, and Buchanan (1991) contended that leader-based values of society continue to elevate males over females in the social order. Traditional socialization practices are male biased, as compared with daughters, and provided greater opportunities for personal autonomy and achievement and outcomes for males (Eccles et al., 1991).

Empirical evidence suggests that the differential treatment of males and females concerning academics are expected to increase in the higher grades (Carter & Wojkiewich, 2000; Catsambis, 1994). Negative consequences of this gender bias have become obvious; for instance, female students have lower self-esteem concerning math ability. Catsambis (1994) reported that males are twice as likely to have aspirations to enter a math field due to a high level of competence in ability. Hansen (1994) indicated that high school seniors who showed early signs of math talent were more likely to be female, dependent on parents, and more inclined to engage in discussions with them.
The general hypothesis of Carter and Wojkiewicz’s (2000) study was that parents would be more involved in the education of their male children. However, school discussions and parental supervision would likely be exceptions, since daughters seem to receive more of this type of parental involvement (Carter & Wojkiewicz, 2000).

Parental Involvement Barriers

Contemporary families face multiple demands from family and work. The prevalence of households in which both parents work, the long hours spent at work, and the increasing number of low-income, single-parent families who are in transition from welfare to the work force create barriers to involvement in their children’s education (Weiss, Mayer, Kreider, Vaughan, Dearing, Hencke, & Pinto, 2003). The majority of working mothers report concerns over how to make ends meet, spending time with their family and finding time to be involved in their children’s education.

The involvement of mothers in their children’s education is one of the family demands that could be adversely affected by increased maternal employment. Substantial research has established the positive influence that mothers have on their children’s education and achievement (Nord & West, 2001). Research suggests that work may be particularly challenging for educational involvement among low-income families. Twice as many low-income as middle-income parents believed their work prohibited school participation (Weiss et al., 2003). Time poverty, meaning the lack of adequate time to meet the demands of work and the needs of family life, is a barrier for working mothers and for mothers moving from welfare to jobs with long hours (Chin & Newman, 2002).

A few studies have suggested positive effects of maternal employment on family educational involvement for mothers from a range of income backgrounds. One study
(Gottfried, Gottfried, & Bathurst, 1989) found that some employed mothers engage in more educational activities with their children than nonworking mothers. Mothers who were transitioning from welfare to work expected their time spent on supervising homework and school involvement to be limited, but they also expected to benefit their children through increased income and the modeling of ambition and achievement (Weiss et al., 2009).

Transitions to High School

Much attention has been devoted to how adolescents make the transition from middle school to high school. Attention has been stimulated by concerns that the transition could disrupt children’s self-esteem and academic success, causing negative consequences for the change (Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap, & Hervey, 2000). Some researchers (Grolnick et al., 2000; Sarter et al., 2002) espoused that adolescents will make the transition to high school supported by parental resources of continued involvement in their education, but this cannot be taken for granted.

Coinciding with adolescence, the passage can be a difficult time of inflated social pressures, a heightened need for autonomy, and increased academic responsibilities to make this a developmentally challenging period (Eccles et al., 1991; Johnson, n.d.). The change can be even more unsettling for adolescents who have been less than successful in middle school (Chen & Gregory, 2010), especially if they have not had the support of parents who were involved in their education. Epstein et al. (2002) have called schools and homes “overlapping spheres of influence” (p. 30) with distinct yet common goals. A positive transition is important for a child’s success in life and parent/child discussions
about differences in high school and middle school and should be ongoing throughout middle school in order to prepare adolescents for change (Epstein et al., 2002).

In a 2007 study, Weiss and Bearman directly compared outcomes for students who made a transition to a new school for ninth grade to students who did not actually change schools but simply entered ninth grade in their present school building. Their results determined that for both academic and nonacademic outcomes, transitioning from eighth grade to ninth grade makes almost no difference for ninth grade outcomes for those students who make a physical transition relative to ninth grade students who do not. While outcomes do change between eighth grade and ninth grade, the level of difference is the same for those who change schools and those who do not. Evidence points to the benefits of school transition as a benefit to adolescents who live in socially challenging situations (Weiss & Bearman, 2007; Johnson, n.d.).

The dropout rate for freshmen is overwhelmingly higher than in other grades with many ninth graders at risk for failure (Proctor & Choy, 1994). These freshmen, in particular, need the support and attention of positive parents and teachers who reach out in this time of great vulnerability (Proctor & Choy, 1994). The potential buffering of parent involvement in middle school is especially supportive as the transition to ninth grade takes place (Proctor & Choy, 1994).

During the transitions between school and communities adolescents see a boundary with limited access across it, as this interface seems to both contain and exclude in the newness of the experience (Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006). Transitions require students to move daily from the language, culture, and customs of their home to those within their schools resulting in various degrees of discomfort. Some cross over with
varying degrees of ease and willingly, while others go reluctantly with some difficulty. Teachers and district personnel are generally on opposite sides of the chasm from parents and students and have limited opportunities for dialogue and understanding of each other (Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006).

Principal and Parent Communication

Research indicates that principal leadership is a crucial factor to schools’ planning and evaluating partnerships with families and the communities (Epstein et al., 2002). The effective leader is one who supports the faculty in developing their skills as collaborators and provides teachers with necessary time to plan for partnerships and engage in communication practices with stakeholders (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

In a 2010 study, Supovitz, Sirindes, and May found strong and significant indirect relationships which mediate education leadership and student learning. These results denote the importance of principals’ work for achievement because of their fostering of collaboration and communication.

Another recent, though limited, review of research on leadership and communication listed self-confidence as an essential characteristic for effective leaders (Supovitz et al., 2010). The task ahead is to find the many links in the chain connecting school leadership to student learning because most leadership effects have been found to be indirect (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). There are recent compilations which have located more research on links between leadership and student outcomes (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Marzano et al. (2005) located many studies but most of them were unpublished American doctoral dissertations or conference papers. One exception is, notably, the meta-analysis of United
States evidence completed by Marzano et al. (2005) which found a moderately strong effect of school leadership on student outcomes.

In Christie’s (2005) study, parents having high expectations for their children in terms of academics and behavior is the highest level of parent involvement. Relationships between parents, teachers, and the community should be closely observed by principals (MacNeil & Patin, 2005). When a positive relationship is established early in the school year, possible negative incidents later in the year will not replace the initial good impression (Million, 2003). Removing obstacles to school, teacher and parent involvement, as well as providing parent communication training will increase parental awareness of what is at stake for student learning (Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005).

Redish and Chan (2005) reported that available data reported that schools that have made the most progress in technology have school leaders with a vision of what is possible through the use of technology. When school leaders model the use of technology and support best practices in instruction they are setting an example (Redish & Chan, 2005). There is convincing evidence that school leadership is both nonlinear and multidimensional. It is not the lines of authority that predict how school leadership effectively enacted as much as it is the leader’s understanding of equalizing power in all relationships associated with schooling (Nance, 2003; Wahlstrom, 2010). School principals’ familiarity with their school’s policy process has been found to be a predictor for real involvement at the building level (Nance, 2003).

Educators are redefining “literacy” to include the ability to access and critically analyze information available online. Webber (2003) suggested that principals’ jobs have and will change drastically because of Information and Communication Technology
(ICT), and not all are ready to evolve that quickly or to that degree. Information and communication technologies will compel educators to change how they plan, deliver, and access professional development (Webber, 2003). Principals are no longer just the enforcers of the rules in today’s schools (Fullen, 1997; Rieg, 2007).

“A principal’s visibility in the school is an important factor for building relationships. Today’s principals are either overloaded with what they are doing or overloaded with all the things they think they should be doing” (Witmer, 2005, p. 24). The word relationships has been added as the fourth R in education: “Reading, ‘riting, ‘rithmetic, and relationships are the foundations of education” (Witmer, 2005, p. 24).

Peterson and Lackey (2007) indicated that educators have much work to do to use systematic approaches of communication with parents and work to create openness among immigrant families, teachers, and principals. Teachers and principals are challenged to examine their own perceptions of language and the abilities and desires of new immigrant parents who want to communicate with schools about their children’s learning (Peterson & Lackey, 2007). By sharing leadership and supporting teamwork to develop and sustain effective programs of school, family, and community partnerships, principals can greatly improve their schools (Epstein, 2007).

A principal in St. Louis who has made regular visits to the homes of some students who needed support in achieving academic, personal, and social goals made the following statement:

Visiting their homes is one way for me to learn more about them and a way to get parents more involved in their children’s education. . . . In the majority of circumstances, I have found home visits to be very helpful and productive, when
the intent is to improve relationships and show parents and students that I care.

One must make sure that parents and students understand that home visits by the principal are not a consequence for negative student behavior but rather a genuine effort to support the students over the long term. (Chandler, 2006, p. 36)

This principal also said that he would not suggest that all principals make home visits, but he does believe that making home visits has made him a better principal (Chandler, 2006).

Electronic Communication

Communication between families and schools is essential in today’s constantly changing world and can be a catalyst to drive trusting relationships that will enhance parent/school involvement (Rogers & Wright, 2008). Technology use will make it possible for parents to actively take part in their middle school child’s education without having to be visible in the child’s school. Technology communication can foster adolescent independence while building comfortable relationships with teachers and schools for the parents (Rogers & Wright, 2008).

In a position of dynamic, reactive, and time-sensitive as the principalship, a flexible means of communication is necessary. Much of the essential information for a new or experienced principal may be provided by e-mail which has evolved into a medium of ease and convenience (Boris-Shacter & Vonasek, 2009). Also, barriers to traditional communication can be reduced through the use of Internet-based communication that may be viewed as one component of a larger communication strategy (Bouffard, 2008; Smith & Caputi, 2005).
While on-going, two-way communication has been associated with students’ academic success (Weiss et al., 2006), communication is at the heart of family-school relationships and can be the foundation for other forms of involvement. In this Information Age, Internet technology symbolizes the opportunity for expanding communication between families and schools. E-mail, listservs, websites, and newer social networking technologies such as blogs seem to be beneficial for school and home, but few studies (Bouffard, 2008) document whether websites are associated with academic success or how often they are being used. In this age of on-line shopping and banking, school websites that have been properly designed can be excellent forums for parents and school involvement (Barron & Wells, 2008).

School officials see the use of the electronic system as a means to strengthen teacher relationships with parents for the good of the students. There is a belief that the more they know the more they will be able to do to assist their children (Barron & Wells, 2008).

Websites

According to Parsad and Jones (2005), at least 83% of United States schools host a website at this time, and with a click of a mouse parents can gain access to what is going on in the schools. The effectiveness of websites can be measured by its usefulness to its targeted users—parents, students, and other community members (Bouffard, 2008). As some parents cope with the growing demand of being computer literate, they may approach with a feeling of anxiety.

Designing an effective website can pose a number of challenges that would prevent a site visitor from gaining access and entry to needed information (Regan, 2003).
Website designers must take a cue from usability researchers to fully understand the who, what, and why of the site (Neilson, 1992). Sites should be accessible to all visitors and provide clear motivational materials for students, parents, and teachers (Acquaro & DeMarco, 2008). Understanding the site audience will assist in making good decisions about organization and lay-outs (Regan, 2003). Facer, Sutherland, Furlong, and Furlong (2001), Vekiri and Chronaki (2008), and Vekiri (2009) identified peer relationships as a real factor related to children’s use of school websites. Home computing can be a social activity and children use each other’s expertise to deal with computer accessibility and learn new things (Neilson, 1992).

The development team and the designers of the school website need to keep the specific audience in mind during the planning of the site. Four phases make up appropriate school website design and implementation: (a) cultural analysis, (b) content organization for responsible website, (c) development of the website, and (d) site evaluation (Gillani, 2000; Alpar, Pomerski, & Pickerodt, 2001). Minimizing loading time and conserving band width is a significant matter. The website builders should keep loading time to 15 seconds and have no more than two to three screens of material (McKenzie, n.d.). “Content analysis of items currently included in school websites and stakeholder judgments of items desired in school websites remain absent in the existing literature” (Miller, Adsit, & Miller, 2005, p. 34). The metaphor “Putting Lipstick on a Bulldog” (Kantor, 2001, p. 92) has been used to point to those who mistakenly assume they are using technology such as the Internet and Web pages in highly productive ways (Kantor, 2001). The use of cosmetics just covers up problems that can still exist beneath
the makeup. What is needed is a conceptual knowledge of how technology can improve instruction and achievement for young people (Kantor, 2001; Creighton, 2003).

As information systems for site visitors, websites provide access to an assemblage of data and information. School websites also function as links between the various stakeholders in the educational process, such as parents, schools, and the community (Hartshorne et al., 2006). The website can serve as a welcome introduction to the school and should include a picture of the school, demographics of the student body, school accountability information, faculty/staff information, course offerings, and other information that is useful to all stakeholders and visitors (McKenzie, n.d.).

Classroom Web pages are a powerful means for schools and teachers to use in communicating with parents and students. Schools now have the option of creating Web pages that are password protected for parents or open to interested parties and the general public. Class information can be updated by teachers in as little as 10 minutes and this requires only standard word processing skills for users (Davenport & Eibs, 2004). Some teachers and principals are vigilant in keeping websites updated daily, while others update on a weekly basis or every other week. Teachers use this tool to revise their schools, and parent response has been very positive (Davenport & Eibs, 2004).

The interactive collaboration between students, teachers, and parents has become possible through e-mail and class websites (Alexiou-Ray, Wilson, Wright, & Pierano, 2010; Bass & Rosenxweig, 1999). More than one third of families have communicated with a school through the website, but the recurrence of contact has been disappointing (Bouffard, 2008), yet it is through a Web-based system that communication between parents and schools can be enhanced and a student’s school and family should not be
isolated from one another because of the shared responsibility of preparing them for adulthood through the educational process. The management of student class work information along with teacher insight enlightens parents about what is going on in schools and documents academic progress (Merkley, Schmidt, Dirksen, & Fuhler, 2006). Parents with access are beginning to visit these sites for updates about grades, homework, and matters of attendance, not just a reported grade or a homework assignment (Weinstein, 2005).

Parents’ and teachers’ use of e-mail communication represents an increasingly prevailing form of computer mediated communication (CMC) at both elementary and secondary levels. However, the problems that parents and teachers encounter when communicating will have to be identified and addressed for better use of the website. Thompson (2009) revealed several notable problems that are real barriers to communication: (a) misinterpretations, (b) reductions in face-to-face meetings, (c) new boundaries crossed, and (d) impacts on student responsibility. The research (Thompson, 2009) also revealed a variety of e-mail strategies that provide teachers and parents the means to address the common problems they encounter. Addressing these problems and exploring strategies to deal with them may also highlight how e-mail can serve as a potential liability (Thompson, 2008). According to Schwartzman (2007), it is important to critically evaluate the use of CMC in academia, although it can produce positive results in the instructional context.

When CMC focuses on negative topics such as grade-oriented concerns, behavior concerns, social as well as health-related concerns, it becomes a real issue for both parents and teachers (Schwartzman, 2007). Due to a recent growth of e-mail
communication at the K-12 levels, research is summoned to develop strategies to address these problems in order to assist educators and parents (Thompson, 2009) in the use of this technology. Significant challenges are posed by Internet use by parents (Bouffard, 2008). Bouffard (2008) explored the likelihood of Internet-based parental communication across a range of family background characteristics. Families with higher incomes and higher levels of education were more likely to have Internet access and more likely to communicate with schools. Families with at least one full-time working parent were more likely to have access. Income was a stronger predictor for Internet access, especially for African Americans (Bouffard, 2008). Americans of higher socioeconomic status are more likely to communicate through multiple devices, such as cell phones, computers, and other wireless technology (Bauch, 2000; DeBell & Chapman, 2006).

Logistic challenges, such as failure to receive messages due to a change in service providers, computer problems, infrequent checking of e-mail, a full mailbox that cannot accept more e-mail messages, and difficulty in finding e-mail addresses are a real part of Internet-based family-school communication (Luntz, 2003; Swann, 2006).

Nelms (2001) conducted a study to determine parents’ use of a teacher-created Web page as an information source and how communication with teachers of their children is affected. Based on evidence obtained from surveys, questionnaires, and interviews, participants viewed teacher-created Web pages as an effective form of communication with schools. The classroom calendar and the one-to-one correspondence area were reported to be the most beneficial component on the school website (Nelms, 2001).
Parents stated that knowing what their children were learning and how they were performing academically allowed them to stay more involved in their children’s education. However, of the 68 possible participants in the study, only 10 parents opted to participate. The potential of the Internet for communication with schools appears untapped for many schools and families (Bouffard, 2008).

Although anecdotal reports suggest that some school administrators do communicate with parents through the use of the Internet, they continue to underestimate teachers’ use of such communication. One possible reason for this is the fact that teachers could be using technology communication with parents outside of the structured programs but using their personal e-mail accounts (Bouffard, 2008). To date, there are few data available to report why and when parents and schools use the website to communicate or provide strategies for building positive and trusting relationships through the use of school technology (Bouffard, 2008). However, according to Hartshorne, Friedman, Algozzine, & Isibor (2008), elementary, middle, and high school websites should have two primary functions. Their purpose should be to serve as information systems for site visitors and act as intermediaries between stakeholders in the education process (Hartshorne et al., 2008).

In a review of 70 elementary school websites in a southeastern state, check-list type surveys were used to gather data from students, parents, and teachers about the school websites. The surveys used were tested for readability in Microsoft Word’s readability statistics (Miller et al., 2005). The students were coached during class on how to answer the survey items. Teachers were then given oral instructions during a faculty
meeting, and parents’ surveys were sent home in student work folders (Miller et al., 2005).

The examination of local websites revealed only five features that were included on more than 50% of sample sites. These features were the physical location of school, faculty listing, school calendar, school’s mission statement, and educational links, which are relatively static and not requiring frequent updating. Features that were present less than 10 items were Internet use policy, homework information, and community and curriculum information, which are much less static and demand frequent updating (Miller et al., 2005).

