THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS BY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TO
COMMUNICATE BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

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Joseph A. Mazza Jr.
DEDICATION

The following story has put life in perspective for my family and me over the last 2 years. It is the reason I chose this dissertation topic and how I have learned the power of social media to bring a community together. It is only fitting that I dedicate this dissertation study to my late brother-in-law, Mark Keeley.

In January of 2011, our family lost Mark in an accidental explosion. He was working to repair a Philadelphia neighborhood gas leak when the street exploded, killing him and wounding members of his crew. Mark was only 19 years-old, a self-less, happy, humorous kid who had his whole life in front of him.

One of the most interesting things about Mark was that he loved a variety of music. He enjoyed listening to rap, but also loved a four-man band from London called Mumford and Sons. The band’s music featured a banjo in many of their songs, which Mark mimicked quite often using a special iPhone app. He had plans to travel down south to see them play live in concert later that summer.

In the months following Mark’s funeral, we (Mark’s family and friends) thought of ways to lift the spirits of our grieving family and generate some positive energy. The thought of him at the concert he would never get to experience was a sad image to for us. However, we had idea.

In April, we opened a Facebook page called “Mumford and Sons to Philly for Mark’s Birthday.” Our goal was to use social media tools like Facebook and Twitter to generate enough attention to the cause that the band would agree to play a concert in Philadelphia in around Mark’s birthday of July 27th. The page was shared and “liked” all over the world, amplified by local newspapers, television, and this powerful social media
tool called Twitter. A month later, I received a call from a United Kingdom telephone number while in my elementary principals’ meeting. It was the band calling to say they would indeed honor Mark with a special concert.

On October 30, 2011, Mumford & Sons played a private concert for Mark’s family and friends at City Hall in Philadelphia. This experience not only taught the potential for social media to bring a global community together, but also helped me create a vision for potential ways I could use social media tools like Twitter and Facebook to engage families in my own school. So I proceeded to join Twitter and became a connected educator.

Writing this dissertation without the support, energy, and ideas of my personal learning network (PLN) would have been a near impossible. Everyday, thousands of students, parents, educators, and leaders I connect with online inspire me to be a better person, educator, and lead learner. Being connected to people around the world has taken me off “admin island” and allowed me to find my voice in education while improving my overall communication and leadership skillset through personalized, relationship-based professional development. Ever since I became inspired by New Milford High School Principal Eric Sheninger’s (@NMHS_Principal) Scholastic Administrator Magazine article, I have been hooked. Soon after I began following educators like Larry Ferlazzo, Jerry Blumengarten, George Couros, Chris Wejr, Lyn Hilt, Chris Lehmann, Kristen Swanson, Rich Kiker, Shelly Terrell, Pam Moran, Justin Baeder, Steven Anderson and Patrick Larkin. Three years later, I consider these and over 1,000 other people I follow my friends and an extension of my school staff working to support teaching and learning at Knapp Elementary School.
After I became familiar with Twitter, I worked to revive the parent-teacher Twitter hashtag (#ptchat). Since joining #ptchat on Wednesday nights, I have met and learned a great deal from educators and parents around the world that are just as passionate about home-school partnerships as I am. My personal and professional use of social media has allowed me to complete the following study to provide an accurate picture on how the use of social media might help schools meet the varying communication needs of today’s families.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my wife Lauren and my new baby boy Mark: This dissertation and the coursework along the way has dictated our entire marriage to this point. It is going to be really exciting to finally feel like I can give my all for the first time in fatherhood. Children are such a gift, and getting to know my son has helped me harness the perspective my school parents have when they send their own “gifts” to school for educators and leaders to keep safe and inspire a love of learning.

To my professors and colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania: The program has provided me with lifelong friendships and opportunities to build my career around. The support of both the faculty and my classmates throughout these last 3 years has been nothing short of outstanding. As I set my sights on becoming a professor at the university level, I take with me the strengths of a supportive program and the leadership needs of students representative of a talented, hard-working, and compassionate cohort
IV.

To my Knapp Elementary School staff and families: Thank you for embracing my hyper focus on family and community engagement. You have been a real-life laboratory for me to truly understand how to “meet families where they are” each day. You truly are special to me, and I am lucky to be part of a wonderful community of learners.
ABSTRACT

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS BY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TO COMMUNICATE BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

Joseph A. Mazza Jr.
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Research has documented numerous benefits of parent involvement in children’s education including increased attendance, increased test scores and better behavior. Access to increased and meaningful communication between home and school enhances parent involvement. The utilization of technology through the use of the Internet and e-mail for school to home communications is growing rapidly as an additional means of two-way communications between home and school. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the role of emerging technologies, specifically social media use by school principals and how its use affects communication between schools and parents. Data gathered from three principals, parents in their schools and actual social media communications were triangulated across these three perspectives as part of a case study analysis, using a convenience sample to further our understanding of the benefits and challenges of using social media tools to build home-school partnerships.

Findings suggest that school principals are mainly responsible for social media use at the school. Consistent, child-centered use of these tools has the opportunity to complement face-to-face, two-way communications between home and school, provided there is a relationship with the school to begin with. In identifying the communication needs of the school, both technology and non-technology related communications must
be utilized as part of a “menu of offerings” based upon solicitation of technology and non-technology related tools used by a school’s families. This differentiated home-school communication approach allows for more families to engage in two-way communications with the school.

Ultimately, the outcomes of the study may help lead to changes in family and community partnerships, leadership practices by principals, as well as teachers and parent groups expanding their use of social media tools to build a connected and transparent learning community. The insights included in this study may be used to support the development and implementation of a school or district’s communication strategies and professional development plans for all stakeholders.
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CHAPTER 1: THE STORY OF THE RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

United States President Barack Obama emphasized the topic of family engagement in his 2011 State of the Union address. He enthusiastically expressed that parents play a pivotal role in student success, stating, “Family engagement raises student achievement regardless of the parents’ education level, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background.” A school principal watching the President’s speech begins thinking of how he can do more to increase the level of family engagement at his school. He consults his staff, the Home and School President and offers some ideas to counter meek attendance numbers for the monthly parent meetings. During an upcoming meeting, a new idea is implemented:

*It is Tuesday night at 7:00PM, and the monthly Home and School Meeting is about to begin in the library at Green Elementary School. The Home and School President begins by greeting the thirteen parents in attendance, then looks up at the big projector screen to welcome the 43 parents logged in from home who are participating via a live video feed. Parents “virtually” sign in and acknowledge their name, their child’s grade, and provide a simple greeting. The Home and School President begins the meeting by asking the Principal to deliver a monthly report, which includes updates, new ideas, and other important announcements to engage families who are both in the room and tuning in from home. The meeting continues over the next sixty minutes with conversations happening both in-person and virtually. Parents without cars, without a babysitter and those with limited mobility participate virtually without the need to physically be in the room where the meeting takes place. The school literally meets the parents “where they are.”*

I am this principal. I have the same family engagement challenges at my elementary school. Recently, social media tools in our school district have passed through policy restrictions and are now accessible to district principals. Schools like
mine are currently testing the waters to see how these tools affect home-school communications.

Over the past 5 years, our home-school team has worked to build our family engagement program around the needs of our families with and without technology. Our efforts, built over time, contain a variety of partnership strategies from visiting the homes of our students to meet with parents face-to-face to using the latest social media tools like Twitter, Facebook, and video conferences for two-way communications. We have even taken our Home and School meetings out to the community remotely, using wireless Internet capabilities to meet our families where they are. As I work through this case study analysis of how three school principals are using social media to communicate with their own school families, I bring my own biases, experiences, successes, and failures with me.