Discussions about what constitutes parental involvement carry with them divergent expectations for what types of relationships need to be developed for communication (Epstein, 1995, 2002). School personnel need to be sensitive to the point of intervening in varied ways to gain parental participation. Additional strategies need to be put into place for relaying electronic information to parents through the school website. It has been suggested that schools should set up a computer kiosk in the school lobby to allow parents access to the use of a computer when they drop off or pick up their children. Also, in-services and training on computer use skills would enable parents to better monitor their child’s performance (Barge & Loges, 2003; Paache-Orlow, Taylor, & Brancati, 2003).

Accessibility

Designers of school websites can look at accessibility research and draw a number of helpful ideas. Regan (2003) suggested that understanding the site’s audience will assist in making good decisions about how the site should be organized and laid out.
Using simplistic headers can greatly ease a visitor’s search for information, and navigation should be predictable and consistent. When making sure that the website is usable, make sure it is usable for everyone, including people with disabilities. A well-designed website offers physically challenged visitors a powerful tool for accessing information while a poorly designed website presents immense obstacles (Palmer, 2002; Regan, 2003).

Research related to the term digital divide refers to unequal access to computers and other informational technology and the term is now accepted as an indicator of the gap in use based on ethnicity and other characteristics (Bray, Pugalee, Flowers, & Algozzine, 2007). Recent studies involving different age groups show that positive computer attitudes and beliefs are associated with home computer use, both past and present (Bentler, 1990; Meelissen & Drent, 2008).

For students from families of low economic status who do not have computer access at home, it will be difficult to develop information communication with technology (ICT) skills compared to their peers. There are considerable differences due to gender, socioeconomic factors, and age (Plantin & Daneback, 2009). Many site visitors feel a kind of information overload that can bewilder, confuse, and discourage them. Usability engineering involves studying and designing ease of use into the product (Battleson, Booth, & Weintrop, 2001). Usability means that a person of average (or even below average) ability and experience can use the thing, whether it is a website, fighter jet, or a revolving door, for its intended purpose without getting hopelessly frustrated (Krug, 2000). Since a large part of what people do on the Web is looking for the next thing to click, they must know what is clickable and what is not.
A Singapore study (Hu & Fah Soong, 2007) determined that few primary school websites function as a two-way communication with stakeholders by taking full advantage of features provided by the Internet. Fewer than half of the schools publish the date of their last update, making visitors wonder about the accuracy of posted information and recommendations made for schools to improve the design. Warchauer (2007) and Veriki (2009) shared that research and discussion have been stimulated by these findings and school practices will have to adapt in order to minimize differences in students’ computer competencies. They also have to adapt in order to minimize differences in students’ computer competencies. They also recommend that schools must continue to work with parents and the community to address the digital divide, which is the greatest challenge to ICT for empowerment. Parents feel more comfortable using a computer if they have owned one and strongly agree that people get left behind if they do not know about computers (Linbarger & Chernin, 2003). A plan should be in place for schools to provide access to resources on campus and for student check-out of digital devices and other resources (Hohlfeld, Ritzhaupt, Barron, & Kemker, 2008). Both physical and cultural barriers confronting students when facing electronic communication are related to accessibility. While educators recognize that students with learning disabilities could benefit from technology use, they are not exactly sure how to get them started (Thormann, 2004). Barriers within the websites can also create significant accessibility problems for some users (Bray et al., 2007). Today’s schools must comply with standards that allow accessibility to all site users. A variety of disabilities are known to reduce accessibility to the Web, such a visual, hearing, movement, cognitive, speech, and other impairments that limit the availability of information.
One formidable barrier for those individuals with visual impairments is the visually based graphical user interface, which is the underlying structure for most modern computer operating systems, such as Windows (Bray, Flowers, & Pugalee, 2007). Problems are created for users who cannot clearly see the screen or have limited mobility and cannot easily manipulate the mouse. Developers continue to identify and develop features that can overcome these barriers.

Website Readability

Writing copy for a website is not the same as writing a school website (Smithson, 2008), but it should be well written. The issue is not whether the user has the ability to use the Web, but rather the extent to which the communication is as effective as that provided to others (Klein, Myhill, Hanson, Asby, Michaelson, & Blanck, 2003a, 2003b). For Web page owners to be successful, with satisfied users, they need to consider design criteria and usability in order to look forward to the likelihood of return and frequency of use (Gee, 2000; Palmer, 2002). When a passage is pleasant and easy to read, it is said to have readability. Generally speaking, if meaning can be conveyed in one sentence and the document is not a professional paper, do not drag it into a paragraph. Short sentences are just as effective and can be read by most people (DuBay, 2004; Stone, 2000).

According to DuBay (2004), General George Washington first addressed concerns about the reading level of fighters during the Revolutionary War. Chaplains at Valley Forge were directed to teach basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic to soldiers. Since that time, the U.S. Armed Services has invested more in studying workplace literacy and readability than any other organization.
Today, the two primary functions of school websites are serving as information systems for site visitors and as a connection between stakeholders in the education process (Hartshorne et al., 2008). Readability is a simple tool that makes reading on the Web more enjoyable by removing the clutter around what is being read. It has been further defined (Levi & Conrad, 1997) as the degree to which a given piece of software assists the person sitting at the keyboard, as opposed to making their task difficult. Many factors contribute to the readability of a passage, such as size of print, illustration, and difficulty of the subject matter (DuBay, 2004; McNamara, Louwerse, McCarthy, & Graesser, 2010). Examples of word difficulty predictors are word length, syllable counts, and the number of unfamiliar words. Sentence difficulty predictors and number of dependent clauses and average sentence length also contribute to the readability of a passage (Stone, 2000). Readability estimates can be lowered by breaking long sentences into shorter ones and using more common word synonyms of unfamiliar words. Depending upon the estimation method used, the reading grade level can vary from the first grade level to well up in what is regarded as college level readability level (Stone, 2000).

To expect a person to comprehend a written passage that requires reading skills beyond his or her ability and literacy can be a very major error. If a significant number of people who visit the website do understand the passage, it can be generalized that other people with about the same level skills should also be able to read it, too. One should also be able to predict how well they will understand other reading passages or similar material. This is the rationale behind testing for readability estimates (Klare, 1963; Stone, 2000). In practice, the decisions to assign grade level comes down to human
judgment, with factors such as the author’s intentions, the needs of the education system, and the opinions of teachers, educators, and publishers all playing a part (Duffy, Graesser, Louwerse, & McNamara, n.d.).

Flesch Readability Formula

Before the middle of the 19th century, schools in the United States did not group school children according to grade. Bibles, hornbooks, and other books that the families had were the books used in schools. Early research into the cognitive processes of reading formed the basis for many reading studies to come (Barr, 1986). American educator Horace Mann struggled to bring education reform to America in the form of graded classes, supervision, and well-articulated classes. It was not until 1847 that graded schools in the United States saw the need to design textbooks for each grade (Dawson, n.d.; DuBay, 2004). In practice, the decision to assign grade level comes down to human judgment, with factors such as the author’s intentions, the needs of the education system, and the opinions of teachers, educators, and publishers all playing a part (Duffy et al., n.d.). Until computers came along, word frequency lists were used to evaluate reading materials for the classes (DuBay, 2004).

In 1943, Rudolph Flesch of Columbia University developed and published one of the oldest and better known readability formulas called Flesch Reading Ease Formula. This formula uses the number of syllables per 100 words and the average number of words per sentence. In 1948, Flesch revised the formula into two parts and published it. The first part, the Reading Ease Formula, predicts Reading Ease on a scale of 1-100, with 30 being very difficult and 70 being easy (Flesch, 1948). The second part of Flesch’s formula predicts human interest by counting the number of personal words, such as
pronouns and names, as well as quotes, exclamations, and incomplete sentences (Barr, 1986; Dawson, n.d.; DuBay, 2004). This formula has become one of the most trusted and reliable. There are now over 200 formulas of varying degrees of access.

The specific mathematical formula is \( RE = 206.835 - (1.015 \times ASL) - (84.6 \times ASW) \). Abbreviations within the formula indicate Reading Ease (RE)—Average Sentence Length (ASL) or the number of words divided by the number of sentences and the average number of syllables per word (ASW)—the number of syllables divided by the number of words. The output, RE, is a number ranging from 0 to 100. The higher the number, the easier the text is to read (Flesch, 1948).

For instance, a score of 5.0 indicates a grade school level. A second of 9.3 means a ninth grade student could read the document. This makes it easier to judge the reading level of books and texts for the students. The lowest grade level score now would be 3.4 and that is a very unlikely result in practice because there are almost no sentences that contain all one syllable words (DuBay, 2004; Stone, 2000).

For many years, no one thought of grading adults, who were considered either literate or illiterate, but this began to change with the first systematic testing of adults in the U.S. military in 1917 (Dawson, n.d.; DuBay, 2004). Most Americans proved to have limited reading ability balanced between average and poor. The results from using readability formulas provide writers the much-needed information to reach their target audience. Unfortunately, readability is different from understandability and it does not help to know if the reader understands the material (DuBay, 2004). A structural shortcoming of the formula is the fact that it cannot show the high readability of direct, conversational writing (DuBay, 2004; Flesch, 1948). Many critics still view readability
formulas as oversimplifying creative writing. The U.S. Navy modified the Flesch formula in 1976 to make it more suited for education, and it is still being used by the U.S. Government (DuBay, 2004).

The Hill, Tyson, and Bromell (2008) Study

Hill, Tyson, and Bromell (2008) studied parent involvement during their children’s middle school years. Findings of the study revealed that adolescence, especially middle school, is a time that marks changes and a decline in academic achievement for many young people (Hill et al., 2008). It follows that declines in school engagement often bring increases in behavior problems (Barber & Olsen, 2004). Although parents’ expectations remain high, their involvement declines in areas such as volunteering at school, helping with homework, and communicating with teachers. Not only does the use of these strategies decline, but they become less effective in promoting achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009). While these declines in parental involvement in education are consistent with the emerging independence and autonomy of adolescence, parents remain hungry for information about how to help their teens succeed in school or get into the best college or vocational training program (Hill & Torres, 2010).

Hill and Torres (2010) indicated that there is a need to identify proven strategies to promote academic success among middle and high school students. The role of families is emphasized in current policies to enhance achievement across elementary, middle, and high schools. However, strategies that are known to work for teens and that account for their unique strengths and needs have not been clearly identified. Frameworks now in place that outline ways to be involved in children’s education and
work with schools are based on research with elementary students and families and work best in that context (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Hill and Taylor (2004) reported that the unique development needs and assets of adolescents have not been considered in determining how parents can and should be involved in education and how middle school teachers and families can best work together to benefit those students. This study discusses how current theories and methods can be broadened to be developmentally inclusive. It also presents the results of research that identifies developmentally appropriate strategies for learning for middle school students (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

The amount of research on parental involvement in education has increased exponentially over the past 2 decades. Two common types of involvement have been identified and analyzed for effectiveness. These are involvement at school which includes volunteering at school, visiting the school, and communicating with teachers and other school personnel and involvement at home which includes helping with and monitoring homework and providing educational experiences outside of school (Fan & Chen, 2001). Research with elementary students has shown that these types of strategies have been associated with higher levels of achievement while the evidence is missed for middle school students (Fan & Chen, 2001). Some research (Hill et al., 2004) has found that parental involvement in education remains positively associated with adolescents’ achievement throughout the middle and high school years. Other research results determined that parental involvement is either unrelated to achievement or is even associated with lower levels of achievement (Bronstein, Ginsburg, & Herrera, 2005; Driessen, Smit, & Steegers, 2005). Differences in the ways researchers measure and
report parental involvement across studies may partially explain inconsistent findings. Also, other factors may impact the effectiveness of parental involvement for supporting academic achievement, such as how welcoming the school is or feels to parents, the level of support teachers receive to work with parents and families, and the resources families have to support achievement both at home and at school, and parents’ knowledge about how the school functions. Parents will be better able to effectively prepare their teens for the courses needed, as well as be effectively involved in course selection if they understand placement in academic tracks for getting into college (Hill et al., 2004).

One study (Hill & Taylor, 2004) followed families from when their teens were in the 7th grade through 9th grade, across middle and high school. Parental involvement in 7th grade was related to achievement in 9th grade and aspirations in 11th grade for parents who had a college education. One could conclude from these findings that parent involvement still matters in the same way that it does in elementary school. However, for parents who did not have a college degree, parental involvement in 7th grade was directly and positively related to students’ educational and occupational aspirations when they reached 11th grade. Surprisingly, parental involvement was not associated with improved school behavior or with improved academic performance. To sum it up, these parents were effective in communicating their high expectations but were not effective in improving academic achievement and improved social behavior, the prerequisites for reaching their aspirations. While these parents were involved in the same ways that other parents were involved in, such as assisting with homework, attending school functions and meetings, volunteering at school, and meeting with teachers, their involvement did
not have the same effect for their adolescents’ achievement as it did for parents with college degrees (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

It may be that differences in parental effectiveness in supporting their teens’ achievement in those parents with and without a college degree is that middle and high schools provide significantly less information to parents about how to be involved (Dika & Singh, 2002). Consequently, parents of middle and high school students are more dependent on their own knowledge about how schools function, what teens need to reach their goals, and how to assist children who are having difficulties (Dika & Singh, 2002). A roadblock of having identified effective ways for parents to be involved in their teens’ middle school education is that parents and schools fall back to the strategies that worked in elementary school, which are often shown to be less effective, such as volunteering in school. Parents who are more experienced with schooling and who understand the pathways between middle school and college access may be engaged in their teens’ education in ways that have not been included in current theories and measures of parent involvement (Dika & Singh, 2002).

The unidentified or unmeasured practices could explain the variances in effectiveness of parental involvement for college-educated parents compared with parents who do not have a college degree (Soenens & Vansteekiste, 2005). Identifying and labeling practices that are most needed for parental engagement was not the only purpose of this study, but is imperative so that such information can be made available to all parents who grapple with how to help their teens reach their goals. By identifying and labeling strategies that work for more effective parental involvement and including strategies that will help parents build upon their teens’ developmental needs and strengths
will support the education of adolescents. This will go a long way in supporting the
occupational attainment of middle-school-aged students from a broad range of
backgrounds who are trying out their burgeoning decision-making skills and autonomy.
Perception of greater parental autonomy support is related to higher grade point average,
competence, and, later, a strong identity for a vocation (Soenens & Vansteekiste, 2005).

For Hill and Tyson’s (2009) study, three types of studies were engaged. The first
was to determine whether firm conclusions can be reached from existing research. An
analysis was conducted on all of the existing research on the influence of parental
involvement in education and achievement in middle school to ascertain the types that
have the strongest impact on achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Second, because of the increasing diversity of American students and to ensure
that recommendations for involvement are sensitive to the needs of all families, the
existing literature on culturally based beliefs about parental engagement in education was
reviewed for the three largest ethnic racial groups in the United States. The groups
considered in the study were African Americans, Latinos, and European Americans (Hill
& Torres, 2010).

Thirdly, the voices of middle school students and their parents were heard to
identify the needs of adolescents from their perspectives and distinguish strategies that are
not included in existing theories (Hill, Tyson, Bromell, & Flint, 2008). Ultimately, the
focus was on the three largest ethnic groups in the United States: European Americans,
African Americans, and Latinos, which represent 75%, 12%, and 12% of the population
in the U.S., respectively (Greico & Cassidy, 2001). These numbers will have increased
during the years that have followed this research.
The goal of this meta-analysis was to gather and combine results across all existing studies to systematically determine whether and which types of parental involvement have been significantly and consistently associated with achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009). The benefit of a meta-analysis over a general review of the literature is to create a mathematical average of the strength of the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement, while taking into account the factors that influence the quality of the study. These factors include sample size, whether the sample was randomly selected and is representative of all middle school students, how parental involvement and achievement were measured, and the quality of the statistic used. These elements impact how much confidence can be placed on the findings of a study. The meta-analysis considers the characteristics of the study design and calculates the average strength of the relation between parental involvement and achievement and determines whether one type of parental involvement is strong enough to be meaningful. It measures whether one type of parental involvement has a stronger or more meaningful relationship than another (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Three types of parental involvement in education were measured in this meta-analysis: (a) home-based involvement, (b) school-based involvement, and (c) academic socialization. Since home-based and school-based involvement has been consistently highlighted in leading theories of parental involvement, they were closely scrutinized for strength of results (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Further, parental involvement strategies that may have increased importance for adolescents, such as communication of parental expectations for and the value of education, linking schoolwork to current events, fostering educational and occupational aspirations, discussing learning styles and
strategies, and making preparations and plans for the future, which is called academic socialization (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

A thorough search of the literature to identify relevant studies included extensive searches of the major databases that catalogue research study, such as PsychInfo, ERIC, Dissertation Abstracts International, and Sociological Abstracts. Also used in the study were hand searches of major research journals, scans of referenced lists of published papers for relevant articles, and the use of Social Science Citation Index to identify articles that cited seminal studies (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Five different studies were found that examined the relationship between parental involvement in education and achievement. Some studies provided multiple indicators of the relationship between parental involvement and achievement because studies often look at multiple types of involvement and multiple measures of achievement, such as grades and test scores. Across 50 known studies, a total of 127 correlations were found and used. A correlation is a numerical expression that indicates how strongly one factor relates to another (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Taking into account the sample size and the quality of the study combined across studies, an overall positive relationship between parental involvement in education and achievement for middle school was confirmed (Hill & Tyson, 2009). While school-based involvement had small but positive effects on achievement, home-based involvement was not associated with achievement. In contrast, academic socialization, defined as communicating expectations for and the value of education, linking schoolwork to current events (the real world), furthering education and occupational aspirations, discussing learning styles and strategies, and making preparations and plans for the future had the
strongest and most positive effect on achievement. Consequently, academic socialization emerged as a critical factor of parental involvement for middle school students (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

In as much as home-based involvement has been a key component of parental involvement, the relationship between home-based involvement and achievement was examined more carefully for the purpose of this study (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Among types of home-based involvement, homework help has been deemed controversial by Cooper (2007), who determined that homework help may either accelerate or interfere with achievement, depending on the motives, strategies, and parent-adolescent relationship. Homework help, when compared to other types of home-based involvement, may undermine achievement when it interferes with students’ autonomy, results in excessive parental pressure, or is not consistent with how materials are presented at school. Various other types of parental involvement in the home, such as making books and other educational materials available, providing educationally enriching activities, and taking adolescents to educational outlets, such as museums to enhance learning and achievement (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Reynolds & Gill, 1994).