**Research Problem**

Monthly Home and School meetings like the one in the vignette above are now made possible by free social media tools available on the Internet such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (see Appendix A for a glossary of technology related terms). Many different social media tools like these are now being used by businesses and universities to create valuable feedback loops that can inform product development and build brand loyalty (Ginsburg, 2010). By joining these conversations with target audiences, showing honesty and a willingness to listen to concerns, and energizing a core group of motivated followers, businesses, and universities are becoming trusted friends to their customers (Li & Bernoff, 2011). With 50% of all American Twitter users sending children to elementary, middle, or high schools, educators are experimenting with how
social media might be useful in communicating between home and school (Smith, 2011). However, little or no research exists on how the use of social media tools affect communications between home and school.

**Research Question**

Schools and school principals need to know more about the effective use of these powerful digital social media tools for enhancing school, family, and community partnerships. This study will examine the following research question: In what ways does the use of social media by school principals affect the communication between home and school? I will describe the theoretical framework underlying this study drawing primarily on the work of Joyce Epstein in the field of family and community partnerships. A review of relevant literature will examine how social media technologies have been used broadly in United States society, in education, and in other fields. I will then describe a case study methodology for examining my research question in detail. The aim of this study is to expand Epstein’s conceptual framework by considering the use of social media as a form of communication that will increase and enhance family and community engagement in the 21st century.

The current research on family and community engagement is thorough and has been the focus of study for many. In this study, I apply the existing body of knowledge on effective Family and Community Engagement to today’s culture of technology.

In the next section, I will review the available literature on family engagement, as well as how social media is being used to communicate around the world today. My focus lies in transferring the previous work of leading researchers like Joyce Epstein, Anne Henderson, Karen Mapp, and others into today’s digital age, and most specifically,
addressing the question of how schools can begin to use social media tools as part of a comprehensive family engagement approach.

In the next four sections, I will examine the work of Family and Community Engagement researchers. I will also consider how social media is being used in general in today’s world as a communication tool and build a hypothesis to investigate how its use in home and school settings affects overall school, family, and community partnerships. Finally, I will cite ways that technology is currently being utilized by schools to communicate with parents.

**Section 1: Family and Community Engagement**

An extensive body of research exists showing that there are many benefits to parent involvement for students, families, schools, and communities. Three decades of research (Epstein, 2010) have demonstrated that parent-family involvement significantly contributes to improved student outcomes related to learning and school success. When schools implement intentional and intensive parent engagement strategies, there is a significant rise in student achievement scores (Redding et al., 2004). According to Binkley et al. (1998), quite a few studies have indicated that children whose parents (and/or other significant adults) share in their formal education tend to do better in school. Specifically, these benefits have included higher grades and test scores, long-term academic achievement, positive attitudes and behavior, more successful programs, and more effective schools. Schools that undertake and support strong comprehensive parent involvement efforts are more likely to produce students who perform better than those schools that do not involve parents. Also, schools that have strong links with and
respond to specific community needs have students who perform better than schools that do not (Simon & Epstein, 2001).

While virtually all schools promote parent involvement, there are different types of involvement, ranging from encouraging volunteering and fundraising to providing parents with home-based learning activities. The parent involvement strategies schools employ have been divided into the Framework of Six Types of Involvement (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011).

1. Parenting. This category includes the basic responsibilities of families--such as providing housing, health care, nutrition, clothing, and safety, and creating home conditions that support children’s learning (e.g., purchasing necessary books and other school supplies, providing a place to study, etc.). Parenting also implies that parents are warm and responsive to their children, communicate with them, and support their development.

2. Communicating. This type of involvement concerns the basic responsibilities of schools, including establishing two-way communication between family and school. This type of involvement assumes that schools keep parents informed about school matters by sending newsletters or report cards, calling, e-mailing or visiting parents, etc. In addition, parents can also address their concerns to the teacher or school administration both through contacting them directly or through correspondence.

3. Volunteering. According to Brent (2000), the term volunteer usually refers to persons who devote their spare time to work on a routine basis without monetary compensation, usually under the direction of a school employee, in support of educational activities and school operations. He clarifies, however, that parental engagement in PTA,
PTO or other types of decision-making organizations involving parents, teachers, and perhaps students and other community members, is not volunteering.

4. Learning at home. This type of involvement suggests that parents are involved in curriculum-related activities occurring at home (e.g., assisting with homework, discussing books with their child, brainstorming ideas for school projects).

5. Decision-making. Parents who are involved at this level advocate children’s interests. These parents often participate in PTA, PTSA, advisory councils, and committees.

6. Collaborating with the community. This type of involvement relies on understanding that helping the community is the best investment (National PTA, 2010). It assumes that different types of community organizations contribute to schools, students, and families (Epstein, 1995).

Epstein et al.’s (2011) framework offers key areas where parent involvement has the greatest impact for students. According to Epstein, for a school to satisfy just one of these six categories would result in an incomplete family engagement approach. Therefore, schools should work to create a balanced family engagement approach where all six categories are represented. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on the second type of involvement within the framework: communicating. More specifically, I will investigate how school principals are using technology tools like social media as an added method to satisfy this type of involvement.

Communication is at the heart of family-school relationships. According to Lunts (2003), ongoing, two-way communication is associated with students’ academic success and lays the foundation for many other forms of family involvement. Since a school’s
organized parent group (e.g., Parent-Teachers Association [PTA], Parent-Teacher Organization [PTO], Home and School Association [HSA], etc.) provides leadership from the homes of the children, it is important to show a connection in terms of parent involvement policies that schools across the country have adopted, and how the current research on family engagement is related. Many schools have a PTA, PTO, or Home and School Association that consists of parents and guardians of the children at the school. Typically, school parents hold monthly meetings with elected positions, plan events, and work with the school staff to support the education of the students throughout the school year.

The National PTA has put forth a framework for considering family engagement called the *National Standards for Family/School Partnerships* to reflect recent research and improve parent and community involvement practices. The following standards were renamed the *National Standards for School--Home Partnerships* (National PTA, 2010).

1. *Welcoming All Families into the School Community*: Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

2. *Communicating Effectively*: Families and school staff engage in regular, meaningful communication about student learning.

3. *Supporting Student Success*: Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.
4. *Speaking Up For Every Child*: Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly, and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

5. *Sharing Power*: Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.

6. *Collaborating With Community*: Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

In contrast to Epstein’s six categories, these national standards shift the focus to what parents, schools, and communities can do together to support student success. (National PTA, 2010). One component of a school learning community is an organized program of school, family, and community partnerships with activities linked to school goals. Research and fieldwork show that such programs improve schools, strengthen families, invigorate community support, and increase student achievement and success (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon, 2003).

When the community is engaged in the process of planning and setting goals for family involvement in its district’s schools, a culture of partnership grows best. District leaders must be able to engage all of the community members, teachers, and parents in setting the goals for family and community engagement. They must conduct and analyze parent surveys about school satisfaction. Leaders must set a clear standard for what is expected at schools and offer assistance to meet the standard. Finally, staffing the effort is critical by creating a high-level family involvement position and committing real
resources to it (Davies, Henderson, Johnson, & Mapp, 2007). Effective leaders understand that schools and families share the common goal of strong results for all students. The role parent engagement plays in positively affecting student achievement should not be underestimated. According to Henderson and Mapp (2002) and Sanders and Sheldon (2009), when families of all backgrounds are engaged in their children’s learning, their children tend to do better in school and stay in school longer.

A major commonality between the Six Frameworks and PTA’s National Standards is the importance of communication. Whether engaging in regular, meaningful communication about student learning or keeping parents informed about school matters by sending newsletters or report cards, calling, e-mailing or visiting parents, there is agreement that the need for parents and schools to communicate with each other is vital.