Home involvement as homework help was associated with lower levels of achievement, while other types of home involvement were positively related to achievement. Inclusively, educationally enriching activities were related to achievement in a positive way. The clear conclusion of known research declares that parental involvement in education continues to be important in supporting achievement during middle school (Hong & Ho, 2005).
Specific requests from students for parental involvement are quite valuable in prompting parents’ active engagement in the learning processes as well as direct requests for involvement in certain assignments. Both types of requests are identified as strong predictors of involvement among parents of adolescents in school-based activities and home-based help with schoolwork (Green, Walton, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sanders, 2007). However, it remains clear that academic socialization has the strongest effect on achievement for middle school students. Academic socialization has been shown to build on adolescents’ developing autonomy, independent, and cognitive abilities and supports the internalization of achievement motivation and the ability to make decisions about their own academic pursuits (Cooper & Smalls, 2009; Hill, 2001; Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Assumptions are made about how students learn, the nature of the world for which students are being prepared, and sources of change and stability in children’s development. These identify the ages at which adolescents should be responsible or independent and enjoy the appropriate balance between parental and peer influences and the content and conflict to be grappled with as core components of growth and identity development. These are world views, socialized within culture systems, and are part of the natural order of a given culture (Goodnow, 2002). Although schools may strive to be culture free or color blind in the United States, it is not possible to be truly culture free or color blind (Pollock, 2004). The impact of differences between families and schools is poignant when examining incongruence between home and school culture for ethnic minorities. Here, the cultural worldviews described in the literature for African American and Latino families are reviewed (Cooper & Smalls, 2009; Hill & Torres, 2010).
When parents of 200 African American children were asked to rank their goals for their children, getting a good education and a good job were at the top of their list (Hill & Sprague, 1999). The primacy of education remains very important. Differences are often found in the learning styles of African American adolescents, who tend to value collaborative styles of learning, such as working together and sharing materials and information (Sankofa, Hurley, Allen, & Boykin, 2005). A culture value of expressiveness and movement means that this group will often focus on multiple activities and circulate among and learn simultaneously from other students. These students are more likely to thrive in a class where nonlinear learning activities are in place. These multiple pathways to learning are consistent with the value of interdependence and cooperative learning common to African American adolescents, who performed better and were rated more favorably for achievement (Sadkofa et al., 2005).

The Latino population in the United States is very diverse, and families have cultural ties with more than 30 countries on three continents. Similar to African Americans, Latino adolescents often place more value on collaborative learning and interdependence. Parents place a high value on social relationships and understanding oneself in relation to others. Some Latino parents find that the values that are encouraged and developed at school are unlike the values they wish to preserve at home. They are often uncomfortable supporting their rights as parents and accepting adolescents’ demanding individual rights as they have learned in school and from their peer groups (Hill & Torres, 2010).

A series of focus groups was conducted with Latino parents for the purpose of identifying the goals they have for their children and the importance of remaining
involved in their children’s education. Some Latino parents found that values learned at school and values that are encouraged at home often make it difficult to fully embrace the American school experience (Vogt, King, & King, 2004). Parental involvement and *familismo*, a culture value important to Hispanics, may be related to academic achievement (Neimeyer, Wong, & Westerhaus, 2009). Further, Latino children expressed positive feelings about their parents’ involvement with their schools. All parents were motivated for their children’s educational success and achievement (Vogt et al., 2004).

Hispanic youth are faced with the complex process of acculturation, which takes place when two cultures come into contact, causing change to each group. This is a great concern for Hispanic children’s parents (Berry, 1997; Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Because the population is young, the children will have the opportunity to change some of the discouraging statistics. Historically, research on Hispanic youth has focused on problem behaviors and school dropout (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 2005).

Parents and adolescents from all three ethnic groups—African American, European American, and Latino—identified specific strategies that they felt would be effective for middle school student achievement. Strategies mentioned were itemized and then examined by all groups, by more than one ethnic group, and by both parents and teens. Strategies were presented that were confirmed by all three ethnic groups. Not surprisingly, there were no strategies that were mentioned by both parents and teens from all three ethnic groups. However, five strategies remained consistent across parent focus groups from all three ethnicities: (a) have family discussions about schooling and goals for education; (b) communicate expectations for graduation and educational attainment; (c) use parents’ life experiences as examples of pathways to follow or avoid; (d) provide
extracurricular experiences with the dual goal of providing educational experiences and teaching time management skills; and (e) threaten involvement in a more intrusive manner if achievement declines (Morita, 2009; Hill & Taylor, 2004). These strategies reflect the academic socialization construct that is often missing from theories of parent involvement.

Although the decisions of this study are clear, there is one significant limitation in the existing literature and that is the gap in sufficient data to examine ethnic and cultural differences in beliefs concerning parental involvement in education. More research is needed on the types of parental involvement in which families from different ethnic groups engage and the relations between parental involvement and achievement across ethnic groups. Research (Suizzo & Soon, 2006) suggests that academic socialization practices operate differently on outcomes of adolescents in different ethnic groups. Parents naturally convey their educational beliefs and expectations for their children. Research is needed on the emotional and motivational components of home influence (Hong & Ho, 2005; Suizzo & Soon, 2006).

Parental involvement has different meanings and motivation in the process by which involvement shapes achievement. The field of parental involvement is in need of a valid, reliable, development appropriate measures of parental involvement during the middle school years. Parental involvement during these years may be better understood as the act of equipping adolescents to engage in school, achieve, and develop into independent, motivated lifelong learners (Hill et al., 2004). Communicating with parents can be subduing for teachers who are new to the profession, but having a clear knowledge
of what parents want to hear and finding productive interactions will assist educators in finding effective collaboration with parents (Freytag, 2001).


New pervasive technologies and their global spread belie the fact that leaders in education are still struggling with how to integrate information and communication technologies (ICT). The stories of these struggles emerged from case studies of schools in New South Wales that were currently in the process of ICT integration. The effects of the research projects Hayes (2005) spearheaded encountered difficulties associated with putting ICT into place and common and recurring themes emerged during interviews with principals.

According to Hayes, Yates, Alexander, Blackwell, Anderson, Harriman, and Dwyer (2005), educational leaders use help when making decisions about how to effectively bring ICT into their buildings as emphasis is placed on new technologies and their perceived potential to transform schools. Other research has made claims that technologies by themselves have little evidence of sustained impact on learning in schools (Hayes, 2005; Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006; Honey, Culp, & Carrigg, 2000).

During researchers’ (Hayes et al., 2005) third visit in 2003, several lines of inquiry were probed, such as a description of the classrooms where ICT was being integrated, trends and practices in online projects, and the influence of socioeconomic status on ICT use in the early years of schooling. Researches spent time in the classrooms talking with students and teachers separately about their use and understanding of what they had done and the form of ICT being used. Teachers had the opportunity to assist and explain
interpretations made through later interviews. School documents, such as policies in place, work sheets, and notes on type of equipment being used were gathered as part of the study. School decisions about how ICT would be used, and the physical location of the equipment were also of interest to the researchers (Hayes et al., 2005). The longitudinal aspect of the study allowed links to be made between visits for the goal was to ease the brevity of the visits and build familiarity through long-term acquaintance (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). The Hayes group (2005) aspired to look closely at particular schools and teachers and what they were doing for successful integration and implementation of ICT in New South Wales schools where the support and involvement of principals was a key factor. Researchers had drawn upon technology advisors around the state to identify some of those schools that were actively working to integrate ICT and made a selection based on the range of types and locations, as well as their socioeconomic diversity (Hayes, 2006).

The schools selected had reputations for innovative practice in technology but had not received additional or targeted funding for ICT. Interviews with the principals were wide-ranging and, for the most part, unstructured. Hayes (2005) encouraged principals to tell their personal stories of ICT and discuss issues that emerged with implementation. Interviews were taped, transcribed, and sections were considered for possible publication. Sustained contact allowed issues to be identified and traced, and as themes emerged future conversations were shaped (Hayes, 2006).

The secondary principals in the study described the integration of ICT as complex journeys from purchasing through working to enhance learning opportunities for students and teachers. The task had required highly developed product management skills, making
necessary structural modifications to buildings, and overseeing human resource management. According to Lingard, Hayes, Mills, and Christie (2003), where integration is concerned, emphasis is placed on shared leadership, which should be extended to include the collective benefits of shared expertise (Lingard et al., 2003). Within the study, Webber (2003) discussed educational organizations unable to respond adequately to new technologies and the risks involved in filling this gap. The initial plan to network the schools and computer coordination allocation were determined by the size of the schools and coordinators were selected, according to computer experience and interest in technology (Hayes et al., 2005).

All schools established networks that were stable and reliable for the most part, but networking requirements outstripped the capabilities of available technology and expertise. Principals reported problems with network hubs, servers, and proxy servers (Hayes et al., 2005). In spite of the difficulties they faced, schools began to show some confidence that their problems, like many others before them, would be fixed (Lingard et al., 2003). The networking did not always work and they were unable to use the Internet on some occasions because the system was “down.” There were expectations that all schools would establish a school-based network that allowed use of centrally provided service and applications, including e-mail and filtered Internet access. The schools in this study were functioning well below the industry standards that would be taken for granted in other sectors. These issues were only a part of the complex spectrum of design matters that extended beyond technology (Hayes, 2006).

Researchers (Hayes et al., 2005) began to feel that the focus was no longer on teaching and learning, but on school-based structures. Technology remained integral to
their vision for successful ICT outcomes as they looked forward to maintaining reliable and accessible technology and building the capacity of teachers to use technology for well-designed learning programs.

Hayes (2005) saw that the principals shared common difficulties such as installing wireless networking to overcome the need to lay cables in every building, getting by with telephone wire modems, and feeling discouraged about time spent on implementation of ICT. Other concerns were related to accommodating ICT into an already crowded curriculum and ever-changing local contexts. According to Hayes et al. (2005), gaps in ICT expertise were not easily filled and allocations placed limitations on the ability to select teachers based on perceived areas of need. Principals were assured that the ability to integrate technology rated below subject area knowledge in the hiring of new teachers and they began to understand why ICT had such little widespread impact on enhancing learning opportunities in the schools (Hayes, 2006). Time and these issues had conspired to subvert all the “flashy stuff” and the hopes for its integration but principals appeared committed to finding meaningful ways of integrating ICT (Hayes et al., 2005).

The Hayes (2005) group remained supportive during the long process, as participants made hard decisions but continued to push ahead with well-considered but basically unproven avenues. In relation to making ICT mandatory for all students, the principals realized in the earliest stages that they would have to remain immovable in their purpose. Teachers were concerned that they could not fit all students in, but would be forced to work things out equitably. It would be about finding a way to address many issues, such as gender, time schedules, and the fact that Aboriginal children were expected to shy away from technology. It was coming down to principals really pushing
for what was most important (Hayes et al., 2005). Identifying what was of greatest concern for the common goal was at the front of the larger scope of technology integration in all schools (Hayes, 2006).

Hayes (2006) reported that technology training programs for parents were put into place in the schools and adults were taken through the basics of what children would learn, what they would do with technology in the classroom, and what they could do at home to help their children. In spite of local variations, some common elements were adopted, such as a driver’s training course for students (Hayes et al., 2005). This self-paced, on-line resource filled a gap in curriculum resource syllabus documents. It also called attention to and heightened widespread uncertainty about how to integrate the technology into classrooms, curriculum, and schedules (Hayes, 2006).

The complicated process of mapping technology across the curriculum was developed to foster support for ICT by lining up with assessment and pedagogy to make meaning of ICT within schools’ operational practices (Hayes, 2006). Principals hoped that by mapping linking curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy, and then linking them to reporting, ICT could further effective teaching, learning, and appropriate assessment of those activities. While this became the plan, one principal continued to envision ICT as the catalyst of change creating opportunities for learning that their children had not had on a day-to-day basis (Hayes, 2006).

The group worked strategically to secure this within their resource limits, while none claimed to have significant progress in embedding ICT beyond compulsory subjects but hoped to achieve this within their resources in given time (Hayes et al., 2005). Technology as a visible and significant part of how people work and learn was part of
their organizational and administrative efforts. On the other hand, according to Hayes (2006), computer access at most schools was limited to designated computer labs (Hayes, 2006). Older students in the classes had more access to better computers with printers and cameras. Resources varied and were directly related to available funds. It came as no surprise to Hayes et al. (2005) when observations of classrooms in the study echoed previous research findings that new technologies in schools were hardly being used at all.

One principal related her English faculty as very skilled users of technology who were very unlikely to use ICT to teach skills that could be more effectively and adequately taught with the simplest forms of technology—namely, pen and paper. The important skills to English teachers are the critical literacies of processing information, writing, and interpreting different types of text, rather than putting an essay on Microsoft Word and being able to format it, which is a low-level skill (Hayes, 2006). Evidence suggests that teachers choose not to use ICT over what they deem more appropriate technologies and these decisions varied from subject to subject (Hayes, 2005).

There was general agreement that the curriculum of some subjects, such as graphic design, multimedia, and other technology-related subjects fit well into ICT (Lingard et al., 2003). This reflects the degree to which the curriculum documents ICT and appropriate outcomes, rather than the nature of the curriculum content. According to Hayes (2005), accomplished teachers in the study were showing greater potential to integrate ICT in more effective ways than less accomplished colleagues. A number of literacy strategies across the curriculum have been integrated in schools during this study, and although this has been explicit, they have rarely been effectively integrated. This is what sets the accomplished teacher apart from other teachers (Hayes, 2005). The former
will do a learning activity that is embedded in literacy. The less experienced teacher is more likely to do a literacy activity. Teachers who are accomplished and comfortable will integrate ICT into a meaningful activity, whether they are technology trained or not. This would be indicative of a rich repertoire of practice that would reflect high-level pedagogical and organizational skills and a commitment to enhancing students’ learning (Hayes, 2006). Integration of technology actually depends on the teaching staff and their skills, but there are some personal qualities that seem to make some people successful (Hayes et al., 2005). This reasoning is straightforward for teachers must be given structure and support with somebody who really knows technology, because their biggest fear is that they do not want to touch technology because they are not comfortable when using it (Hayes et al., 2005). Interviews with Hayes et al. (2005) brought teachers’ feelings to the surface and they expressed unwillingness to let go of full control of learning in the classroom and allow students to pick things up and go with them through technology. This would be very threatening for teachers who have been the providers of all information, and there will be risks to take in this endeavor (Hayes, 2006).

Hayes (2005) observed that teachers were mainly incorporating technology into their existing practices. While teachers utilized the Internet as an information source, very few were teaching how to critically search the Internet or exploring new avenues, such as remote experts, virtual communities, and primary sources, such as current affairs and weather information (Hayes et al., 2005). In spite of an apparent slowness of change, the longitudinal nature of the study allowed for tracking of some gradual change in thinking about knowledge, authority, and the purposes of schooling (Hayes et al., 2005). The projected focus would be on the goal of every student having some computer skills
by the time they left the school (Lingard et al., 2003). Technology can trigger a broad-based reassessment of schooling, as reflected in these shifts in teachers’ thinking. A form of analysis is grounded in the shifting context of education and the understanding of the changing nature of work, social formations, and even global economies. Schools may be dynamic interfaces between local conditions and global trends, although they maintain essentially modernistic forms (Hayes, 2006).

In relation to the integration of ICT, the principals and some teachers were drawing upon the skills sets of new knowledge such as teamwork, problem-solving, project management, resourcefulness, and constructing knowledge directly applicable to their school context. The type of knowledge each principal required was local, practical, context-bound, and specific, although the different sites shared some similarities and, by analogy, could be compared and contrasted (Hayes et al., 2005). According to Bernstein (2007), this type of knowledge, horizontal discourse, is associated with work-based, on-the-job knowledge for specific and immediate goals. This type of knowledge is segmented; it cannot be easily transferred across sites, which is an important implication for education systems (Alpar et al., 2001; Chappell, 2003).

Alpar et al. (2001) reported that the acquisition of ICT integration knowledge is dependent on strong social and professional networks between school leaders. As old problems are solved and new ones emerge, the high-use value knowledge is usually short-lived, so networks that circulate this type of knowledge should remain responsive to local needs. Many of the schools’ challenges will require local practical solutions (Hayes et al., 2005).
Hayes et al. (2005) noted that results in how schools adapt and integrate new technologies tend to focus on recognizable indicators across schools, such as the amount and form of ICT use. In this study, particular attention was paid to the background design issues that were unique to each site that required attention before other forms of ICT can take shape. It is important to recall that schools that represent a variety of locations in the public system were chosen because of their efforts in integrating ICT (Hayes, 2006).

Although broad variations in the technological expertise on each site include the number, availability, and functionality of computers and the professional development employed, all schools operate under similar funding and resource conditions (Hayes, 2006). Schools seemed to rely more on local resources and personal determination to address their issues, rather than systemic support.

Opportunities for regular dialogue among teachers to plan and to organize were only observed in one of the case study schools. When teachers spontaneously gather around a computer to share expertise, they generally lean how to integrate ICT in ad hoc ways. The depth of professional learning related to ICT in schools was dependent on the level of collective know-how held by school-based personnel (Hayes et al., 2005). An absence of resources and strategies for integrating ICT into specific subject areas was worsened by this situation. Increasing support for ICT integration in curriculum documents across 3 years of study varied across year levels and subjects (Hayes, 2006).