According to Core Belief Four, the responsibility for building partnerships between school and home rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders. (Davies et al., 2007). In the next section, I will discuss the research on the importance of strong leadership to create a culture and climate of partnership with parents.

Section 2: Principal’s Role in Family Engagement

As education leaders, school principals are essential factors in schools and significantly influence whether or not their students experience academic success. In setting a school’s purpose and goals, the principal frames and conveys a vision for his or her school that affects staff expectations, influences teacher selection and motivation, and increases the likelihood of staff consensus regarding the school’s mission. Successfully meeting the challenges of leading a building, the principal must possess the tools to bring
all audiences into the planning and implementation of effective teaching strategies. The
evaluation of any school program is a strategy for discovering ways to improve
effectiveness, and evaluation frameworks can help principals and educational partners
understand what, why, and how a program is expected to benefit teachers, families, and
students. In developing a school’s family engagement program, the support of the
principal is necessary in order to be successful and sustained (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

One of the barriers to building and maintaining home-school relationships is poor
communication. Sanders and Sheldon (2009) report that effective school leaders
implement practices to develop a positive school climate that welcome families and
community partners. To overcome these communication barriers, school leaders have the
responsibility to leverage a growing number of tools, both with and without the support
of technology.

Promoting appropriate methods of communication can help build a foundation of
trust with parents (Epstein, 2001; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). To build this trust, schools
need to think beyond traditional methods and connect with families to support children’s
success. This requires attention to teacher training that fosters effective communication
(Anderson & Minke, 2007). The administrator, as the school leader, can strengthen
relationships with parents and community members and also create school environments
that foster partnerships (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

Despite the evidence validating that schools with strong, positive relationships
with parents are successful, school administrators still struggle to find innovative ways to
reach out and connect with parents (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Wanat, 1994).
Connecting today requires school administrators to think beyond traditional methods in
order to communicate and partner with families in ways that will support children and ensure success. Schools that make an effort to become positively involved with parents may have a greater understanding of the family (Berger, 2000). Studies have confirmed that schools that construct policies to encourage collaborative relationships create environments that foster communication and demonstrate cultural understanding (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999).

Recognizing that parents are important sources of information and have a great amount of influence on their children’s development is beneficial for all involved (Domina, 2005; Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, Evertson, & Weinstein, 2006). When the school administrator collaborates with staff, parents, and the community to respond to the diverse interests and needs of the children, positive outcomes occur (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

The research is clear on the importance of effective school leadership as it relates to the success or failure of school and community partnerships; school leaders must take the lead. In preparation for this study on social media use by principals to communicate between home and school, it is important to understand how fields outside of education are already successfully using these tools to communicate. The following section aims to identify the ways social media is being used in the healthcare field, who, like those in education, aim to foster ongoing relationships with families and patients.

**Section 3: The Use of Social Media to Communicate in Today’s World**

Before we attempt to connect the use of social media to education, it is important to understand how it is being used in other areas to communicate. Today, social media tools are present in many areas of life. With a growing number of people taking to social
media for work and play, recent studies have concluded that the foundation of social-networking sites is interpersonal communication, connecting people to one another (Burnett, Lamm, Lucas, & Waters, 2009). Whereas traditional websites offer a place for the world to learn about an organization in a one-way, information-gathering manner, social media tools, by design, offer two-way communication capabilities that can be viewed publicly.

One social media tool, Facebook, is being used in the health care field to communicate child health information to low-income parents. For those parents using this tool, maintaining personal relationships was found to be a higher priority for parents over gathering information. Although research is needed to find the most beneficial way to communicate with low-income populations, social media was found to have value as part of an overall communication strategy (Stroever, Mackert, McAlister, & Hoelscher 2011). This infusion of social media serves as a complement to the overall communication strategy that includes traditional means of communicating including via website posting, paid postage newsletters, online newsletters as well as email and in-person opportunities.

Hospitals using these social media tools to communicate with parents of high risk infants found that social media tools used successfully to communicate were discreet and able to fit neatly into everyday life. Moreover, the tools used were not uncommon to the parents’ use of other tools used outside of the hospital like Facebook and text messaging. The hospital makes an effort to meet the parents where they were in terms of the technologies already being used in the homes of the families they work with.
When language barriers are present, the use of collaborative technologies can support the various languages that make up the population targeted (Liu et al., 2011). Social media tools have the capability to automatically translate a language from sender to recipient, reducing the language barrier that prevents two-way communication from occurring in a variety of circles.

In the non-profit sector, social media provides a great deal of opportunity for public relations practitioners to communicate with the public while using new means of technology and blending them into the daily lives of their audience (Curtis et al., 2010). The vision, efforts, and accomplishments of these organizations are shared with the world through a growing medium in social media. This has the opportunity to allow for the organization’s stakeholders to communicate back while providing real time feedback to the organization’s vision, efforts, and accomplishments.

There are many ways professionals outside of the field of education are communicating with families. Some are using what we have used in schools for years with success in terms of emails, phone calls, and postage to communicate with families. Most recently, the use of technology, specifically social media is being used to engage in these communications. In the next section, I will share the ways technology is currently being used in school, family, and community partnerships, as well as current statistics on access and technology use that help set up a potential use of social media by schools to communicate with parents.

Section 4: Use of Technology in School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Due to the infancy of social media use by schools, there is not currently a great deal of research available. One of the aims of this study is to explore ways that schools
are complementing their traditional home-school communications practices with the infusion of social media tools.

Despite the importance of family engagement, home-school communications can be challenging for logistical, emotional, and cultural reasons (Lightfoot, 2003). Some parents have small children at home, making transportation to and from school to meet with teachers very difficult. Other parents are not confident enough in their English-speaking skills to engage in conversation with school personnel. On the other hand, teachers have only a few short breaks during the school day to host parent conversations. Whatever the reason, parents and teachers have a variety of needs that sometimes stand in the way of developing a true partnerships with the school.

Today, schools have various Internet tools available to them to engage more disconnected and hard to reach parents and bring schools and parents not only physically, but virtually together as partners. Although there is limited research of literature on the use of social media used in schools, the following statistics are evidence of its growing presence amongst today’s parent population: Facebook was created back in 2004 and now consists of 800 million users worldwide. Twitter is the newer social media, created in 2006, and is also the fastest growing. According to Twitter’s website, 460,000 new accounts are created each day, and the largest percentage (86%) of adults on Twitter are between the ages of 18-35, the age range of many parents in today’s schools. Sixty one percent of all adults report spending at least 6 hours a month keeping up with friends and neighbors in digital spaces, and almost 50% of all American Twitter users are parents of elementary, middle or high school students (Ferriter, Ramsden, & Sheninger, 2011). These statistics suggest that a growing number of school-aged families are using these
tools for their personal and/or work lives. It is this very evolution of Internet users that provides schools with opportunity to harness the benefits of these tools to complement home-school communications.

Earlier research indicates that many families and teachers are interested in using email and websites to communicate (National School Boards Association, 2000). Few studies have documented how often such methods are used or whether they are associated with benefits for families or students. Electronic mail and school websites can reduce scheduling barriers that pose challenges to traditional forms of home-school communication, can convey information to multiple families at once, and can efficiently share and archive information about student progress, school policies and assignments, tips for family involvement, and other topics (Abdal-Haqq, 2002; Marshall & Rossett, 1997).