In another publication (Hayes, 2006), the researcher wrote that the goals of the study had been to examine and describe the ways in which teachers, in various settings, were utilizing ICT in their everyday practices to mediate students’ learning experiences. The findings pointed out that ICT is predominantly being integrated in ways that
supplement and support existing classroom practices. From these observations, it was believed that successful integration of ICT required fundamental shifts in the core activities of schools, and these shifts included new teaching (Hayes, 2005, 2006). According to Prensky (2001), educators have ignored the most fundamental cause of stationary achievement in today’s young people.

Students have changed radically and are no longer the people today’s schools were designed to teach. A great change has taken place, and there is absolutely no going back (Prensky, 2001). This singularity is the arrival of digital technology in the last decades of the 20th century. Students of today are native speakers of the digital language of e-mail, computers, and video games. The problem facing some digital immigrant instructors includes struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely different language (Prensky, 2001).

Constructing learning to engage the “digital natives” will require teachers to know what is significant in the lives of young people (Hayes, 2005). The choices made in terms of what digital content, exposed through what medium, using what device is paramount if ICT is to be motivating and engaging (Hayes, 2005; Sawyer, 2006). It is possible that the components of fresh technology may transform teaching and learning in the classroom of today (Hunter & Beveridge, 2006).
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on two-way communication between parents and schools through the use of technology and the middle school website, as well as more conventional methods. The readability level of the websites was determined by applying the Rudolph Flesch Reading Ease Formula, designed to pinpoint actual grade level of written text.

Readability is a measure of the ease with which a given passage of written text can be read and understood by website visitors. If a significant number of website visitors can read and understand the document, it may be generalized that other people with about the same reading level skills will read and understand it, too. This is the rationale behind using readability estimates. The reading ease level served as one variable for this study. Another variable that was examined in this study were the achievement scores of seventh grade MCT2 Language Arts students retrieved from the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) website. As an additional part of the study, middle school principals were interviewed to discuss parental involvement in school to home communication.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher presented an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Southern Mississippi for the purpose of acquiring written approval for the study (see Appendix A). The IRB approval was received by the researcher and the study was conducted. Websites for all public middle schools in Mississippi that have websites available were downloaded and a visual search was made to identify links that
are accessible to parents. First preferences were given to vision statements of introduction or welcome for website visitors. A textual document was selected for the purpose of determining the readability of the material. The document was downloaded into Microsoft Windows, and the Flesch Reading Ease Readability Formula was applied to the text to measure the grade level of the material. A reading level analysis was made for selected documents.

Seventh grade MCT2 Language Arts scores (see Appendix B) from 205 middle schools were used to look for a relationship between school websites’ readability level and student achievement. These test scores have been made available on the Mississippi Department of Education website and are publicly accessible. The reading grade level determined by the application of the Flesch Reading Ease Formula was used to make the determination.

Middle school principals across Mississippi were selected according to their schools’ position within the range of MCT2 scores from highest to lowest. Two principals were selected from each of the three ranges of scores. The six principals were contacted by telephone and an interview to take place at each of the six school sites was scheduled by principal and researcher. During the initial call, the researcher requested the use of a tape recorder during the interview. Each principal’s interest, participation, and level of involvement in school/parent communication currently in place for the positive impact of children was discussed during the interview protocol (see Appendix C) that took approximately one hour each.
Analysis of Data

An analysis of the data was conducted using SPSS for data entry, and results were reported by Pearson correlation coefficient. Quantitative variables for this study were MCT2 test scores and readability grade level of middle school websites.

The recorded conversations retrieved during principal interviews were transcribed by the researcher and examined for common themes. The qualitative data became part of the study. The identity of participants was protected for confidentiality, and all data remained in the possession of the researcher.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of the quantitative portion of the study was to examine the relationship between the Flesch Grade Level Readability of middle school websites in Mississippi and student achievement. The study was designed to identify actual readability of text by applying Flesch Formula to each middle school website’s home mission statement. The Mississippi Department of Education website was used to gather published data on participating students’ MCT2 scores.

Eight middle school principals were selected by their school’s position within the range of MCT2 Language Arts test scores from lowest to highest. They were individually interviewed by the researcher for the purpose of examining common themes. One additional administrator was interviewed as well.

A secondary purpose of the qualitative portion of the study was to gather information through the principal interview process and transcripts about principals’ interest, participation, and level of involvement with parents through electronic communication and other more traditional methods, such as planners, notes sent home, signed tests, and teacher conferences for student achievement. All data were coded to protect participants’ privacy and confidentiality.

This chapter introduces the descriptive statistics and statistical analyses for the study. From the statistical analyses, one can make inferences regarding whether or not a relationship exists between the selected independent and dependent variables. Both descriptive analyses were conducted using SPSS. The following research questions guided this study:
1. Is there a relationship between the readability level of Mississippi’s middle schools’ websites and seventh grade Language Arts scores on the MCT2?

2. Are Mississippi’s middle school principals involved in the use of school websites and other methods of parental involvement?

3. Is there a relationship between seventh grade Language Arts MCT2 scores and principals’ interest and involvement in the two-way communication of school and home?

Overview of Data Collection

A sample of 145 school districts in Mississippi was selected from a population of 156 school districts. One district having no middle school, one district having no middle school website, one district having no MCT2 scores available, agricultural school districts, an applied technology school district, and districts for the Arts, Music and Science schools were omitted from the study. This sample represented 96% of all public school districts in the state. Private middle schools in Mississippi were not included. A total of 205 middle schools from the 145 districts were made part of the study.

In order to link schools’ MCT2 scores with website readability, each school was assigned a number. Seventh grade middle school Language Arts MCT2 scores were publicly available on the Mississippi Department of Education website. Individual middle school websites were downloaded and a visual search was made to identify links that are accessible to parents. A textual document was downloaded into Microsoft Windows system, where the Flesch Reading Ease Formula is embedded. The formula was applied and used to measure the reading grade level of the written material and a reading level analysis was made. These scores were then used to determine the
relationship between student achievement and readability grade level of middle school websites.

In order to link scores to the respective schools, each school was assigned a number. These scores were entered into SPSS with the corresponding school code. These scores were then used to determine the relationship between student achievement and the readability grade level of middle school websites.

Middle school website readability levels were determined by using Microscope Windows and the Flesch Readability Formula. The levels were entered into SPSS using corresponding school numbers that were used to enter MCT2 scores.

Quantitative Findings

Descriptives

The average seventh grade Language Arts MCT2 2009-2010 overall score was 148.74 in a range of 140.3 to 160.5 (standard deviation 3.96). The value of the variable corresponding with the greatest frequency was 147. Advanced scores were made up of 3.22% of students tested, while the Proficient category included 44.9%, with Basic scores having 38%, and 14.2% of scores were in the Minimal range.

Overall, seventh grade females scored about 8 points higher on the Language arts MCT2 test than did males. When seventh grade MCT2 Mathematics scores were examined as a point of further interest, it was determined that females’ scores were again about 8 points higher.

Website readability grade levels ranged from 5.1 to 24.3, with an average of 11.7 and a median of 11.5. A determination was made that 93% of middle school websites had a readability grade level that was above seventh grade.
Collectively, students receiving free/reduced lunches scored 2.5 points below minority students.

Middle school enrollment numbers ranged from 110-1,353, with a mean of 573. Higher enrollment numbers were related to higher MCT2 scores. Nearly half of the schools had an enrollment of less than 500.

Other middle school variables, such as a home page administrative message of welcome to the district and open access to other schools in the district were treated as variables of interest and were explored as possible factors of student achievement, but no correlation was found.

**Statistical Analyses**

**MCT2 Readability Grade Level**

In regards to research question 1, the relationship between readability and Language Arts scores was not significant. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated examining the relationship between schools’ seventh grade Language Arts MCT2 scores and websites’ reading grade level. A nonsignificant correlation was found ($r(203) = .004, p = .949$). Readability of websites is not related to MCT2 scores.

**MCT2 Socioeconomic Status**

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the relationship between schools’ seventh grade MCT2 scores and free/reduced lunch percentages. The correlation found was significant ($r(203) = .207, p = .003$). There is a relationship between socioeconomic status and MCT2 scores. It was determined that higher website reading grade level is related to lower free/reduced percentages.
**MCT2 Enrollment**

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the relationship between seventh grade Language arts MCT2 scores and school enrollment numbers. A significant correlation was found \((r(203) = .234, p = .001)\). Enrollment is positively related to grades.

**MCT2 Minority**

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between percentage of minority enrollment in seventh grade and MCT2 Language Arts scores. A significant positive correlation was found \((r(203) = .373, p < .001)\), indicating a linear relationship between the two variables. Higher minority enrollment is related to higher MCT2 scores.

**MCT2 Password Protected Parent Link**

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between having a password protected parent link on school websites and MCT2 scores, and no significant correlation, \((r(203) = .069, p > .05)\) was found. A password protected password parent link is not related to achievement.

This chapter introduces the descriptive statistics and statistical analyses for the quantitative part of the study. Mean and standard deviations for group statistics are presented, and one can make inferences regarding whether or not a relationship exists between the selected dependent and independent variables. Both descriptive and statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS. The following research question was addressed in this part of the study: Is there a relationship between the readability level of
Mississippi’s middle school websites’ and seventh grade Language Arts scores on the MCT2?

In addition to the quantitative measures, eight middle school principals were selected by their school’s position within the range of MCT2 test scores from lowest to highest. They were individually interviewed by the researcher for the purpose of examining common themes of reported behavior. One additional administrator was interviewed as well.

This study examined two research questions that are closely related. The following analysis of principal interview transcripts (see Appendix D) was guided by the following inquiry:

1. Are Mississippi’s middle school principals involved in the use of school websites and other methods of involvement with parents?

2. Is there a relationship between seventh grade Language Arts MCT2 scores and principals’ level of interest, participation, and involvement in two-way school/home communication?

Synopsis of Interview Data

The following synopsis of interview data was explored for the purpose of making a determination about the interest and level of principals’ involvement with parents, as well as the effect on students’ achievement.

Principal 1

Martin Gayle is in his third year as principal in a K-8 elementary school with a total enrollment of more than 300. Advanced level students currently make up 10.2% of the seventh grade. Mr. Gayle stated, “I believe that families are the primary audience of
the school website.” He is also understanding of the fact that all parents do not have access to a computer in the home. Provisions are in place for parents to register for a password protected parent link for the purpose of going on the school website to look at grades and other information that pertains to their child. Additional assistance is available for those individuals who need training in using the website.

The school provides a planner for all students. This contains assignments, hall passes, daily activities, and other information needed during the school day. Teachers sign the planner daily in order to keep the parents up to date and fully informed. Notes continue to be sent home by the teachers as needed, and students have teacher e-mail addresses for student/teacher communication.

One family night is held during each semester and parents, teachers, and students are invited to come out for food and fun. Parents come out to eat with students, teachers, and principal and this may become a work night after the meal. They are invited to view what is going on in the school and are able to look at current practices in each of their children’s subjects. These events are in place to encourage positive involvement between parents, students, and school staff in an informal setting.

While Mr. Gayle does not hear accessibility concerns from parents, he is dealing with parents’ reports of bullying and harassing behavior on the website. He looks forward to continued improvements to further enhance school and parent involvement for students. At the beginning and end of the school year, open-ended surveys for parents are in place to address concerns and opinions about technology and other issues. “Collected data have been used for professional development and better service by way of the school website,” according to Gayle. This principal is hopeful of expanding the website
capabilities to include parents and students working together at home on Math, Science, Reading, and English practices. He also hopes to eventually have a means of measuring participation in the parent link. He also stressed the importance of interacting with middle school parents and continues to do so. The MCT2 seventh grade Language Arts for the year 2009-2010 were among higher scores in the state. This growth is 1.9 points up from last year’s scores. Students who scored within the Minimal and Basic range in 2009-2010 made up only 22.8% of seventh graders. Large numbers of both Proficient and Advanced students (77.2%) are highly indicative for achievement and growth.

**Principal 2**

In the same vein, Mr. Tom Collins, principal in a K-12 rural school with an enrollment above 350, is heavily involved in school to parent communication and, living in a small town, he knows most families. Again, all parents are assigned passwords for aforementioned active parent use and they can check on their child’s grades and other information at any time. While he does not consider his website to be top quality, Mr. Collins does have a technologist in his school, and he feels hopeful and pleased about present parent participation. Parents often bring Active Parent concerns and questions to him, and he remains helpful and appreciative. He expressed concerns that his parents are not inclined to keep up with the parent link for grades on a regular basis.

It is Mr. Collins’s belief that it takes parents and schools working together to make schools work. He hopes to have more time in the future for using the website to reach parents. Mr. Collins said from behind his old desk, “Responsibility for parent involvement has been placed on all shoulders in this school.”
An automatic telephone messenger system is in place in Mr. Collins’s school, and he is able to reach out in all areas to parents and other groups. These calls are made when progress reports go out, inclement weather is eminent, or other notifications are needed. Another method of parent communication is contact logs kept by all teachers. The reason for the contact made and the date are specified on the reports. These go to the principal and are kept on file in the event of a parent visit or conference when information may be needed. Also, teachers’ e-mail addresses have been made available for students’ use.

This young school leader gets a lot of feedback from parents about incidental matters and he is willing to assist them. A step-by-step instructional card for accessing the parent is also available for parents on demand. According to Mr. Collins, “Parent involvement in their child’s education will likely wane as they move up to higher grades, but it is still visible in seventh grade.” The MCT2 seventh grade Language Arts scores for 2009-2010 place his school in the mid-to-lower scores for middle schools in the study. This reflects a significant decrease of three points from 2008-2009 MCT2 scores. This could possibly be attributed to the high number (56.9%) of Proficient students tested in the school year 2008-2009.

Principal 3

In a neighboring county, a time-worn, brick building houses a Title I, K-8 school with an enrollment of 273. Classes are made up of 20-25 students, and no Advanced level students are reported within this population. In the positive words of the principal, Carl Williams, the school is trying to reach every parent. With password protected links to students’ grades and all class information, and with the help of a study management system now in place, parents are engaged in what is going on in all areas of their
children’s school. Parents who need help in learning to get into the website and/or parent link are encouraged to come in for assistance. Mr. Williams continued, “They are walked through the process as needed.” The automatic telephone messenger system is used to reach parents or groups of parents when there is a need for information or unusual events in the school system. This is another common means of communicating with parents and is used in many schools.

“This principal was uncomfortable with the publication of students’ pictures on the school website and chooses to stay away from this practice when possible,” Williams said. “But there are some students who can sign a video photography sign-off sheet to bypass this,” he added. However, events such as Thanksgiving activities and other things of interest to students and parents are available and students and parents are encouraged to stay informed. The school librarian is proficient in technology and is available and competent to assist when she is needed. In this, his third year as principal in this school, he has had three different websites and in his words, they remain very basic. He hopes to see the district improve the website in order to provide easy access into all schools in the district.

All special education students in Title I schools are required to receive instructional practice on using the school website. These parents and students were invited in for an evening in the computer lab. During this learning time they were informed of the meaning of inclusion, self-containment, personal instruction plans, and other details about what is going on in their lives. About 80% of parents were present.

Teachers are required to keep a parent contact log with details about each contact on the report. These are kept in the principal’s office in what he calls a “black” box with
the Title I paperwork until he has a need for them in dealing with parents. Face-to-face interactions with the parents are of great interest to Mr. Williams, who takes what he calls drop-off duty each morning in order to briefly see each parent and child as they are dropped off. He likes to catch parents at ball games and other school events and is very likely to meet a parent when he visits the neighborhood store. He is very enthusiastic about being out front with his students and parents each day.

This principal is very involved with his students and has made plans to take all students who scored above Basic on the state test to a nearby university basketball game on a Friday evening. He has also invited parents to attend, and tickets have been provided for the group. Out of 164 students, about 60 are eligible to attend the game. He is looking forward to the outing but does not expect a good parent turnout. This school is in a low-income area and many of his students are being raised by grandparents, and they will not attend. A caring Mr. Williams stated, “We have very caring parents who are unable to do more due to their jobs and lack of transportation.”

There are several eighth grade girls who work from 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. each school day in their efforts to move up to the ninth grade by December 2010. The district has purchased and provided an online class for their use to prepare them to move up. The principal hopes to see the district website improve school access for students and parents. His goal is to have a way to put a “counter” on each password protected link for parents in order to know how many times a parent has visited and sought class information for his or her child.

He wants to know that all parents are using the link for viewing grades and how often they are using it. This is of utmost importance to him. The MCT2 seventh grade
Language Arts scores for 2009-2010 reflect a slight increase for this year. However, they are ranked in the lower end of scores for the 205 middle schools in the study, and more than 59% of students tested below Proficient in the current year. No Advanced students were tested during the last 2 school years.

**Principal 4**

A Star middle school near the state line has an enrollment of more than 600 students, and 33.8% of this population scored at the Advanced level on recent state testing. According to the principal, Mrs. Mae Stone, she considers parents and students to be the primary audience for the school’s website. She also welcomes incoming families and anyone who may read about the school and want to research the district. She declared, “We take great pride in our award-winning school and our students.” This young, but seasoned principal is new to the area and her present school district.

A technologist in the district is available to all schools and staff. Mrs. Stone was responsible for more technology matters in her former position but is not held as responsible at this time. When asked what improvements or changes she would like to see on her school website she said, “I see the need for a school calendar, an updated calendar of events, such as the selling of homecoming t-shirts.” She would like parents to be kept informed of such news. When asked if she felt that parents in her school wanted to be involved in the school, she gave an affirmative reply, “Our parents do want to help out and they usually do.”

Parent communication is considered a joint responsibility in her setting, and she prefers three-way and four-way involvement, which includes administrators, teachers, parents, and child communication when possible. This method is put into place to keep
everyone on the same page, in Mrs. Stone’s words. Scheduled parent nights are held during the year, and one is to take place in each 9-week grading period. This is a combination school meeting and parent night out. This very high-achieving middle school also uses the school messenger telephone system that is similar to others mentioned in this study. Principals are able to send calls out to all groups of parents in the district or to particular groups as the need arises.

Other methods of parent involvement include the password protected link to the website that is designed for parents’ use and access to look at grades, their child’s attendance, their discipline, and even the school menu. Technology in place in this school district allows them to track the number of parent visits to any particular student’s class information. The class teacher, principal, and vice-principal also have access to this information. Regular school newsletters are sent out to parents, and all students carry a planner to be signed every night.

According to Mrs. Stone, this question is always asked by the principal during parent conferences, “Do you have Internet access at home to keep track of your child’s grades?” Only one parent told her that she could not get online to look at grades. This was not due to a handicap, but simple inability to use the computer. Parents who need assistance or practice in using the school website are welcome to come into the principal’s office and sit with her at her desk and receive training in going to the website and using the parent link for class information access. They are walked through the process when help is needed. This school earned MCT2 seventh grade Language Arts scores that place it near the top of all middle schools in the study. These scores report a
meaningful rise in achievement, with 81.3% of students performing in the Proficient and Advanced range, which is up from 2008-2009.

Principal 5

Similarly, Mrs. Tina Smith, principal of another large school, is heavily involved in communication with parents and has a school enrollment of almost 800 students. She considers the community as the main audience for the school website because of community members’ perceptions of the school. But, most important are the parents, as far as updating current events and the information they need. The password protected parent link is also available on the website. The district has purchased this program for allowing parents to log in using a password assigned to them for the purpose of looking at their children’s grades, attendance, assignments, and other information. Parents are required to visit the school office where they are assigned a parent Internet password requiring their signature. The principal was unsure about the district’s ability to count the number of visits to the parent link.

Parents are invited and encouraged to come to the school’s media center in order to learn to use the school website and visit their child’s classroom link. Every effort is made to ensure that all parents are able to go on the website and use their parent password for access. The librarian will work with them or other staff members will do the training. When an occasional parent cannot come to the school, someone will go to the home and bring them in. Parents will be walked through the process, using step-by-step directions and assisted by a teacher. If there is no computer in the home, parents are welcome to come in and use the media center.
Mrs. Smith requires everyone in her school to share responsibility for involvement with parents, and the teachers are held to very high standards in this regard. They are required to keep a log of parent contacts that is turned in to the principal’s office and for issues with a parent who has not been involved, backup is in hand. Everyone is expected to contact parents on a regular basis. School and parent conferences are scheduled during the school day as well as during the evening for the convenience of all involved.

The automatic telephone messenger system is used to inform parents of absentees after the day’s attendance has been taken. These are informative and are also used to contact all parents in the district or certain other groups. “A message will go out in the after-school hours if the student has been out for the entire day,” according to this principal. This system also makes announcements informing parents of school programs and upcoming holidays. Newsletters are also sent home with students for parent information and activities.

Individual grade team concepts are used in this school and they are held responsible for keeping parents informed and up to date by using various methods of communication. Telephoning parents has become the most challenging method of reaching out. A large number of parents purchase cell phones and after 30 days find themselves without service due to lack of payment. The school deals with it in the best way it can. The school also uses a large marque in front of the school for announcements and activities. This is another form of parent communication.

Mrs. Smith enjoys being physically involved in morning duty and likes to take car riders duty. She loves it when the parents roll down their windows and she can make a close, personal contact. This principal likes one-on-one and has an actual open-door
policy, which can be time consuming. Obviously, the easier way is to go to the phone and call a parent. She is not picky or choosey and welcomes any kind of parent contact she can get.

Another method of communicating is through a parent survey and meaningful parent feedback is often retrieved from these. This also serves as a federal requirement for Title I schools. Parents sign up to take the survey at Fall registration and questions are answered at school year’s end. Upon completion of the surveys, parents may offer opinions or ideas for better school involvement. Mrs. Smith was pleased to find 15 suggestions on the last survey, instead of pages and pages of suggestions, as in other years. She sees this as a very positive sign for communication methods in place.

Middle school parents often feel stuck in the middle because the level of communication is much higher during the elementary school years and is on the decline in middle grades. Many parents call the principal expressing their dismay about that. Parents and principal are free to discuss issues during the regular parent nights that take place in the school.

This school’s librarian and the gifted teacher are the technology “go-to” people, and they are in touch with the principal on a weekly basis and are always helpful. All other teachers receive technology help as it is needed. When asked about possible improvements or additions to the school website, Mrs. Smith expressed an interest in seeing updated teacher biographies on the school website and verbally reminded herself to update her own as soon as possible. “I would like to have the software used by elementary students to also be used in the middle schools because it would be familiar to students,” she said. The MCT2 seventh grade Language Arts scores for 2009-2010
indicate an increase of 3.1 over last year. This casts the students in the middle range of scores.

Principal 6

Another middle school in a large district with an enrollment of almost 500 students is strenuously pursuing involvement with all parents. The school specifically welcomes parents because of the informative style of the website. Along with that, community-minded people have resources and often help the school. Mrs. Lucy Dean, the principal, works in a city that has been viewed internationally and nationally as a great place to raise children. The school district website has gotten over one million hits in a short period of time. They receive many applications to come in and register in the middle school. She suggested, “You would benefit greatly by visiting the superintendent to get more data about the work being done by the public relations person who is heavily involved in school-to-home communication and works with all principals in the district.”

Mrs. Dean is principal in her home town and attended her present school as a child. She is partial to the area and loves living there. In her words, she is crazy about the area.

A recent disaster dealt a heavy blow to this small town, and many long-time residents’ homes were destroyed, resulting in the residents leaving the area. The state, county, and residents continue to work to bring industry in, restore or rebuild homes, and bring new life to a city that has received prestigious awards in regards to the quality of life here. She said, “I am very proud of the community as well as the elected city officials.”

As for responsibility for parent communication, the principal expects to be the overseer and to model expectations, whatever they may be. Staff teachers are required to
keep a log of contact with all parents that includes the reason for and the date of contact. These parent logs are turned in to the principal, who keeps them for an indefinite period of time. Within this district, parent letters, letters sent home, and other informative data are filed and kept in the office.

Another method of communication is the automated message system which is used for reporting absent students, emergencies, and many other things. It also allows instant messages to subgroups or all parents can be contacted. The principal is able to enter her message, listen to playback, and choose to whom it will be sent. She also has the option of sending it out in another language, such as Spanish. Mrs. Dean’s school has a high number of Spanish-speaking students enrolled. The phone system can also be used for announcements, such as homecoming week activities and other things of interest to parents and students. When a parent conference is scheduled and held, that is considered as another method of communication. When parents or teachers are out on the weekend and run into each other, that is also reported and considered as a parent contact. Records are well kept by the school and the district, and parents have been enlisted in this effort.

A good part of this principal’s day is spent on the phone with parents.

This principal enjoys personal contacts with parents. She makes a real effort to know all students and know where they are for assurance of their safety. That is quite an undertaking. If she encounters two students scuffling, she needs to know who they are. Mrs. Dean also likes parents to know that she has visited a classroom, so she is likely to write a note on the boards commending some good behavior going on during her visit. Children also enjoy seeing her messages. Many parents work and have access to a computer and are able to send e-mails to teachers when needed.
The principal has mixed feelings about the availability of computers in homes and parents’ use of the school website. With only one seventh and eighth grade school in the district, all students from the most affluent families to the child from the poorest home are enrolled in her school. While some homes have mixed technology, other homes do not even have one computer.

Parents who need help with technology or do now know how to use the school website are invited to come to the school’s library and obtain help in using the Internet. A password has been provided to all parents for using the school website to view their child’s grades, homework, upcoming assignments, and other information. Through this active parent link, all parents can be kept up-to-date about what is going on in the classrooms, and without leaving the home, parents can pay for school lunches on the website.

Computer assistance is always available and step-by-step instructions are given when needed. Mrs. Dean said, “We have a large pocket of parents who have no way to use the school website from their home, but they are always welcome to seek help at school.” Parents can also look at teachers’ lesson plans when they are submitted online. This is optional and teachers may or may not publish all plans. They are most often online for projects or when lessons or assignments carry over for more than one day.

In addition to the school librarian, the gifted teacher is skilled and is also available when parents or others need assistance in using the website or going online. Also, the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) president and co-president are available when help is needed. They are a “go-to” when Mrs. Dean needs technology changes or add-ons.
This district has a widespread plan to ensure that all parents are involved in their child’s education, and the Director of Services and the Superintendent come to the schools’ rescue when it becomes necessary. When a principal is repeatedly unable to reach a parent, it is turned over to the district and district employees visit the home and make the contact. During the last school year, 800 home visits were made because of no phones, no accurate addresses, or parents did not attend scheduled conferences. Mrs. Dean has made home visits herself. Typically, when she goes out it is due to a dire need, such as a death, other emergency, or difficult situation. Visits are usually made by district personnel.

Recently, the city put in a statute defining the boundaries of the school district. There are many instances of parents attempting to enroll their children who live in the neighboring town. While this principal and school love all children, they are mindful that their own students should benefit from district resources.

Mrs. Dean regrets that she does not have more time to spend on the school website because she enjoys reading parents’ e-mails, and she must do so periodically. She would like to see the quality of homecoming pictures online improved because they are not of good quality. She has recently returned from a long absence and must now prioritize her time. She looks forward to finding more time to give to the school website.

The MCT2 seventh grade Language Arts scores for 2009-2010 reflect a 1.5 point increase in achievement. The school is ranked within the overall mean of schools in the study. There was a decrease in the number of students testing at the Minimal range and a rise in Proficiency.
For a change of pace, a young, but experienced principal in an isolated, rural area leads a school with a seventh grade enrollment that is nearly 50. Bob Horne said, “Our numbers are down from last year and we have no explanation for this; also, many people are slowly leaving the area. However, he was excited about his school’s engagement in parental communication and wanted to talk about it. The password protected parent link is now being used by parents who have access to the Internet, but he believes that to be about 48% of his parents. Those parents who do not have Internet access are welcome to come to the school for assistance. However, he has been disappointed in the number of parents who respond to that invitation.

Other methods of communication used are the automated telephone system now in place for reaching out by phone to a group or all groups. He said, “I do not encourage students to e-mail teachers because I feel that it is being overdone.” Teachers are mainly responsible for reaching out to parents, but all in the school are involved in some way. This school holds a family night out for Math or Reading, and low parent attendance is often a deterrent to successful gatherings. Only a small number of the school’s parents go to the trouble to come out at night because they live in a rural area and it is difficult. Graded papers go out every Thursday, and that is a real advantage for parents who are out of reach and out of touch. Parents who have computers at home have dial-up Internet service and that often makes access difficult. Most parents depend on notes sent home with students and more traditional methods of communicating. He does not get much feedback from parents, but he does send an end-of-the-year parent survey to all parents.
The school is always concerned about how parents are feeling, and this works in a small way.

Because his students reside in a very low income, isolated area, it is difficult for patents who do not know how to step up and come forth. Mr. Horne and his teachers suffer from a collection of incorrect data or out-dated contact information. He often finds communication difficult and his hands are tied as phones are turned off and addresses changed. The school staff continues to reach out in all directions and hope that the situation will improve.

Mr. Horne felt that his school was in danger of being closed or taken over last year, but his students and school showed significant growth on the latest MCT2 tests. The scores increased four points about the 2008-2009 scores, and this moved the school into the higher end of the low scores. While the number of Minimal students remained about the same this year, there was a 50% decrease in students who tested Basic, accounting for obvious growth.

Principal 8

In the eastern part of the rural county, a small municipal school was changing classes with the ringing of the bell. The school campus is widespread and not easy to enter. Principal Vincent Parker was eager to talk about the school-to-home communication taking place in his school. He tells in some detail about the study sites on the school website. Parents who have access can visit the website and obtain help in the areas of study needed to help their children. More sites are being developed and should be up and running next year. He feels that he is ultimately responsible for school-to-home communication, and everyone in the school has a role to play.
Mr. Parker believes that most of his parents do use the website in some ways. Parents are given a password to allow them to access their child’s class information, including grades. An automated phone system is also in place for notifications and emergencies. Teachers are required to keep a parent contact log to encourage parents to stay in contact with the school. Records are kept that contain both positive and negative contacts with parents.

Mr. Parker said, “We make a real effort to reach parents when we are out in the community or at a game or school function.” It is important for his students’ parents to get to know him. He knows that his school uses a ladder of command to ensure that all efforts are being made to reach parents.

An open house night is held for parents to come in and meet other parents. It is often scheduled from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. to make it more practical for parents. “Parents who pick up a child after school will not have to make another trip,” he said, “and are more likely to be able to attend.” The district is in the process of updating the school website, and both Mr. Parker and the teachers are excited about that.

Administrator 1

For a change of pace, the Coordinator of Communication at the next middle school responded to the interview questions in the principal’s unexpected absence. Mrs. Betty Lake considers community parents as the primary audience for her school website. She also includes the entire community, businesses in the area, parents, students, churches, and anyone who is interested in education and the schools. Responsibility for parent communication and parent involvement is shared by everyone. While she is there
for the staff, no one person handles a situation. “I want everyone in the school involved,” she declared.

The school’s automated telephone messenger system is in place for almost instant notification of parents, groups of parents, and the community. After entering a phone message, it can be sent out to all parents or a specific group of parents. This is provided in order to keep parents informed of what is going on in the school. It is also used for emergency announcements, such as school closings or inclement weather. The link for parents to view grades and other information is password protected and can only be used by those who have a password account and access to the website.

“Parents who are not skilled in the use of technology or do not have access to a computer in the home are invited and encouraged to come to school where they will be taught to go to the Internet and into the school website,” she pointed out. Someone is always available to assist parents, and step-by-step instructions are provided until the parents are able to visit the classroom website on their own. Parents are welcome to visit the school media center at any time during the school day for further help or practice. If students are using the computers, arrangements will be made to make parents comfortable and provide assistance to them.

Because this is a middle school, she would like more parent communication by e-mail, but some continue to send notes or make a telephone call, and that is appreciated also. Parents who wish to visit the school for computer help will be picked up and driven to their child’s school and instructed in computer usage. There is a real effort in this school to dispel all barriers. A district computer director is currently in charge of
technology, so some change is expected to occur within the district for the upcoming school year.

As alternate methods of contacting parents, teachers send notes home as needed and a monthly school newsletter goes out to every home. Some parents still send notes to school, and that is acceptable.

In closing, Mrs. Lake expounded on the quality of her school’s parent-teacher association. With recent changes, students are now allowed to join and work with parents to support their school. This group is very active and motivated, and she reports that the parents within the group are involved with other parents and that is working out well for everyone. While the coordinator is there for them, the group has reached out to more parents than the coordinator alone would be able to.

School personnel have been successful in writing grants and the school was recently awarded a Target grant which they plan to use to pump funds back into the school for the children. She considers her group to be on the move. She believes that all parents do care, although some parents must work and that must come first. Overall, she feels that parents want to be involved. The MCT2 seventh grade Language Arts 2009-2010 scores were significantly up from last year’s scores, and this ranks the school midway in the lower scores. Current scores report a slight drop in both Minimal and Basic students, giving a rise in Proficient numbers, to account for this growth.

Research questions were put to each of the nine participants in the study, and the following responses were reported. When asked individually who they felt was the main audience for the middle schools’ websites, a large majority (seven of nine) responded that it was the parents.
Concerning which individual is considered to be mainly responsible for school-to-home communication, responses varied. Four principals believe that it should be a joint effort by all, while three principals expect teachers to lead the way, and two principals hold themselves responsible.

When asked to talk about the methods of communication with the students’ parents, the administrators brought the most used methods to the forefront. Methods are listed according to precedence.

1. Password protected parent links
2. Automated telephone message system (including one bilingual site)
3. Teacher log of parent contacts
4. E-mails
5. Notes sent home
6. Parent nights
7. Graded papers sent home
8. Student planners
9. Transportation for parents
10. Home visits

Additional Findings

Participants in the diverse group include three White males, two Black males, two White females, and two Black females. Two of the eight principals reported that parents’ access and use of the school website is poor to very poor in rural areas. Parents in these areas who have computers in the homes have dial-up service that will often limit use. The middle schools often deal with the same disadvantage. Seven of the principals are
more hopeful about the use of the parent link for looking at grades, homework, assignments, and other class information.

Middle school principals in the study are involved to highly involved in parent communication for student achievement and are working with parents who need help with access or do not have a computer in their home. These parents are being taught to use the school website and view grades and class information. They are being given step-by-step directions on viewing student grades and staying informed of their child or children’s progress. Those parents who do not have Internet accessibility at home can still visit the parent link regularly by coming to the school and asking for help. The importance of keeping up with grades and other information is being stressed by all principals in the study.

Only the Star school in the study has the technology to count parent visits to each password protected link for grades. The principal considers this information invaluable for parent-teacher conferences, when parent and principal information can be shared.

Two principals discussed the importance of PTA involvement in their schools. They share the belief that any circumstance that brings parents together is favorable for students’ achievement.

In the interest of future student achievement expectations, the seventh grade Language Arts MCT2 scores were examined in this study to look at possible growth over time. Data were gathered for the past 3 school years. The 2007-2008 MCT2 scores ranged from 156.9-137.3. When examining MCT2 scores for 2008-2009, which ranged from 158.0 to 137.5, a small increase was noted. MCT2 2009-2010 scores, ranging from 160.5 to 140.3, indicate substantial growth over the 3-year period.
Marzano (2000) reported that student achievement can be dramatically increased by improving the alignment of classroom instruction to district benchmarks and state standards. Assessment can only be thought about after the desired outcome has been reached (MDE, 2007). The desired student outcomes in seventh grade Language Arts for Mississippi were revised to increase the rigor of classroom instruction and to align state assessments as part of a grant in 2007 (MDE).