In using technology between home and school, there are also challenges for both staff and parents. Lewin and Luckin (2010) suggested that technologies with readily accessible and interactive resources that are flexible can help develop parental engagement. However, websites and email contact can be difficult for schools to maintain, may intimidate some families, and lack visual and nonverbal cues (e.g., tone of voice or body language). Locally speaking, the June 2010 National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Report (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2002) noted that 23% of households in the state of Pennsylvania do not have Internet access. The other 77%, or 9,909,482 people do have Internet access. Over six million of those Internet individuals in Pennsylvania interact using the social media tool Facebook.
According to the Pew Internet Study Digital Differences (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012), differences in Internet access still exist among various demographic groups, especially when it comes to access to high-speed broadband at home. Some of the findings related to this study include the following. One in five American adults do not use the Internet. Among those least likely to have Internet include senior citizens, adults with less than a high school education, and those living in households earning less than $30,000 per year.

For those with access to the Internet, the ways in which they access digital information has changed significantly over the years. The growth of today’s smartphone has put the Internet in the hands of many children and adults without the need home computer access. Eighty eight percent of American adults have a cell phone, 57% have a laptop, 19% own an e-book reader, and 19% have a tablet computer; 63% go online wirelessly with one of those devices. Device ownership is generally correlated with age, education, and household income, although some devices including e-book readers and tablets are as popular with adults in their 30s and 40s than young adults ages 18-29 (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012).

Those traditionally on the other side of the digital divide in basic Internet access are using wireless connections to go online. Among smartphone owners, young adults, minorities, those with no college experience, and those with lower household income levels are more likely than other groups to say that their phone is their main source of Internet access. Even beyond smartphones, both African Americans and English-speaking Latinos are as likely as whites to own any sort of mobile phone, and are more likely to use their phones for a wider range of activities (Zickuhr & Smith, 2012).
In thinking about how these statistics might inform our communication efforts in schools, the Harvard Family Research Project (Buffard, 2008) sees today’s Internet as a promising but largely untapped opportunity for promoting home-school communications. Despite the fact that such communication is relatively infrequent at the current time, it is associated with academic benefits. The Internet may represent an opportunity to maintain or even increase communication between schools and families of adolescents. The study also raises concerns about equity. More economically advantaged families, who are more likely to be involved in education in many ways and whose children generally have more educational opportunities than children from low income backgrounds, are also more likely to have access to Internet technology and to use it to communicate with schools. As the Internet and new social media technologies become more embedded into the daily lives of our school families, it is likely that the use of the Internet for home-school relationships will continue to grow - a trend that could close existing educational inequity gaps.

The research on family engagement in education is comprehensive. Educators and school leaders have a plethora of concrete examples and core beliefs (Davies et al., 2007) to imagine and implement both face-to-face and virtual interventions to engage families and the community, regardless of their school makeup. Many of our school parents spend their time online using social media tools, creating possibility for schools to engage them and encouraging a deeper partnership between home and school.

This study will be an exploration of how to conduct family engagement activities in the virtual world using social media technologies to improve home-school communications. Does using social media to communicate with parents make a
difference in home-school partnerships? Does it bring parents closer to the school? Does it help them engage in more events, support teaching in the classroom? In what ways does the use of social media by school principals affect the communication between home and school.

In the chapter that follows, I will present the research design and methodology I will use in this study to examine the ways social media tools affect communication between home and school from the lens of the principal and the respective parent populations at that principal’s school. The actual social media artifacts found publicly online will also be used to provide a window into these communication efforts.
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this section, I offer a description of the study, inclusive of research design and research methods, participant selection, and a rationale for the methodology. It is important to connect the methods to the study to ensure that the chosen method will obtain what is necessary to appropriately address my research question: In what ways does the use of social media by school principals affect the communication between home and school?

The collection of data from school principals, respective parents (see Appendices B and C), and actual social media artifacts found online is aimed to understand the role social media tools serve within each school. Examples of the social media tools being used by each school principal to communicate with parents will be described in explicit detail through a case study analysis of three school principals and representatives from their respective parent group.

This study investigates the relationship between school, family, and community partnerships and the use of today’s fastest growing technology, social media. I will closely examine how three educational leaders in various contexts are using social media to meet the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships designed by the National Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). This research is designed specifically to be a study of the impact of social media on communication as defined in Joyce Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership (Epstein et al., 2011) and will aim to update the body of knowledge in this field. The study will take a case study approach, detailed in the next section.
Research Design

The distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. The case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries. (Yin, 2009, p. 4)

I chose a qualitative case study approach for this study and worked to investigate the work of three principals using social media within their school, family, and community partnerships efforts. An explorative case study approach (Yin, 2009) was chosen for this research design because I attempted to study an area where little was known about social media in education, as well as social media use on the part of school leaders. I collected relevant information about each school leader, while prioritizing specific questions and propositions centering around school, family, and community partnerships.

Three distinct cases are comprised of: (a) interviews with school principals using social media to communicate with school families; (b) document analysis of social media artifacts used by those principals to communicate with school families, including social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Instagram, and YouTube; and (c) perspectives on these efforts from parents in the schools where these principals lead. These took the form of an in-depth interview with parent leadership teams at each study site. The school principals, parent leadership groups, and actual social media artifacts provided publicly online served as the research participants, detailed in the following section.
Research Participants

To address my research question, I carefully selected three school leaders for these focused case studies to learn more about whether their efforts are having any impact in building and maintaining home-school partnerships. I identified these three school principals by using the same social media tools (Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Twitter, blogs) they are using to communicate with families as part of school, family, and community partnerships efforts at their respective schools.

The principals selected in this convenience sample represent elementary and high schools in rural locations, suburban, and urban settings. The principals vary in their range of experience as school principals. Each of these scholars have spoken during national conferences on the use of social media in schools and how these tools are used to connect students, teachers, parents and community members. There are not many leaders utilizing social media tools on a daily basis. Although this is not an exhaustive sample, these three leaders are considered by many to be the trailblazers in the use of social media tools to communicate, collaborate, and share.

Along with the three school principals, I interviewed a group of parent leaders from each school. The parent leadership teams at each school were chosen by the school principal to be a group that works in partnership with the principal throughout the school year as part of the Home and School Association. Each parent focus group contained five parents who provided their own perspectives on how social media was being used at the school, as well what he or she saw as the overall family engagement approach offered by the school. Years experience as a parent at each school ranged from 2 to 5 years.
depending on the school. Grades of parent’s students ranged from kindergarten through 12th grade.

The three schools that I studied have been broken down into three cases. Case 1 includes the founding high school principal who has led in an urban setting for the past 7 years. This principal uses multiple social media tools to leverage online home-school communications. The public high school serves 366 students in grade 9-12. The school principal did not receive any formal training on how to engage families in his leadership preparation, nor how to use social media to communicate with school families.

Case 2 includes a high school principal in a suburban setting who has been the leader at his school for the past 5 years. This principal uses multiple social media tools to leverage online home-school communications. The public high school serves 644 students in grades 9-12. The principal did not receive any formal training on how to engage families in his leadership preparation, nor how to use social media to communicate with school families. Case 3 includes an elementary principal leading in a rural setting for the last 4 years. This principal uses multiple social media tools to leverage online home-school communications. The public elementary school serves 472 students in grade K-6. The principal did not receive any formal training on how to engage families in his leadership preparation, nor how to use social media to communicate with school families.

The parent participants in this convenience sample were chosen by the school principals to represent a cross section of each school. These parents are from various demographic and socio-economic subgroups represented within each of the schools.
Case 1 is situated at urban Inquiry High School and includes a 9-12 population of school families comprised of 34% free or reduced lunch. The school’s family demographics include 51% Black, 36% White, 7% Hispanic, 7% Asian, and 1% other. It is a Title 1 school and also classifies as a Magnet School.

Hewlett P. Ackard High School (Case 2) includes a 9-12 population of school suburban families comprised of 9% free or reduced lunch. The school’s family demographics include 57% White, 36% 18% Hispanic, 17% Asian, 4% Pacific Islander 3% other.