Assessment that is explicitly designed to promote learning is the single most powerful tool available for raising standards and empowering lifelong learning (MDE, 2007). Evidence of seventh grade Language Arts test scores reported in this study over a 3-year period could possibly be connected to assessment reform.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present findings from the study. Quantitative data gathered from the Mississippi Department of Education website was presented in the form of narrative descriptions and statistical tables. Data were organized according to research question 1 following descriptive statistics reported to examine the relationship between students’ achievement and readability of middle school websites in Mississippi. Qualitative data collected from principal interviews were presented in the form of transcripts. Data were organized in the form of common themes of behavior to address research questions 2 and 3.

A total of nine interviews to examine whether principals are involved with parents through electronic and other traditional methods of communication were scheduled and completed. Transcript data were analyzed to examine the relationship between principals’ school to home involvement and student achievement and common themes for
involvement. Chapter V presents the conclusions, implications, and recommendations of the study.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The purpose of the quantitative study was to examine the relationship between the reading level of middle school websites in this state and seventh grade Language Arts MCT2 scores. The study was designed to look at messages of welcome on middle school websites’ home page and measure the reading grade levels of the text. This was done by using Microsoft Windows to apply the Flesch Reading Ease Formula to the text. An electronic calculation was then made and the reading grade level was displayed on the screen. The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) was used to gather data on student achievement for middle schools’ seventh grade Language Arts MCT2 scores. This study reviewed the limited literature and research on middle school website accessibility and usability.

The Pearson correlation coefficient design utilized in this study incorporates statistical techniques that describe the degree of relationship among the variables in mathematical terms. Chapter IV introduced the descriptive statistics and statistical analyses for the study. Mean and standard deviations for group statistics were presented. From Chapter IV’s statistical analyses, one can make inferences regarding whether or not a relationship exists between the selected independent and dependent variables. School year 2009-2010 assessment results from the Mississippi Department of Education were used in the study.

Both descriptive and statistical test analyses were conducted using SPSS. The question “Is there a relationship between the reading grade level of the middle school
websites and the MCT2 seventh grade Language Arts scores?” was addressed in this quantitative section of the study.

The purpose of the qualitative study was to determine whether middle school principals are involved in the use of school websites and other methods of parental involvement. The second purpose was to determine whether a relationship exists between seventh grade Language Arts MCT2 scores and principals’ level of interest and involvement in the two-way communication of school and home. This was done by using transcribed interview data and examining it in the search for common themes of behavior concerning principal and parental involvement and the use of the school website.

The principal interviews were designed to explore the main audience for the website, school-to-home communication responsibility and methods, parent use of the website, and feedback about website accessibility. Principals’ level of contact with responsible technology person and possible changes for the school website were also discussed. All principals have an assigned person on site to assist them in their technology needs and practices. Plans for changes to the school websites were varied and unrelated.

The qualitative study reviewed the existing literature and research on principals’ behavior and involvement for student achievement. The interview questions were designed to determine the level of interest and involvement with parents for a possible alignment with student performance and growth. The results are discussed in this chapter.
Summary

This was a correlational study of Mississippi’s test scores and middle school websites’ readability conducted during the 2009-2010 school year. MCT2 Language Arts scores from 205 middle schools were used. Data of student achievement were obtained from the Mississippi Department of Education and were analyzed using descriptive and correlational statistics.

The qualitative assessment tool was made up of questions used to collect data about common themes of school-to-home communication being used by eight middle school principals and one administrator in the study.

Discussion

The relationship between student achievement in language arts, as measured by the MCT2, and the Flesch readability level of middle school websites was tested by research question 1. The descriptive findings by Pearson correlation coefficient revealed no relationship between scores and readability grade level of websites. This finding is neither supported nor disputed by existing literature (Bouffard, 2008; Parsad & Jones, 2005).

Middle school website readability grade levels ranged from 5.1 to 24.3, with an average of 11.7 and a median of 11.5. A determination was made that 93% of middle school websites had a readability grade level that was above seventh grade. Summarizing several studies that were done in the United States and Canada, the average adult reads at the eighth or ninth grade level. However, this same study found that one in five adults had a reading skill level of the fifth grade or below (NAEP, 2009).
Research supports the reasonable assumption that 20% of today’s parents are unable to read and access school websites to view grades and other class information (NAEP, 2009). Parental awareness of what takes place in the cognitive as well as the social environment of the classroom is important for the academic success and the well-being of children. The benefits of parental access to the password protected link for grades should not be understated in their importance.

During the process of collecting middle school website data, the researcher discovered that the middle school home page undergoes almost constant change. For a less-than-skilled reader, regular changes could impede accessibility to the website and the parent link. Practically, it would not hinder computer literate adults with a common purpose. In light of the inconsistent Web page, the readability of the website may be nonessential for student achievement.

According to interview transcripts, all principals in the study reported that they are heavily involved in the use of the school website and other methods for communication with parents. The account of principals’ involvement with webpage, website design and readability is an extension of increasing parent involvement in middle schools. Data reported that the password protected parent link for viewing grades is the primary common theme for parents’ involvement. Parental awareness of students’ performance and progress can be enhanced by regular visits to the school website for the purpose of looking at grades and other class information. While approximately one-third of middle school websites in the state do not have the parent link, the researcher makes the assumption that parental awareness does become a catalyst for student achievement.
Available literature (Davenport & Eibs, 2004; Weinstein, 2005; Merkley et al., 2006) and research support this assumption.

The second most common theme for parental involvement, discovered through the interviews with principals in the study, is a record of both positive and negative parent contacts made by the teacher during a specified period of time. Seven of the eight principals require teachers to develop Parent Logs and turn them in periodically. These are made up of valuable data to possibly enlighten parents during a conference or enhance parent and principal relationships in general. No obtainable literature or research support or debate this assumption.

The majority of principals in the study hold family gatherings in the schools for parent, teacher, student, and school interactions. The meetings are held for the purpose of enriching education for children and making parents comfortable in the school setting. The researcher would expect positive changes in student effort as a result of principals’ motivating evenings (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

Telephone messenger systems technology is used by all principals and one administrator in the study for instant communication to parents. Enlightened parents who are kept up to date about events and activities in the middle school are more likely to communicate and interact with the principal and teachers for the good of their children.

The opportunity to give a complete depiction of student effort, behavior, and performance is reserved for the classroom teacher. These personal interactions, spread out over time, become part of the academic growth of a student. Even frequent principal visits to the classrooms will not allow the principal to observe real, uninhibited classroom behavior, effort, and performance. This is a privilege that can only be enjoyed by the
classroom teacher. The assumption is that through principal and teacher joint cohesive efforts, such as proper use of Parent Logs, principals can have a direct influence on student achievement. Research data in this study supported this assumption.

Bodies of research on principals’ involvement have reported both indirect and direct effects on student achievement (Epstein, 2007; Marzano et al., 2005).

When 100% of principals in a particular study share these high visibility methods of school-to-home communication for parent involvement, it is reasonable to assume that a very large number of middle school principals who did not take part in this study share these common themes of communication with parents for student achievement. The recent, upward trend of Mississippi seventh grade Language Arts MCT2 scores over the last 3 school years (2007-2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010) will likely support this assumption. These findings imply that student achievement and principal-parent communication are parallel.

Limitations

The study was limited by the fact that correlation studies can suggest a relationship, but they cannot prove that one variable causes a change in another variable. An attempt was made to determine whether a relationship existed between website readability and student achievement. However, these relationships cannot make a determination that certain characteristics of a website cause changes in student achievement.

The study also made an attempt to determine whether principals are actively involved in communicating with parents, as reported, and whether this behavior can make an impact on student achievement on state testing. The relationships found in this study
can only be generalized to schools and principals within the state of Mississippi since only Mississippi student assessment scores were used in the study.

After website data were collected from school websites, certain characteristics of the websites were changed, causing uncertainty about the grade level determined by the researcher. Correlational results could have possibly been made unmeasurable by the change.

In addition, the principals’ involvement traits were measured from the perceptions of the researcher. A variety of factors, such as personal appearance, likes or dislikes, and integrity of the interview could have compromised recollections. Along the same vein, principals’ highest degrees earned were not a part of this study due to the researcher’s concerns in the interest of unbiased expectations and perceptions, as well as principal comfort.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Concerning recommendations for policy and practice, high stakes testing is at the forefront of today’s education. School leaders are under significant pressure to succeed and document the achievement of all students. Many initiatives for school reform include parent and student use of the school website for communication with schools as a probable means of student achievement. Based upon this study’s findings, several possibilities for future research are recommended.

Recommendations for Future Research

Because this study did not find a statistically significant relationship between website readability level and student achievement in Mississippi schools, it was not determined whether further research is needed. However, middle school website
designers, made aware of the predominantly high level of website readability, could enhance and improve accessibility by offering a lower grade level, more readable website for visitors.

There seems to be a real need for further research that expands upon the effects of principals’ reported level of involvement with parents and the direct effects on student achievement. Due to the isolation of the position, a barrier may be in place that limits real principal influence except through active principal collaboration with classroom teachers, which could filter down to parents and students. Personal interactions with students in an informal setting, such as parent nights and other school events, may possibly affect achievement. Research and literature have not been found to support or dispute this assumption.
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE REVIEW FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board
118 College Drive #5147
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Tel: 601.266.6820
Fax: 601.266.5519
www.usm.edu/irb

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

This project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 10102809
PROJECT TITLE: Relationship Between Readability of Middle School Websites and Seventh Grade Language Arts MCT2 Scores
PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 07/27/2010 to 07/27/2011
PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Anna Marlene Graves Pickard
COLLEGE/DEPARTMENT: College of Education & Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership & School Counseling
FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 10/20/2010 to 10/27/2011

[Signature]
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair

[Signature]
Date
APPENDIX B

MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN THE STUDY

001 Shivers Jr. High
002 Alcorn Central Middle
003 Kossuth Middle
004 Gloster Elementary
005 Liberty Elementary
006 Amory Middle
007 Ethel Attend. Cent.
008 Baldwyn Middle
009 Bay-Waveland MS
010 Ray Brooks School
011 Ashland Middle
012 Biloxi Junior High
013 R.H. Long Middle
014 Alexander Middle
015 Bruce High
016 Nichols Middle
017 J.Z. George High
018 Houlka Att. Cent
019 Ackerman High
020 Weir High School
021 Port Gibson Middle
022 Oakhurst Middle
023 W.A. Higgins Middle
024 D.M. Smith Middle
025 Margaret Green MS
026 Clinton Jr
027 Coahoma County JH
028 Coffeville Elem
029 Jefferson Middle
030 Lee Middle
031 Crystal Springs MS
032 Corinth JH
033 Carver Middle
034 DeSoto Central MS
035 Hernando Middle
036 Horn Lake Middle
037 Lake Cormorant MS
038 Olive Branch Middle
039 Southaven Middle
040 Hunter Middle
041 Durant School
042 Heidelberg Jr. High
043 Charleston Middle
044 Enterprise Middle
045 Hawkins Middle
046 N. Forrest High
047 Franklin Co Middle
048 George Co Middle
049 Leakesville Jr High
050 Coleman Middle
051 Solomon Middle
052 Greenwood Middle
053 Grenada Middle
054 Bayou Middle
055 Gulfport Central MS
056 Hancock Middle
057 D'Iberville Middle
058 North Gulfport 7th
059 W. Wortham Elem
060 N.R. Burger Middle
061 Hazelhurst Middle
062 Bolton-Edwards El
063 Byram Middle
064 Carver Middle
065 Utica Elem-Middle
066 Chambers Middle
067 J.J. McCain Middle
068 Mileston Elem
069 Houston Middle
070 Humphreys Jr. High
071 Robert L. Merritt MS
072 Dorsey Central
073 East Central Middle
074 St. Martin Middle
075 Vancleave Middle
076 Blackburn Middle
077 Brinkley Middle
078 Chastain Middle
079 Hardy Middle
080 Northwest Middle
081 Peeples Middle
082 Rowan Middle
083 Siwell Middle
084 Whitten Middle
085 Prentiss Jr. High
086 Jefferson Co Jr. High
087 Northeast Jones HS
088 South Jones High
089 West Jones High
090 Kemper County HS
091 Kosciusko Jr High
092 Lafayette Middle
093 Oak Grove Middle
094 Purvis Middle
095 Northeast Middle
096 Southeast Middle
097 Laurel Middle School
098 Rod Paige Middle
099 Carthage Jr High
100 South Leake High
101 Mooreville Middle
102 Plantersville Middle
103 Shannon Middle
104 Leflore County High
105 Leland Park School
106 Bogue Chitto
107 Enterprise
108 Lloyd Star
109 West Lincoln
110 Long Beach Middle
111 Eiland Middle
112 Caledonia Middle
113 New Hope Middle
114 West Lowndes Mid
115 Lumberton Elem
116 East Flora Middle
117 Madison Middle
118 NE Madison Middle
119 Olde Town Middle
120 West Marion High
121 Byhalia Middle
122 H.W. Byers
123 Denham Jr. High
124 George Carver Mid
125 Magnolia Middle
126 Hamilton High
127 Hatley High School
128 Smithville High
129 Montgomery Co HS
130 Magnolia Jr High
131 JFK Memorial High
132 Robert Lewis Middle
133 Neshoba Central MS
134 Nettleton Middle
135 New Albany Middle
136 Newton County HS
137 N.H. Pilate Middle
138 Shelby School
139 N. Panola Jr High
140 North Pike Middle
141 Faulkner High
142 B.F. Liddell Middle
143 Ocean Springs Mid
144 Okolona High
145 E. Oktibbeha Co. HS
146 W. Oktibbeha Co. HS
147 Oxford Middle
148 Gautier Middle
149 Wm. Colmer Middle
150 Pass Christian MS-
151 Pearl Upper School
152 Pearl River Cent-JH-
153 Runnelstown Elem
154 Petal Middle School
155 Philadelphia Middle
156 Picayune Jr. High
157 Pontotoc Jr. High
158 N. Pontotoc Middle
159 Poplarville Middle
160 Jumpertown High
161 Thrasher High
162 Wheeler High
163 Quitman High School
164 Quitman Co Middle
165 Florence Middle
166 Northwest Rankin MS
167 Brandon Middle
168 Richton High School
169 Bettye Mae Jack MS
170 Lake Middle
171 Senatobia Jr-Sr High
172 McEvans School
173 Magee Middle
174 Mendenhall Jr. High
175 Raleigh High School
176 Taylorsville High
177 South Delta Middle
178 Batesville Jr High
179 South Pike Jr. High
180 Ripley Middle
181 Armstrong Middle
182 Stone Middle
183 Moorhead Middle
184 Ruleville Middle
185 Independence Mid
186 Iuka Middle
187 Tunica Middle
188 Tupelo Middle
189 Vicksburg Jr. High
190 Warren-Central
191 Dexter High
192 Salem High School
193 Tylertown High
194 Water Valley High
195 Waynesboro Middle
196 East Webster High
197 Bay Springs Middle
198 Fifth Street Middle
199 W. Tallahatchie High
200 O'Bannon High
201 Riverside High
202 William Winans MS
203 Winona Secondary
204 B.E. Woolfolk Jr Hi
205 Yazoo Cty. Jr. Hi
APPENDIX C

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Principal 1- Martin Gayle

1-Who do you feel is your main audience for your middle school website?

Well, in my opinion, I think, ah, you know, families that are fortunate to have the Internet are going to be the most prominent users, although here we pushed our site because our grades are posted, ah, through Active Parent so, I mean, that’s a form of using school web information and of course, that information is private to that particular parent and they will have their own code and setting for their student (password protected)? Password protected, but here again, we emphasize that in all of our parent meetings and we do a ton of meetings with parents here and ah, there are some routine things that we emphasize and using the net, using the state, using our school site and accessing grades is one of the most important things that we bring to the parents’ attention here.

2-Who is mainly responsible for school to home communication? Discuss

I actually I, I think it is a partnership between the school as well as the parent. I, as an instructional leader, as a principal, emphasize that we are truly partners in every child’s education and the parent, as well as the school, and it is our job to communicate with one another effectively for the student to be successful. I think that makes the job easier because we only talk about success here and that’s the most important element, the student understanding with the school, the student, parent and school working together.

3-Tell me about methods of communication to your students’ parents.

Well, we have, ah, we still use some of those, ah, I guess note count methods. But, what we have here is, every student here has a planner, and every day teachers initial or sign the planners. (They carry them?) Each student here carries a planner. We purchase a planner for every student here and the planner has a lot of things in it. Their hall pass, it’s just their every day, ah, you know, activity is done in the planner so they can be familiar with it as well as we communicate to the parents to be familiar what’s in the planner, to really keep that day to day track of their students.

(That’s a good one. What is another one?) Of course, the Internet is another way to drive that, I mean, if they want to email teachers, you know, all that teacher information is on there. Ah, ah, here again, the grades are on there, we have activities that are going on in the school and they are on there and so they can stay in tune with what is going on within the school and the school district. Also my teachers keep up with each time they contact a parent and note the reason for the call. These come to me and are used for conferences. We call these our parent log of communication.
(Are turnouts pretty good for those?) Yeah, well, that is something that we are working on. I think that is something in every school that should be a continuant. We do a lot of things here to include families. We do what you call family nights. We have one, actually this Thursday. Ah, we do at least one family night a nine weeks. That’s where we invite parents out to view what we are doing here at school and we feed ‘em. I mean we feed everybody after we go through some of the things, working on homework, working on Science, working on Math, some of the issues that we want parents to be aware of. That is one way to get them out, to take care of some of those things.

4-What is your impression of parents’ use of school website?

You know, well, the only thing I find on the school web sites are, you know, things we are dealing with like bullying or harassing behavior, other than that, the purpose of school is really, it’s a good thing for us. We are in the process of working very hard to make our website more interactive where students can go on with their parents and they can work on some Math, English or Reading kinds of things. (So you mean to involve parents too?) Absolutely. We do put links, we do have links on there so students and parents, the parents can work with students on things at home with their students on Math, Reading, English and Science activities, which is very important to us.

5-Discuss any feedback from parents about accessibility and use of school website.

No, we are not hearing any concerns about accessibility. We actually do a community or parent survey and we include as a part of that survey technology kinds of things so we can get instant feedback. So we have some guided technology questions on there and they can give us multiple choice of where they feel like we are, if we’re successful or if we’re not successful and there is something we need to work on and then, we have an open ended side of that where they can type in a statement. And we analyze each of those particular surveys to help develop better service by way of the internet.

(Would this be after they have been online and are going off?) Yes, actually what we do is a beginning and end of the year survey and we get it out to our parents that we have a survey available and we want their instant feedback to better improve services that we have to offer. And so we take that information and we develop a lot of our professional development or community around their opinion and that is one way we get their opinion about our technology and the internet.

6-How often do you personally communicate with the person who does your website?

Every day. (Is that someone in your.) Someone is assigned to me in this building. I have a, we have a, in every one of our buildings here in our district we have a technology person assigned to our building. That person has a place in that building and I know how to access and get to that person quickly for better service.
7-How might you make changes to school website for better parent involvement?

Well, I do have an opinion. Absolutely. We are currently working on that. I kind of mentioned that earlier in my earlier statement. We’re having more interactive Math, Reading English and Science kinds of things that parents can actually go in and engage their students and help them and have some type of method of measurement, a formal measurement, of how well they’re doing with the system they can use at home. I’ve seen on some other sites that they have things like this, you know, so we are working hard to improve our sites and do some of these things so they can work at home on the sites at home, to be more interactive at home. *(Do you mean that the child is sitting with the parent and working?)* Absolutely, absolutely.

Principal 2 - Tom Collins

1-Who do you feel is your main audience for your middle school website?

The principal began by saying that his parents are his main audience, but his school site is not really up and running in the way he hopes it will be in the future. His technology person is also a principal and has limited time to work on it. He is accessible and they hope to make things better for the website in the future. *(At this time the researcher noticed that the recorder was not running, so we started over.)*

It’s just that our tech guy, ah, that does that is also a principal. And, ah, he also has to keep up with all the computers and make sure that they’re going and networking and so along with trying to build our websites, and his day is pretty full. So where we can, we try to fill in and do some stuff ourself on the web site. We’re working to make it better. So, you know what now, we just don’t spend a whole lot of timewise on the website because we don’t have the time or personnel to so that. *(It’s not quite where you want it?)* No, ma’am.

2-Who is mainly responsible for school to home communication? Discuss.

Ah, I think, honestly I want it to be the whole school and not necessarily one person or just teachers. I know our teachers, I think we do a pretty good job of communicating with the parents. I make our teachers every month fill out a parent log where they talk with every parent. They have to turn that in to me, telling me who the parent was, the child’s name, what was the reason of why they talked to them. They have to turn that in to me and that is just something I picked up from an administrator I worked for at one time.

It just kind of gives me an idea, when they bring them to me, or we communicate with the parents. Sometimes we use that for an advantage when a parent comes in here, and says, “look, you know my child’s got a bad grade and the teacher hasn’t hasn’t told me anything about it.” so I will pull up and say, yes, ma’am, she talked to you, on what occasion and she tried to get in touch with you. And so it helps us and we are a Title 1 school and we’ve got to have that kind of involvement and so we are able to document
some of the stuff we do. Ah, I talk to, as an administrator, I talk to a lot of parents a day myself and so I think we do a pretty good job as a whole school trying to communicate to the parents. (and you must know all of them by now?) I know a lot of them, I don’t know all of them, but I know a whole lot of them.

3-Tell me about methods of communication to your students’ parents.

We have an Alert Now system that we have in place. Say, if we need to send out, say we’ve got something, we’ve got a fundraiser coming up, we can make a voice recording of it and it calls every parent or we can set it to call every student in the county if it is something district wide, or we can set it to or we can kinda narrow it down just for our school or we can plug in just what number we needed to call and we can do that just for teachers if need be.

If we have bad weather coming up and we are going to close the school we send it out that night, we send it out to every parent in the county and we try to cover ourselves like that and we do some things. You know, it could be, we send one out every time we have a progress report and they can’t say and we send out progress reports every two weeks. Every time I get a phone call, saying, this is what’s up.

A lot of stuff, like if their child is absent, they get a call twice a day, one in the morning, one in the evening. And if a child was absent today, or they can just verify and if something comes up with discipline, they get the phone call. (Planner?) Ah, no, a lot of stuff we do we through ourselves, we have Active Parent and so they have to get an account and they can check child’s grades at any time.

Ours is called Active Parent and we put all lesson plans on there so parents have access to this, our lesson plans, the teacher lesson plans, so if their child is going to be out, they can put on there and say, look, this is what the homework was we did today. This is what we had in Science today. You know, kids are not going to always tell her they have homework, so they have access to pull that up say, yes, you do have homework. Only thing that we don’t, basically, when I say lesson plans, they have access to lesson plans, it just tells them what was covered and what homework is due.

4-What is your impression about parents’ use of school website?

Oh yes, we have a lot of parents that are using our website. And so, I really push as an administrator, to keep my teachers on top of when they put their grades in, make sure we put our grades in every week, make sure we’ve got each week of lessons on there for parents to see them. Education is not only for us, the parents have to be involved too. We only see them, that is, teachers see them for 50 minutes a day. That is not a whole lot of time. Hopefully, if we can get Mom and Dad on our side too, and keeping them up to date, with what is going on we can we can pull through.
5-Discuss any feedback from parents about accessibility and use of school website.

Yes, I do because I receive a lot of phone calls on some Active Parent stuff questions, like a teacher may forget to put a grade in this week. And they call us, and ask us, can you see if that was the last grade put in there this week? Can you see if that was the correct homework? I don’t mind doing that because it takes the parents to make this whole system work. Yes, we get a lot of feedback. You know, every day we get someone either with access to it or questioning it (Have you heard from a lot of parents that they are not able to get in?) No. We get a lot of feedback from them. They call us and ask if we can see if that was the last grade that was put on (Complaints about inaccessibility)?

No, because if they ask us, we have cards we made out and they have a step by step thing that we have made up here is the website you go to and here’s what you do step by step.

6-How often do you personally communicate with the person who does your website?

I, I, and he does a great job. He is very accessible. I can pick him up, pick the phone up at any time. I can call and tell Mr. XXX I need this, and he is there. I can call him on his cell phone and ask him, I can call him right now and he will help me out.

7-How might you make changes to school website for better parent communication?

Well, since ours is in the rough draft. I guess you could say, there’s a lot of things I would like to do. I would like to have more time, personnel wise, to spend more time to keep it updated, but we do a lot of other stuff, other than our website through our Active Parent, through our work now. I don’t know that we would be any better if we did have our website that was, I don’t know if we would have as much traffic on it as we would like anyway because we do so much other stuff. I hope, you know no matter what you do, it seems like it is never enough. With what we have to work with I think we do a great job.

Plus, a lot of our parents have teachers’ email address and they communicate that way. Some of them may be at work and they can shoot an email back and forth. We have some parents that are very understanding and it seems like the older the child gets, the student gets, the less parent involvement you get.

Right now, we are kind of in the middle stages of where we’re at. We’re not at the high school level and we’re not elementary we’re not high school. I know that once you get to the high school level, the only time you’re going to hear from the parent is when there is an issue. But, our seventh grade, we have a lot of involvement with our parents calling us and stuff like that.
Principal 3 - Carl Williams

1-Who do you feel is your main audience for your middle school website?

With our website? We’re trying to track every parent. Ah, with our Sam system, that’s student management system, their Active Parent side of it is linked to our website, so if they will get on our website, they will have, ah, our teachers have a site and the parents have a site. The teachers go through our website to get to the email or, program, AR program and then parents can see the school calendar, the district calendar and any of the activities, football.

In the Active Parent side, they have to sign up for that. The secretary sends them to the central office and they assign them a password, log in, parents can look at grades, discipline, attendance, anything teachers put into the system or I put into the system, the parents are allowed to see that. Within the website, they’re just links there, but you know, like the parents, they can actually click on email but if don’t know the teachers’ they can’t get in because all that is protected. And we try to get every parent to actually try to go on there and look at it. It is a very basic one and this is my third year here and this is our third webpage. We are trying to go with a newer one.

I don’t want them to see, I don’t want to say too much. If you put too much on a website, I want them to say, okay, what’s going on in school and stuff like that. Things we have posted, they can tell, like when the Thanksgiving holidays are because we have got that posted. Then they can look at their grades. Other than that, a lot of that hoopla pictures and stuff like that we’re not into. We’ve got a video photography sign off sheet. Some kids can’t be photographed and I don’t want to be taking photographs and putting them on the internet and other people taking my photos and moving them. I’m kind of leery of posting pictures on the website.

2-Who is mainly responsible for school to home communication? Discuss.

Right now, mainly the teachers. Often they are the first one to communicate with the parents, with us being a Title school, we have forms here that is a monthly report that every teacher has to fill in and they have to turn in every month and I’ll end up with 8 of those per teacher and they do a running total for every month, which is strictly a Title I. I’m trying to find one. That right there tells me she contacted every one of these kids. She made a phone call just last month, she made 7 phone calls. They’re around no more than about 20, 25 per classroom. Total enrollment is 271, kindergarten through 8th grade. I see this in some other schools, when Mama says, nobody told me, Here is a 3rd grade and right, here is a 5th grade and this took a sheet and a half. It’s very strange, as a junior high teacher, you don’t see much communication in junior high.

3-Tell me about methods of communication to your students’ parents.

The main communication is to the parent from the teachers first and then we do a follow up parent log. In the school district, it’s the teachers. They will do one and keep
up with it for a month. I will end up with 8 of those per teacher and we put it in a, we call it the black box and it goes with the Title I program box. I do communicate with parents. I try to catch them at ball games where it is not a stressful contact. A lot of my parents are local, I can run up to the store and run into a parent of mine. We also have, I think its AIM that tells me she got in touch with every parent.

Through our student information, I can just type in a message and it goes to a computer system and it calls every parent or I can pick out which parent I want it to go to. Here is a report of automated parent phone call or I can figure out which parent I want it to go to for different things. We like a lot communication better. I go out there to the pick up line and at least try to make it every week. And it’s the same parents who pick them up. That’s, I can just go out there and say, hey, how’s it going? And they have got to get out of there. They can’t chit chat with me, they have to go. Outside of quote, being principal, it’s a person out there.

4-What is your impression about parents’ use of school website?

Teachers are taking care of theirs? Yes, and we do send letters home about the Thanksgiving lunch next Wednesday. Eighth graders are participating in a Veterans parade tomorrow and we have to get a form signed. I am taking my proficient and advanced kids to a basketball game at XXX next Friday. We have invited parents to go with us. (What is your number?) Right now we are at about 60 and that is just 4th grade to 6th grade.

(Will you have a good turnout, and will parents go?) Probably not, we are in a low income school. Grandparents raising kids and they are working during that time and they don’t have the transportation. (Will the school get a discount?) The kids go free, this is ah, XXX is putting it on and they are playing at noon instead of 5 or 6 o’clock game. I talked to the coach the other day and he said, yes, bring the parents too. We’ve got 154 in 4th through 8th grade are eligible for that trip. I am going to say 60 are eligible to go. Sixty out of 154 kids scored proficient or advanced.

5-Discuss any feedback from parents about accessibility and use of school website.

We know some of them use but I cannot tell you how many are using. There is no way of checking it. The thing is, I would like to put a clicker on that, a counter there and know how many go through Active Parent a day. We’re not getting that. We do send a survey home once a year, because of Title1 on how is communication going? (Do they go to the teacher web?) I just don’t get it, feedback on do they look at website. We do have a great number of things, this day and time you would think most people have it. Maybe 48% have internet access at home and we let the kids do as much of their tech here.

(If a parent comes to you and you and says they cannot get on line, do you have someone here who can help them?) Somebody would, but we haven’t got a lot of it. Our special Ed program was required or mandated by the state that the parents of kids with an IEP
have to do something on line and we actually invited them in at night and went to a lab and walked them through it. We talked to them about what inclusion meant, what self-contained meant, what their IEP meant, and we got more in detail with them about what is taking place. We got about 80% of parents. And then we got 100% of them. The ones we didn’t get we called them and it just so happened that on the phone. We ended up getting 100% of our IEP kids. *(So, you are not really hearing that they cannot get in?)* We are not hearing if they are using the webpage or not.

On Active parent, if just on Active Parent, I would like to know how many parents get that. I do get that a parent will call and say there is an empty spot and I will go to the teacher. Teachers are required to put grades in every 5 days so the parents can stay updated and it helps me watch the teacher.

Most of our teachers do most of the PTA. Before I took this job, due to the economic status of our parents, a lot of them can’t get back up here. We try to keep them informed of what we are doing. Last Friday we contacted about 12 parents and 8 of them and they said they will help and now they have to find a way up here. We have overlying-caring parents but its just between working and their money. They can’t get off and they are going to work before they get off. They cannot get as involved as they want to but making a phone call to them and they are overly interested with what is going on here.

**6-How often do you personally communicate with the person who does your website?**

The librarian does. She will take my Monday memos and say, “This needs to go to the webpage.” I very rarely look at the webpage but I have a shortcut that throws it in and links it in. The teachers, I don’t think they have a Sam shortcut, but I have a shortcut on my computer. So I don’t even go to the website anymore. Just for me, I link mine straight. I don’t have to go to web anymore. So, I don’t know what she is putting on the computer, I just give her a note and change our schedule. *(Can you get to her everyday?)* Oh, yes.

**7-How might you make changes to school website for better parent communication?**

On the website, more educational links are put on there. We have a couple of things we can use at home. More we have purchased and last year we used Brain Child and these kids need to be using. We send paper home with a parent instruction page and they can go home and complete that. We have a few kids on Play Dough, which is on line courses. I have two 8th graders trying to get to ninth grade before Christmas. They’re working on it here from 7:30 to 3:00 every day. There is no link on our computer, things I would rather have. We teach them, What’s a power point point, for instance. I like math counts for the lower kids The parent should ‘t have to say, “What is that web?” They should be able to go to district website, the district where we and all five schools are set up and can clue on our specific school. Then they can click on specific educational sites. I have not heard them come up with a way for this yet.
Principal 4 - Mae Stone

1-Who do you feel is your main audience for your middle school website?

My experience has been with the school I left, which I was there for 12 years. I’ve been here 3 months. The parents. (Would you elaborate?) Why I want the parents? Well, parents and students because of the information on there. Incoming families to the area may read about us and anyone who wants to research our school district. We are proud of our school. (So am I.)

2-Who is mainly responsible for school to home communication? Discuss.

I think it is a joint responsibility. Joint responsibility means a three way, more like a four way I think. So it is kind of like a 4 way, when you talk about administration, teacher, parent and child, everything going on, everyone on the same page.

3-Tell me about methods of communication to your students’ parents.

We do use the school website. We use, we have something like a school messenger, a phone system. We do have a school newsletter we send out also. We’ve had one meeting and we will have 4 this year, kind of a parent night out. And they do have a planner they have to sign it every single night. To be able to see grades, they have access to look at grades, their attendance, their discipline, ah, their school lunch at the cafeteria and a lot of stuff they can see and they have access to that. Ours is called Grade Book. Teachers keep track of parent contacts and note positive or negative and send these in each month for office use.

4-What is your impression about parents’ use of school website?

Our technology tracks that. They can tell you how many hits they have a day on each student. (So you know how many parents are looking?) Yes, we do and they do and our teachers have access of a child and how many times their info has been looked at and our teachers have access to see. We hired a man who wrote our program.

5-Discuss any feedback from parents about accessibility and use of school website.

Pretty much, and when we have parent conferences, that is one of the questions I always ask. “Do you have internet access at home to keep track of your child’s grades?” And most of them, I have only had one parent who told me they could not get on. I have not heard about a handicap, but not being able to. They come into my office and use my computer. We sit here at my computer and get them on the first time. I’m walking them through.
6-How often do you personally communicate with the person who does your website?

Yes, this person is in the district, the central office, and he is available to all of us. It’s not part of my job. Here, I don’t do that very much, at the other school where I was, I was responsible for a lot of that. But here I am not responsible for it. (Enrollment?) About 650. We are around 650 right now. I say that. That’s give or take 10, 15, or 20.

7-How might you make changes to the school website for better parent involvement?

I would have a calendar, an updated calendar of events. For instance I have had parents tell me, “I didn’t know you were selling homecoming t-shirts.” I didn’t know you were doing this or that. (Do you feel that you are in a school where parents are and want to be involved?) I think yes. (When you call on them, are they able to help?) Yes they do. (Are you a Title I school?) Yes, we are.

Principal 5 – Tina Smith

1-Who do you feel is your main audience for your middle school website?

I don’t think I understand. Obviously the community, because of the perceptions of the school; number two, and most important; our parents, as far as updating the current events and the information they need. Also, as well, what the district has purchased, the software necessary for them to go in and look at grades, attendance, assignments, etc. (Is it the password protected program?) Yes, and if they choose to hit on that icon on the main website, they will have what we a call a parent internet password that comes from the office. They have to come into the office and get a password and sign up for this. (Do you have a way to count the parents’ hits on the website?)

Ah, the district does and you know, when you ask that question, I’m not quite sure that it does that for individual’s site. The district has down here….. (taking a look). No, it doesn’t. You know, they may be able to do that, from our technology department and be able to discriminate about what sites are being activated. But I know that is for the district, if it is there.

2-Who is mainly responsible for school to home communication? Discuss.

Oh, gosh. That’s going to be everyone, the administrators, the counselors, the librarian, teachers, you know, we hold our teachers to a higher standard they have to turn in their parent contacts every month. It’s a log and they have to turn it on and, if we have issues with a parent not being involved, we have some backup. If we are having attendance issues or other issues we turn to the log. So when, so, sometimes we have them and sometimes we don’t. We expect everyone to contact parents and we have our parent conferences during the school day as well as the afternoons.
3-Tell me about methods of communication to your students’ parents.

We have a school messenger system that we’ve been using this year, that also, when the attendance is taken at the end of the school day, say from 6 to 9 at night. The school messenger will send a message that their child was out for the entire day. It also lets them know of any programs, any holidays, and we also have newsletters that go home with students.