Coral Stables Elementary School (Case 3) includes a rural K-6 population of school families comprised of 24% free or reduced lunch. The school’s family demographics include 94% Black, 5% Asian, 1% Hispanic, 1% Black, and 1% other. It is a Title 1 school.

The goal of this study is to contribute to the literature by identifying new trends through these principals’ use of social media tools to communicate between home and school, keeping in mind limitations such as the small size within this convenience sample. The results will help identify further study foci around the way schools might best use social media to communicate in education. The next section details how data will be collected from the three types of participants described above.

Data Collection

I explored my research question by collecting three kinds of data from three different sources: (a) School principals, (b) Parent focus groups, and (c) Social media artifacts. First, I conducted in depth interviews with three educational leaders who are currently using social media as a part of their school, family, and community partnership
efforts. The questions asked of the educational leader were open-ended and designed to allow him or her to reveal as much information as possible about the tools employed to engage parents in their school’s family engagement efforts. Data collected from parents of students attending these principals’ schools focused on the diverse ways in which their school provides communication opportunities and the ways social media used in these efforts. Questions were focused on access and any reasons the parents choose to engage in any social media used. Also included in the collection of data were the social media tools employed by these school principals such as Twitter, blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, et cetera. I analyzed these school and parent social media artifacts for any evidence of two-way communication between home and school.

After I collected data from the three school principals, their respective parent focus groups and the public social media artifacts of their exchanges, I analyzed this data to identify key trends in home-school communications in each setting. The following sections details my process for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Using a case study approach, I wrote a narrative of each principal’s electronic school, family, and community partnerships efforts, crafting together each of the three data sources. From the perspectives of these principals, I described how each school leader gained the knowledge and skills to use social media, the implementation approach they took within their schools and how social media use has evolved since its initial adoption. I paid particular attention to how they saw social media improving or limiting their communication with parents across various uses for communication. Actual social
media artifacts were examined in the form of tweets, blog posts, pictures, and Facebook comments to evidence these communications.

I used this data to identify various uniqueness and commonalities apparent in schools offering social media opportunities for communicating between home and school. All findings were recorded and analyzed to learn as much possible, with the overarching goal to provide a deep description of emerging practices in use of electronic school, family, and community partnership efforts.

The second piece of data analyzed during the study were interviews from each school’s parent focus group elected by the school principal. I used these interviews to gather the parents’ unique perspective on how social media is affecting home-school communications. Data collected from each school’s parents included both technology and non-technology-related family engagement practices offered by the school. Identifying the parent lens was very important as I aimed to provide a clear description of how each school met the needs of its families.

Finally, 6 months worth of social media artifacts were collected from each school’s social media tools found publicly online. The most widely used tools (as described by the principals and parents) will be captured and embedded into the school’s case study to aid in describing how the tools are used for two-way communication between home and school. These social media artifacts collected and analyzed included a sample of the social media tools used by the school.

After detailing each of the three schools within the case study, I did a cross-case analysis to identify both important trends and unique elements emerging in the field. Figure 1 represents the cross-case analysis used to analyze the three cases within my
study. Each case was analyzed separately according to the lens of the principals, parents, and social media artifacts. Then, the three principals were analyzed to identify similarities and differences in approach. The same cross-participant analyzing method was used to stuffy the parents’ perspectives. Similarities and differences on described impact on the part of the parents were identified. Finally, I looked across the social media artifacts from all three schools to identify key trends on how these social media tools encouraged two-way communication between home and school.

Figure 1. Analysis of the data.
CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDIES

Introduction

The previous chapter presented the research methods and methodological stance applied in the study. In this chapter, I will present three distinct cases featuring three school leaders and their use of social media to communicate with families and the community. Each case study will include data from school principals, respective school parents, and actual social media artifacts from these digital communications. At the end of the three case studies, I will present a cross-case analysis identifying common themes around my research question: In what ways does the use of social media tools by school principals affect communication between home and school? My aim is to use these case studies to present new and emerging trends in the field of family and community engagement and provide direction for further research.

School Case Study 1: Inquiry High School

Inquiry High School is a grade 9-12 school. Families are comprised of 34% free or reduced lunch. The school’s family demographics include 51% Black, 36% White, 7% Hispanic, 7% Asian, and 1% other. It is a Title 1 school and also classifies as a Magnet School.

IHS Principal Chuck Ubiquitous is known as an international educational leader aside from his role as the current and founding principal of Inquiry High School (IHS), a progressive science and technology high school in a large northeast city. The learning environment he leads is an inquiry-driven, project-based, 1:1 laptop school that is considered to be one of the pioneers of the School 2.0 movement. IHS was recognized by Ladies Home Journal as one of the Ten Most Amazing Schools in the United States,
has been recognized as an Apple Distinguished School in 2009 and 2010 and was featured in the 2011 PBS documentary Digital Media: New Learners for the 21st Century.

In June 2010, Mr. Ubiquitous was named as one of the 30 Most Influential People in EdTech by *Technology and Learning Magazine*. In 2009, he was an honoree for the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development’s Outstanding Young Educator Award as well as been named as one of 40 Under 40 *Business Journal* in 2009. In 2006 the National School Board Association named him one of 20 to Watch among American administrators. He has spoken at conferences all over the world, including various TED talks, the National Association of Secondary Schools Conference (NASSP), and the International Society of Technology and Education (ISTE) conference, and he has worked with many schools and districts as a consultant. Aside from email communications, use of Twitter and a student management system called SLATE, Mr. Ubiquitous also uses a school and personal Facebook page to leverage his school’s electronic family and community engagement efforts.

**Chuck Ubiquitous, Principal**

“We want to make the school as accessible as possible for our families both physically and virtually.” This statement summarizes the family engagement philosophy of Mr. Ubiquitous’ school. Located in the center of town, his school welcomes students and families from every corner of Philadelphia so a well-rounded approach in imperative. The “we” in many of his statements suggests that his overall approach to not only family engagement, but school leadership is a total team effort.
With a conscious effort in face-to-face, non-technology-based communications, the principal considers the school’s advisory system as the “most powerful form of family engagement strategies.” He described that the underlying concept of the strategy is to encourage parents or guardians to spend time with their children for four high school years. The advisory system uses an advisor and teachers in guiding the academic success of every student. The principal shared:

In terms of our advisory program, there’s a 1:20 ratio of teacher advisor-to-advisee. And that advisor is the parents’ first point of contact. So everybody, every parent in this building knows that there is one teacher here who will be with their child for all 4 years and that will serve as an advocate for their child. That provides a continuity of care that is incredibly important that I think parents really value to the point where when we do parent teacher conferences, unlike most high schools where you walk around and do a six, you know, wait in six different lines for 1 minute with six different teachers, we produce all of our narrative report cards electronically. Those are kicked out as a PDF file to the advisors and the advisor sits down with the parent and the child and he does, has a 20-minute conference about the progress of the child. That conversation becomes a longitudinal conversation because again there’s continuity as you’re meeting the same person semester after semester, which in turn is designed to build a strong relationship between home and school.

Without any formal family engagement leadership training, Mr. Ubiquitous has evolved his own practice with each year in his role. He believes that solid home-school relationships begin with the aforementioned strategy in establishing and maintaining a continuous partnership. Face-to-face opportunities are maximized when opportunities arise. The school invites parent and community stakeholders to volunteer during in-school activities. Inquiry High School is constantly looking to accommodate more volunteers to help them organize advisory dinners with the families and build more relationships with families. In fact, the principal shared that volunteers are encouraged to
spend a lot of time in the school, not just for their own child, but for the learning community in general.

As parents get to know the school, a transparent school environment is established with and without technology tools. This environment can be described as a place where parents can always express their views and opinions to the principal and staff and expect the school to be open and transparent in the way they approach any challenges. Since the school enrolls students from every corner of a large metropolitan city, limiting barriers like access, transportation or childcare is a big part of the family engagement strategy at Inquiry High School. The school aims to do whatever it can to meet families where they are in terms of their engagement needs.

The fact that the first person you see when you walk into the school is the principal supports this overall vision of the school. “The open door policy would be ineffective if it wasn’t matched with an open mind policy.”

The data collected suggest that this principal’s words are backed up by his actions and the physical design of the high school and his follow-through with parents. When walking into the school, the principal’s office is positioned as a hallway into the main office area, a frequently traveled and common space for students, teachers, and parents. This approach removes the traditional secretary as gatekeeper approach that many schools still use, in turn removing barriers for parents. Mr. Ubiquitous is committed to breaking down as many barriers as possible in the way of engaging his families.

The school principal ensured that their activities also address the socio-economic challenges of families describing that:
Fifty-percent of our families are of low socio-economic status. It’s nine bucks to park in the lot next door, which is a lot of money. We’re always trying to look for ways to lower the barrier to entering the school. We offer a lot, that’s why our staff give out their cell phone numbers and they text message parents. It’s one of the reasons why we do so much by email and why we publish out so much stuff on our website and my blog. We want to make the school as accessible as possible for our families both physically and virtually.

While the collection of data in this study targeted the electronic tools and impact they had on communicating with Mr. Ubiquitous’ families, this principal spent little time talking about technology itself. To him, it is not about the technology tools in meeting the needs of his families or even for teaching and learning. His daily role as a leader is to remove the barriers that are in the way a connected and transparent learning environment.

In discussing his lack of leadership preparation in the area of school, family, and community partnerships, Mr. Ubiquitous shared an inspirational professional development workshop led by Dr. Karen Mapp on the *Beyond the Bakesale* (2009) book. He feels this book has helped shape his own family engagement core values, as well as those of his staff and families. In this publication he learned the value of home-school relationships and the importance of offering parents multiple opportunities to engage in the education of their children. Along with these core beliefs, Mr. Ubiquitous sets high expectations for school, family, and community partnerships at his school. One of the goals he sets for the school is to always get at least 95% attendance at all parent conferences.

In detailing both one-way and two-way home-school communications offered at Inquiry High School, Mr. Ubiquitous described one-way communication, as “advisory memos that are sent out twice a week letting parents know what’s going on.” Some two-way communication examples include Facebook groups, the school’s Twitter account, a
listserv and parent access to Moodle. The principal revealed that part of their electronic home-school success is the use of SLATE, a student information system where students progress monitoring can be accessed. The program allows teacher to “create progress notes” for information to the advisor and the parents and engage in electronic dialogue on this progress.

The principal shared the use of social media tools like Facebook and Twitter had never been an original plan of the school’s family engagement strategies. He detailed how he discovered its potential with his learning community:

It was when I started using the tools and parents then started using it and naturally that’s when it happened. Kids got a kick out of the fact that their principal followed them on Facebook--some of it just really happened organically. If you have a great relationship with a kid, they trust you enough to be like I, they want to invite you into their electronic playground and they invite you in.

Mr. Ubiquitous shared many real-life relationships that opened the doors for social media tools to be harnessed in school and at home. He points to his interest in blogging, sports, photography, and an innate curiosity that gave him an advantage in building a healthy relationship with the parents and students. He describes the use of social media to virtually watching a local sporting event with his students and parents as “wonderfully humanizing.” In other words, the real-time information sharing that social media tools allow for “virtually” puts people in the same room as one another. It is obvious that Mr. Ubiquitous genuinely enjoys relationship building in both personal and virtual worlds. Relationship-building as a key focus is one of the reasons social media is successfully used as a main form of communication at his school. From my conversation with Mr. Ubiquitous, it is evident that social media is an extension of who he is and his behaviors and actions online do not change from who he is “in real life” if you walked
into his hallway office. The next section will detail the parents’ perspective of how family engagement occurs at Inquiry High School, and the impact of the school principal’s efforts.

**Inquiry High School Parents**

“I think you feel like you have more of a relationship with the school because you have access to the school and principal outside of the traditional school day” (Inquiry High School parent).

Parents from the Inquiry High School’s Home and School Association were included in this group interview to understand how they see family engagement efforts at the school, both with and without the use of technology. They were asked a series of questions regarding the efforts of the leader, Mr. Ubiquitous, and the school as a whole in terms of its efforts in engaging families. The statement aligns fairly closely with the principal’s vision of overall family engagement, and again the word “relationships” is used to describe Inquiry High School’s home-school connection.

To these parents, the initial connection with the school started during the first day of classes when parents are greeted with a welcoming and friendly environment. It is very evident that home-school connections at IHS are fostered beyond social media and other technology tools. The parents claimed that teachers and the principal ensured that all parents’ contact information are consistently stored and that all parents feel secure that their concerns will be cordially responded as they arise. Further, parents shared that a recent family night organized by the school also gave them the enthusiasm they need to participate in future school activities.
From the very start of the interview, it was evident that the parents considered the school principal a relationship builder. Multiple times during our discussion parents shared how lucky they felt to have such a genuine “students first” individual leading their school. He was described as an “excellent role model,” a “real person,” and someone who “always had time for students and parents.”

The parents at this school each had a “choice” form of communications they preferred to use. While the use of email was the most widely used form of digital communication in place at the school, it was noted that each day a different form of communication might work best for a given parent. While phone calls were considered useful for emergency information, the parents found email as effective in communicating simultaneous concerns from parents and students. These parents recalled that the traditional means of communication such as phone calls and postage mail have been replaced by the faster, modern, and cheapest mode of emailing. Some parents agreed that with their experiences, that sending an email is a much-preferred mode of communication because sending mails would require them to pay postage fee. Parents also shared that paper-based notices might not always reach the parents. One parent shared that she used to email her son’s teachers to notify them of the possible absences due to health or emergency reasons. Two of the participants indicated that regular school updates are being sent to parents through email and that she looks forward to these communications.

While parents noticed that email communications are well suited for parents’ and teachers’ time, they also revealed that messages sent through text are much more preferred by students than email messages. One participant said that text messages were more like a conversation than sending an email. Accordingly, children and parents
differed in their communication preferences. Parents prefer email while children prefer
text messages. These students’ interests had urged their parents to allow the use of
cellular phones, as the school used to prohibit such acts. The takeaway here is that the
school is invested in meeting not only the parents, but also the students, where they are in
terms of their desired method of communication. This differentiated approach works at
home, too, as the parents shared stories of how they text their children from various areas
of the house to notify them of dinner being “on the table” and also to check in on
homework progress.

When parents at Inquiry High School were asked about the access to resources
through the Internet, varying responses were noted. Parents articulated that they use the
school webpage mainly for research purposes. The parents also cited that the parent
portal had served them in a number of ways. This portal, known as SLATE, gives them
access to view videos and pictures of students as well as the access to view progress
reports of school donations, thus making the webpage an interactive two-way bulletin
board of the school’s current activities and achievements.

In terms of social media tools, Facebook has been the most widely used social
media tool at this school for students, staff, and parents. All parents were excited to
report that IHS included special student, parent, and alumni pages. They shared that
these pages, however, were created and administered by private persons, rather than by
the school. A parent shared that the parent pages contained similar information such as
schedules of meetings and fundraising activities posted in the school website. The
discussion of parents revealed that their active involvement with home-school activities
started when they joined Facebook. To these parents, Facebook allowed them to share
and receive ideas from other parents and IHS teachers over a period of time. Parents detail this experience:

Once a conversation is begun on Facebook, it can continue in person and/or virtually using Facebook. Our experience with Facebook has paved the way for marketing activities and both related and unrelated networking and relationship-building opportunities for other parents. Our Facebook parent page is an open page, offering commentaries from any user, not just those officially included in the school’s learning community.