We have the individual grade team concepts here, so they, the teams, are responsible for sending this information home. There is a variety of communication ways. Telephone nowadays, is probably the most challenging because of the use of cell phones, and being able to get a phone for 30 days and then it is turned off. This can be a challenge and we also use the marquee out front for instant notifications. Ah, I think that is about it.

4-What is your impression about parents’ use of school website?

Well, I’m just, we have to physically be on duty in the morning and I take car rider and I love it because parents roll down their window and that is a close personal contact. I like one on one and I do have an open door policy. It can be time consuming so obviously the easiest way is to go to the phone and talk to the parent. I can’t be choosy or picky, I will take any kind of contact I can get. And, obviously, I take any kind.

5-Discuss any feedback from parents about accessibility and use of school website.

We ah, oh absolutely, we get feedback, in lieu of that and it’s a parent survey. Its serves as part of the federal law that we have and it’s a parent survey that is required for a Title I school. We are kind of stuck in the middle here and when your child is in elementary school the level of communication is much higher and we have a sixth grade academy and a lot of calls that I get from parents is that they’re unhappy about that, and so on. So, this parent program that we have twice a year, they give me the feedback and, it helps some.

It’s a Title I parent survey, and we are a Title 1 school and then the district combines an overview of the survey as well as provides, although this is great too. Although, when they register their students and if they want to participate they give their names and telephone number. In the back of our year end parent survey are parent suggestions so we know their needs, and I was very pleased this year that they were down to about 15 suggestions, instead of just pages and pages, like other years, so that appears to show that we are doing a better job and this is very good.

What we do is we allow them to come down here to the school if they can get here. If they get here we will have our librarian take them to a computer and work with them and walk them through. Or, other staff members can help them. And we will walk them through, if they want to come in during lunch, but they will have to sign in. If they
do not have a computer at home, there is a recourse they can go to and we will show them how to use the website.

Well, also what we have, they have to physically pick up a teacher interview letter we distribute to them when they come through at registration. Then they have to attend a meeting and that is how they are distributed. They are only handed to a parent or guardian, so they are not given to a child or student.

6-How often do you personally communicate with the person who does your website?

Probably on a weekly basis when we have specially or faculty meetings I will go over and talk to her, and she is one of my administrators and is very tech savvy if I am not available. And, my gifted teacher is one also and she helps me out. We also have a technology manager supervisor in the district where this person goes around and helps the teachers with technology as help is needed.

7-How might you make changes to school website for better parents communication?

This year one of the projects for my Webmaster was, I wanted each teacher to have a biography on line so that when anyone goes in there her personal life or what have you, and I would like to keep them there. I would like to see background, family, years of experience, and I am reminded that I need to go in and update mine and so that is something that I would like to see. What I would like to see eventually is, if the middle school used the same technology that is like the elementary school, so that the same level of contact that is used in elementary school, could be used here, but it is not very user friendly and so, ah, I’m very dependent on my teachers and librarian in making changes.

When I go into a meeting for this, I often have to have my librarian right behind me and she says to send me what I want, and a lot of it has to do with my schedule instead of my ability.

Principal 6 – Lucy Dean

1-Who do you feel is your main audience for your middle school website?

Ah, specifically, parents, for the school because it’s an informative place for them to get all kinds of information. Ah, along with that, community minded people who may have resources to help us. go to in and help us in the school and of course, XXX School District website gets over a million hits, I think it’s in a day and we even get viewed internationally. We have had applications from a foreign country. It would be really neat for you to talk to Mr. XXX or even XXX, our personal relations person because, you could talk to him about these things and he could really give you a lot of super data for your study.
Well, I am partial to XXX and I grew up here, although I wasn’t born here, but have been here since I was 2 years old. Most of all the schools I have attended here, I have worked in. So, I am really partial to XXX and love living here. Crazy about the area.

Recently, since the hurricane hit, we are doing everything we can to bring things back together. And to bring in the industry and the people back because when the hurricane hit, many long time residents left and most of them have never returned. It is a very small town and we have received a lot of prestigious awards in regards to the community but a lot of work has gone into that, and the elected officials of our town.

2-Who is mainly responsible for school to home communication? Discuss.

Ah, the principal has to oversee it and to me, a principal has to model expectations, period, whatever expectations may be. All of the administrators here, we keep our old log of parent contacts. In our district, we log letters we send home, parent letters, we log any informative things, we also have an automated called a school message system. Daily, at the end of the day, for absences, calls go out letting parents know. I can put in a call for attendance and a message goes out to those parents. Or a letter or phone call, please call the school tomorrow. It’s a system where we can call different subgroups, or we can contact our entire school. I can go in and on an automated system I can go in and set up a phone call. It calls me back and I can hear my message and choose who it goes out to.

I can also click on Spanish because I have one of the largest Spanish populations in our district here at XXX. I have 80 something to 100 Spanish children. So that can go out as well, for example, when we had homecoming week, and we sent that out and we back that up with a letter. All of those are considered parent contacts, when parents have a conference, that is considered a contact. If you are out on the weekend, and you run into your parents, we keep up with all that and this district does an amazing job of that. We have really enlisted our parents. A good part of our day, I will be talking to parents on the telephone.

3-Tell me about methods of communication to your students’ parents.

I do a lot of one on one with parents. I try to know all the children. I try to know where they are and that is an undertaking. But again, my philosophy, is that is why I have a job are these children, and when I was a parent I was very involved. The first part is assuring safety. When I have two students scuffling, I need to know their names.

The other part of it too is it sends volumes to parents and children when the principal has been in the classroom. Because I wrote a note on the board telling them I appreciate their focus or appreciating teachers. That kind of back and forth and it takes all of us in helping the children. (That sounds great.) Well, we try to be.
4-What is your impression about parents’ use of school website?

At this school, we have really mixed reviews. Because our school, it is only 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} graders and our schools are a combination of now, all the XXX children. I have affluent children to less affluent and in some of their homes, they have every kind of technology you can imagine. And in many of the homes, there are not even computers. And so I say to parents, “You are welcome to come up here and go to the library and try to get in and we will help you.”

5-Discuss any feedback from parents about accessibility and use of school website.

A lot of our parents who are working have so much a level of computer use, we do a lot of emailing back and forth to our parents and our teachers do that too. And we do have a big pocket of parents who do not have the luxury of having a computer. Ah, but with some of them. Even if we cannot contact them, it is to the point that if we don’t have that we have, our director of services and the superintendent.

Last year they did over 800 home visits, over various things, because of no phones, or because parents weren’t coming to conferences, or because we have no current addresses or the principal emails the district and says they cannot get this parent to come to conferences. Then they go visit the home.

Recently the city has put in a statute about the boundaries of our school district because we have a lot of people who want to come to our schools, particularly in XXX. It is not that we don’t love all children, but we want to put our resources into serving our own students. And so a lot of home visits have been done. I have even made home visits myself. Typically when I do a home visit, it’s a real dire need or specifically when something bad is going on in our school, or a family death or a bad situation. But I have done that as well.

6-How often do you communicate with the person who does your school website?

Yes, our librarian, XXX does our website person and teachers sometimes assist her. Each of our teachers have their own component of the website. And of course, some of our folks are learning the technology and some of them are better than others. Also the PTO president, the co-president, one of them, I should say, helps us and we send things to her and she is a teacher at another school and she puts them together for us. (Do you have a password protected link for parents?)

Yes, there is. It is for parent only viewing. And we do not give that out without parent coming in. So there’s a lot of good services for parents in this district. You can also never leave your home and deposit lunch money for Johnny on the website. (Can you count parent visits to website?). No, but we have a link so parents can go in and see some lesson plans, if the teacher doesn’t secure it. Ah, some teachers secure all their lesson plans. There are times when there may be teachers who secure them for this week...
and provide them next week, especially for projects, or special things that may carry over for more than one day in the classroom.

7-How might you make changes to school website for better parent involvement?

Oh, goodness. I would like to have the luxury of time so that I could get in more often. Because I like to read a lot of parent emails, I don’t have to go to the website to check them, for things, I do it periodically, like homecoming, I may go in there more often. The luxury of time would be very helpful. I’m not real crazy about the way some of our pictures are sometimes on our website. That is something that should be better. You could see a nice picture, but then you will just see the top of a head. It’s our website, certainly not our district webpage. It’s kind of relative news.

Websites are only as good as our input, but we are learning and it is certainly not at the level I would like it to be, but I try to be patient with teachers. I would like to be able to go into it more often, and there are some things that I know right now that I should go in and tweet, but I am back after battling breast surgery and missing 4 months of school and then having 4 surgeries. And my time, I really have to prioritize my time. And I know I have other folks fixing it and looking at it for me. (You look well. I hope you are.) I’m lucky, I am well.

Principal 7 –Bob Horne

1-Who do you feel are your main audience for your middle school website?

We structure that to involve parents, to have a way of communicating with us about their children. Whether it be homework assignments, grades, what is going on in school, we target the parents. We have a system where parents can use a password and go in and look at anything available on their child’s class. We have a process to access and they have to come to school and set up an account and then they can go in. The children can go in the website and they do have access to e-mail the teachers. That can be overdone and can get people into trouble. We discourage the texting and phone use because of many obvious reasons. These can be the things that would lend itself to being inappropriate. As in terms of emailing parents, we do a lot of that all the time. We also have school website newscasts that the students really enjoy.

2-Who is mainly responsible for school to home communication? Discuss.

The teachers are the main ones, but in addition, we all work together, everybody in our school… We have a lead teacher who also gets involved. In order to keep community relations, we care about that too. We also might have a family reading night or even family math night and that is working really well, however, we are not able to get all parents interest, for whatever reasons. Actually, only a small number of parents go to the trouble to come out at night, you can see we are out in the country and it is difficult. However, there is not a big number of these, but we are a Title I school and we have had
to scale back this year because we may have overdone it and turnout has gotten bad. We
don’t want to wear people out.

3-Tell me about methods of communication to your students’ parents.

We do have an automated telephone message system and we try not to overdo this
and have people think, oh, no, that’s the school calling again. Every Thursday, grade
papers go out and parents like that. All the teachers do it. Not all parents have access to
the computer. We have a parent resource center but parents just don’t know how
important it is to come here. We have been disappointed in this. We keep trying.

4-What is your impression about parents’ use of school website?

I think that those who have access use it, but only a small number of parents have
access. Some of them, most of them have dial up and it is very difficult to get on line.
We use parent surveys at the end of the year and that is good. This gives us information
too. We use this info and we are going to come up with a school improvement plan. We
also try to make sure our students are safe when they use the website at school and that is
important to us. We are also trying to give them some experience in using the website.

5-Discuss any feedback from parents about accessibility and use of school website.

Well, we are not really getting much feedback from parents because we are a very low
income, rural school and our parents do not know how to step up and come forth. We
hope to improve this, but it is a really difficult situation. We can’t go bring them access
and practice when we are unable to reach many of them by phone or mail. We suffer
from collecting bad contact information as people’s lives and situations change and
phones are shut off, etc. It is not from lack of our caring, we do continue to reach out as
much as we can.

6-How often do you personally communicate with the person who does your website?

We do have somebody who helps us out when they can. There are two guys who
service the whole district. We have one young lady here who helps us filter our problems
and take it to them.

7-How might you make changes to school website for better parent involvement?

We did make some changes this year to the website. Our biggest concern was
that we want to get, next year, more timely information up and running. Of course, we
continue to struggle with parents, almost, seemingly unaware of the importance of
staying in touch with the school that is working with their children. We have a very
caring staff and will continue to serve the kids. We were at risk of being closed this year,
but our students showed some growth when scores came out. We were very happy about
that. We want our school to be successful.
1-Who do you feel is your main audience for your middle school website?

I think ah, probably for us, it would be our parents. And the community. We have a lot of good links on there also, like a parent link where parents can go and see homework, grades and all the things they want to keep up with. Our parents use our website a lot. There are many things of interest to them if they will just go to them.

2-Who is mainly responsible for school to home communication? Discuss.

Well, when it comes to that, I feel that I am personally responsible to make sure that a lot of that is going on. We have a ladder of command, you might say, and if a child is falling behind, I really want my teachers to keep close contact with my parents, not just for negative behavior, or negative grades, but to call them occasionally, when it can be a positive call. I don’t require them to call so many times a year. It may be out in the community a teacher can make a contact and that can be as good as a call. It may be at a game, function when they see parents, and she would keep a log of that. (Would they eventually come to you?) Yes, they would, and I would check them as I can.

3-Tell me about methods of communication to your students’ parents.

Our website actually has some study sites to go to for help in different subjects and they are being developed more now. Once you get there, you will be able to select your subject, and so forth. (I have not heard about that link. That is really interesting.)

So far, this year, we have had 3 opportunities for the parents to come to the school for whatever the reason. We had an open night, like the second week when parents came to meet their teachers and see the classrooms, and then, in the first 9 weeks, we did a parent night to come in and get progress reports and discuss them with teachers if they wished to. We have always had good turnout.

We’re not too spread out, so it is not too bad for parents to get in. Here it is not so bad. Our longest bus ride is about 40 minutes. We do a 60% day on report card day and begin at 3:00 so parents can leave work and come by, or parents who pick up their children can just come in and stay for the event. It works out real well and we stay till about 6 for parents who cannot get in earlier for whatever reasons. (Do you have the automated telephone messenger system in place in your school?) We do. We have an automated call that goes out at 9:00 every day. We have it and we use it and I can’t remember what we call it now.

4-What is your impression about parents’ use of school website?

I don’t know. I guess there must be a way to find out percentages, with the way technology is growing, but I don’t have that. I do know that most of the parents that I talk to, when I talk to parents about a grade, I ask them if they have been on line for
grades and most of them I ask say yes. If they don’t we sign them up immediately so I feel like a pretty large percent of them do. Of course, you always have those who have no internet access and the rule is to continue to ask.

5-Discuss any feedback from parents about accessibility and use of school website.

Not a lot. The few I get may be just, I have parents call me first and say they have been the parent link and are unhappy about a grade and they will call me. I will then set up a teacher principal conference. Other times we have tables set up for parents to come in who need help with the parent link. We have faculty and others there to give them assistance.

6-How often do you personally communicate with the person who does your website?

Well, right now we’re in the process of updating. Ah, we have a guy who works in our high school and he is in the process, he is training one of my teachers and she will be our specialist and she will be here on our campus. She already knows a lot, how to do things and change things.

7-How might you make changes to school website for better parent involvement?

We try to make it as friendly as possible. Our website has everything a parent could need, but our district has a little bit more. The district website has more links, but we are working to make ours more user friendly and we are working to get to that layout.

Administrator 1 - Betty Lake

1-Who do you feel is the main audience for your middle school website?

It’s for the community parents because we feel like, you know, that it is for the entire community, the businesses, parents, students, the entire community, the churches that are out there and we realize we need support from everybody. And that would include anyone who care about the schools.

2-Who is mainly responsible for school to home communication? Discuss.

Everybody in the school is responsible for communication. It is not a one person, because I am the communication coordinator and I am trying to be there for these groups and it is not there as communication across the board. Everyone in our school should be involved.

3-Tell me about methods of communication to your students’ parents.

Okay, one of the methods is our connect data. *(Phone messages?)* Yes, we use a phone message and we send it out to a group or groups of homes. We also use a school newsletter, that comes out every month. We try to keep our people informed about what
is going on. Teachers send notes, letters, and also we have what the parent can use to go on line and they have their own password and each parents can look at their own child’s grades, assignments and the things that they need to stay informed. Each parent has its own password. Normally, to get their personal password, they have to send it in on line and we get the information back to them directly and it is password protected and our school has a data person and can assistance can be requested at any time. And that is website communication.

4-What is your impression about parents’ use of school website?

A parent can use our computer and we have, what we call a media center, and they can come in at any time. A lot of times a class will be using the media center, but a parent can always come and someone will give them the help they may need.

5-Discuss any feedback from parents about accessibility and use of school website.

I guess because I am a in a middle school, a lot of our communication would be to the teacher email and some of them do still send notes. But a lot of our parents don’t have a computer in their home so there is still the method of using the phone or sending a letter. You can get that parent in and if that means having to go get that parent for a lack of transportation, we do that. We try to look dispel all barriers. (So, when you have parents who need to come in and learn how to use the computer, you are saying that you actually go and bring them in and they can learn how to use a password and get in?) Yes, we are always ready to assist a parent.

6-How often do you personally communicate with the person who does your website?

One of our teachers, Dr. Phillip does that, but lately, I understand that now it will be going to our district and they will do all of it. And that is all I am hearing about that for now.

7-How might you make changes to school website for better parent involvement?

When a parent go to the website and check child’s grades, she is involved. (Do you have a way to go in and count the hits or how often a parent looks at their own child’s information?) No, I think a teacher would have that information but I not certain of that answer.

The only other thing, I’d like to say, our PTSA , it is now also for students to be involved with the adults who support the school. So we do now have a very strong PTA and they are very strong and very supportive and I have always said that a parent can reach other parents. I am only there to support them but our PTA has reached more parents than I ever could
They have had grants written and that shows you that they are supportive. They have far reached out. This year we have a Target grant and they will pump these funds into our children. They are still going for improvement and they still have foresight. My PTA is very, very active and they are on the move. I think so there is still a group of parents, I believe that parents do care and I know that parents have to work so sometimes that comes first. I have to say our parents are involved.
APPENDIX D

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

01- Who do you feel is your main audience for your middle school website?
02- Who is mainly responsible for school-to-home communication? Discuss.
03- Tell me about methods of communication to your students’ parents.
04- What is your impression about parents’ use of school website?
05- Discuss any feedback from parents about accessibility and use of school website.
06- How often do you personally communicate with the person who “does” your website?
07- How might you make changes to school website for better parent involvement?
08- Do you or the district have a way to count “hits” to students’ information?
09- Do your students wear school uniforms? How do parents feel about this?
10- Is there anything you would like to add on the subject of parent involvement?
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