Further, the parents revealed that the school principal often directed and informed them using his Facebook and/or personal blog site. As such, parents have been reading developed an ongoing relationship with the principal even without physically coming to school.

Phone calls are also used at school for home-school communications, but sparingly and according to need. With only one secretary, calls are used mainly when parents have no access to the Internet as a strategy, to compensate for what they do not have access to online. The secretary does the best she can to personalize the information offered electronically through various tools used by the school.

I think you feel like you have more of a relationship with the school because you have access to the school and principal outside of the traditional school day. Even if you’re not directly chatting with school personnel, you’re reading a post or you’re getting some insight even into the personal life of your principal or one of their teachers cause you’re looking at their vacation pictures being posted. Or, so, you know, it’s not all just school related but you get to know the school personnel on a deeper level and be involved in a real relationship that matters. You feel like you know them a whole lot better than you probably actually do because you’re not seeing them face-to-face, which makes the comfort level between home and school higher. When I do run into a teacher, I feel a connection that I wouldn’t have if I hadn’t been able to interact with them on Facebook.

Parents went on to say that the use of the social media tool Facebook has built a new community for them. “It’s a new kind of community and helps us feel connected to
our school because we have that virtual cohesion.” When thinking of all of the barriers to physically being at the school including but not limited to childcare, lack of vehicle, money for parking or transportation, et cetera, the schools offers parents innovative options that get them “almost there” and able to interest with school staff and principal on a consistent basis according to the needs of the day.

Parents also shared that the energy and camaraderie of school activities have a way of promoting engagement and narrowing the divide between home and school. There was overwhelming agreement that the school meets their needs and conscientiously works with them as issues arise where the home-school partnership and the “relationships” built over time both physically and virtually becomes vital.

In the next section, I detail the actual social media artifacts referred to in the interviews with both IHS parents and the Mr. Ubiquitous over a 6-month time span. The posts included are aimed to showcase how the use of social media tools by the schools has provided a two-way communication opportunity for families at Inquiry High School.

**Social Media Artifacts, Inquiry High School**

Three social media artifacts were chosen to illustrate how these tools are being used to offer Inquiry High School families a two-way communication option. These artifacts inform parents of recent activities in school, elicit feedback from parents who participated in an event and encouraged a global learning community, offer the community an opportunity to get to know school staff as lead learners, build trust, and provide the pulse of the school for new and current families.

**Artifact 1: Inform parents of recent activities in school.** For working parents, it is often difficult to get to extra-curricular events that occur at 3:00 p.m. in the
afternoon. By sharing pictures and video highlights using social media, parents can get an early heads-up on their child’s extra curricular to deepen the conversational level later when the family meets face-to-face.

Figure 2 is a group picture from the Home and School meeting hosted at Chuck Ubiquitous’ house. This “open up your home” offering illustrates the blurred line between home and school IHS has established and the face-to-face, two-way communication offerings they have invested in. Many principals and their families might balk at this idea, which accentuates the passion and commitment he has for his school and his families. He truly treats them as another member of his family by opening his doors to plan for what is best for kids. In this picture, a photo social media tool called Instagram is used to keep a running photo album throughout the school year. Instagram can be easily synced with the school’s Facebook page for ease of use. Since it is a public social media tool, parents, teachers, students, and community members can check the visual feed at any time to catch up on something they missed or would like to learn more about.

The next social media artifacts offers an opportunity for parents to understand the professional learning investment that school staff and leaders put in outside of the typical school day. This learning falls in line with the mission and vision of the school and offers parents an opportunity to learning virtually alongside school staff using the same social media tools as other educators around the world.

Artifact 2: Offers the community an opportunity to get to know school staff as “Lead Learners.” Principal Chuck Ubiquitous speaks around the country on a variety of educational leadership topics, shares his reflections using tweets, his Facebook
Figure 2. Monthly IHS Home and School meetings are hosted at the principal’s house.

page and his professional blog. Parents, students, staff, and the community are able to read and continue the conversation using these transparent social media tools.

Transparency is a leadership characteristic that Mr. Ubiquitous demonstrates in a variety of ways within his role as principal at IHS. Transparency in using social media tools equates to the material that you post online. Mr. Ubiquitous is proud to share the
accomplishments of his learning community. By posting online, he is sharing and/or encouraging conversation with the rest of the world, virtually inviting others into the room with him to learn and share. Figure 3 details how his professional colleagues recognized him for his efforts and provides his family and friends with a transparent view of his educational work/lifelong learning “outside of IHS.”

![Figure 3](image)

*Figure 3.* Mr. Ubiquitous is commended by education colleagues around the country for organizing and facilitating a national conference.
The next IHS social media artifact illustrates the true global reach of social media tools. Fundraising has been successful at HIS due to its large network of educational, family and community stakeholders from various time zones around the world.

**Artifact 3: Encourage global participation.** At IHS, fundraising plays a huge role in what the school can offer its students from year to year. Each year the school holds a teacher leadership conference to raise enough money for the 1:1 laptop initiative at the school. Using social media tools like Twitter, Facebook, and his blog, Mr. Ubiquitous, IHS parents, teachers, and students market their conference and share globally their goals and how those in various time zones can help out. Mr. Ubiquitous shared that individuals in at least ten countries outside of the United States contributed donations using these social media tools during the fundraising window. The school is known around the world for outreach efforts and even welcomed President Obama in June to speak to the graduates. In Figure 4, Mr. Ubiquitous thanks those who helped his school reach their annual fundraising goal of $200,000 to support their 1:1 laptop initiative.

The next artifact provides the school and school leader with feedback that the efforts to engage families, both with and without technology, are making a difference. Social media are seen below as providing explicit compliment as feedback to the school.

**Artifact 4: Building trust.** The informal, conversational style of communication used as a strategy in building camaraderie with the parents is a major theme highlighted in the online posts. Inquiry High School parents appear very open and enthusiastic in sharing their thoughts, suggesting a culture of transparency, trust, and relationship-based.
Figure 4. Fundraising provides students with their own laptop in this 1:1 school.

As evidenced in Figure 5, the parents explicitly use the word “trust” when it comes to the relationship they have with their child’s school and principal.
Figure 5. Mr. Ubiquitous talks openly about family engagement on his Facebook wall as parents chime in.

In describing the school as an “extension of their family,” the ease of access to the school using social media has made communication and camaraderie seamless for this particular family. They have taken the time to describe in detail what the school means to them, and put it out there for the rest of IHS’s learning community to see.

Artifact 5: Provides the “pulse” of the school. Since the school pulls from all over the city, interested students must interview for enrollment. By accessing the school
social media tools, prospective students and families can begin to understand the culture of the school based not only on what the school says it offers (a typical one-way website), but by what the information and feedback school families, students, and community using social media tools.

A student who is not yet part of the IHS learning community shares their enthusiasm for the school’s offerings in Figure 6. This post captures the excitement of a prospective student at the thought of attending IHS, and both current and former students and teachers contribute to the post. A school with its own Twitter hashtag (#IHS) and Facebook page is appealing to many of today’s high school students that use social media as a way of life. Within a couple keystrokes, this prospective student writes on the school’s page and is already engaging current and formers students in their own thoughts. The prospective student and his/her family is provided an authentic exposure to the school’s culture with a participatory window into the school. Without the technology tools in place, this student’s only chance to speak with all of these stakeholders in a matter of minutes would be at the actual school during an Open House days before his scheduled interview.

Each of the social media artifacts embedded in this case contain content and language used to engage school stakeholders in a virtual way. Themes that emerged from the social media artifacts at Inquiry High School include (a) Inform parents of the recent activities in school; (b) Offer the community an opportunity to get to know school staff as “lead learners”; (c) Encourage global participation; (d) Build trust; and (e) Provide pulse of the school for new and current families.
Like Mr. Ubiquitous shared, “It’s not about the technology tools.” The school is about relationships and doing whatever it takes to remove the barriers to engage families who might not be able to physically attend the school in a face-to-face manner. The parents and school staff work together to harness social media tools to support teaching and learning in a variety of ways. The school considers technology like oxygen. It is
something everyone uses to thrive in their learning environment, knowing that everyone
might use it in a different way for a different purpose.

School Case Study 2: Hewlett P. Ackard High School

Hewlett P. Ackard High School (HPHS) serves a grade 9-12 population of school
families comprised of 9% free or reduced lunch. The school’s family demographics
include 57% White, 36% Black, 18% Hispanic, 17% Asian, 4% Pacific Islander, 3%
other.

Linwood Burton is the principal of Hewlett P. Ackard High School in Ackard,
suburb of a major northeast city. He is a former high school vice principal, director of
athletics and supervisor of health and physical education, and science teacher. Mr.
Burton expressed his overall vision as “establishing and fostering learning environments
that are student-centered, collaborative, flexible, and designed to prepare all learners to
succeed in the 21st century.” As the school leaders, he believes that the skills necessary
for the transformation of school culture include effective communication, listening,
support, shared decision-making, and the integration of technology.

Mr. Burton has emerged as an innovative leader in the use of social media and
web 2.0 as tools to engage students, improve communications with stakeholders, and help
educators grow professionally. He is a Google-certified teacher and an ASCD 2011
Conference Scholar. Linwood was named to the National School Boards Association 20
to Watch list in 2010 for technology leadership. He presents and speaks nationally on
embracing and effectively utilizing today’s technology tools. Aside from email, Twitter,
the student newspaper and a student management system called Zippslip, this school
principal uses Facebook to leverage his school’s eFACE efforts.
Linwood Burton, Principal

Our family engagement efforts consist of routine communications on items such as events, sports scores and schedule changes. These communications include student accomplishments, staff achievements and emergency information. It’s also about giving stakeholders the information that they want and respect.

Before Mr. Burton’s school used of social media, they used “phone, email, and snail mail to communicate home to families.” Snail mail is relatively expensive, which made email the most preferred mode of sending communication for parents in the interests of being fiscally responsible within his role as school principal. While traditional forms of communication continue to be used to engage parents, he uses email to share a monthly report which is anywhere from six to ten pages long. In these reports are details of all the things that are going on at Hewlett P. Ackard High School, including innovation in the classroom, field trips, guest speakers, updates, and more.

When asked about access challenges at HPHS, Mr. Burton spoke from experience. “A high percentage of our families give their students smart phones before they put food on the table. Based on recent district data, 95% or more of HPHS homes have the Internet access.”

With these statistics in mind, Mr. Burton believes that the new Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) initiative will benefit his school community as he is “meeting his students and families where they are.” BYOT allows students to use their own personal digital devices during “break and lunch time at their will, except they can’t make phone calls.” Furthermore, Mr. Burton said that teachers “prefer to use students’ mobile learning devices in classrooms” so using these electronic communication tools are a nice transition in generating parents’ participation in using the same tools that their children
use. In turn, students then go home and are able to teach their parents how these tools work, building capacity in the home-school communication tools that the learning community can utilize moving forward.

Mr. Burton, like many school principals, has never had any formal training on engaging families. He does what he feels is the best to enhance or improve upon what is currently in place. His efforts have been accomplished in an informal, self-directed fashion. In reflecting further, Mr. Burton believes his school uses a holistic approach in disseminating information out to his stakeholders in a variety of forms because, as he has learned, they consume content and information in a variety of ways.

Mr. Burton described the importance of two-way versus one-way communications between home and school at HPHS. “Using social media is pointless if it’s one-way communication. It’s no different than email on a website. We’re talking about true engagement if we’re talking about two-way communication.”

Mr. Burton shared that he is not satisfied with his family engagement efforts, and is working to embed two-way communication tools by default when possible. As he lays out his goals and checkpoints along the way, it is evident he is building this capacity purposefully and slowly among all of his students, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders according to the Internet usage data provided to him by his school district.

The principal shared that the emergence of social media tools in his school such as Facebook and Twitter started from his students’ suggestions. He recalled a statement from a student. “If you want to really communicate with us and get information into our hands, get on Facebook.”
So that is exactly what he did. A self-proclaimed anti-social media user, Mr. Burton began using tool after tool to engage stakeholders after he witnessed the use of Facebook generated online student and parent participation within his learning community. He became a believer once he saw the positive impact these tools were having on his learning community. His blog continues to be used to inspire students as well as parents at Hewlett P. Ackard High School to use these tools. You will find guests posts by HPHS students and teachers, as well as from outside the school network.

While Mr. Burton shared that his school had a formal website, he also shared the need to use Facebook and Twitter to extend the reach of the information found on that website. He explains the need for one tool to complement the other here. “Having a vehicle to push out what is going on within the schools is crucial if back and forth, two-way communication is to occur between home and school.”

Mr. Burton has made consistent use of social media tools being used so the parents have an expectation that if they are going to use a tool like Facebook or Twitter and there will be valuable information there. He has seen schools fail when they start a Twitter feed or a Facebook page and go months without sending an update. In building capacity to use these tools, they become the place where students and families can find information and communicate with the school.

Mr. Burton has set high expectations for the use of social media tools at his school centering around his students.

As we generate more content on the Internet, the potential for student digital software publishing appears. Once we take our digital journals and course newspapers to the next level, I foresee more engagement not just on behalf of me, but teachers and students. We want students to have Twitter feeds as reporters
because it sends a positive message to our families in terms of the authentic teaching and learning going on at Hewlett P. Ackard.

Mr. Burton believes these “student reporters” help to build a positive school culture and a sense of pride. HPHS educators, in their own social media use, are teaching and leading (by example) students how to be digitally responsible using social media. The most powerful communicators we have are truly the students. It is very evident here that Mr. Burton is learning innovative ways to offer family engagement opportunities which put the students at the center of his school’s efforts. When the students are the ones on stage, parents desire to witness their daily efforts and accomplishments (whether physically or virtually).

Mr. Burton makes an effort to utilize new technology tools at his high school campus. His school offers to all families a free web-based family digital communication interface called ZipSlipp, and all of his school communications are delivered electronically using this free tool. He shares:

In using this tool, it is a whole different dynamic when parents get an email, open up a private interface and they see a video from the principal. Not only can I see that parents opened up the email, I can actually set it up that they have to comment on a certain communication.

By harnessing a social media tool that collects data on how many parents he is actually reaching with these digital communications, Mr. Burton can make informed decisions on future communication strategies his school team will take.

Mr. Burton’s vision of using social media tools to engage families is to engage students with resources that are free and easily accessible, and help parents and students support and enhance the in-school teaching and learning process. He shared many technology tools that he has begun using since the students at his school encouraged him
to “meet them where they are.” As he talks with learning community members locally and globally, he often references his former anti-social media attitude as a way to convert those still weary of their benefits. Due to the work of Mr. Burton’s staff, HPHS is widely known around the world as a cutting edge high school with a connected learning environment. He has used social media tools to create his school’s own “brand” and dictate the story of the teaching, learning, and relationship-building happening within his school. The positive impacts of social media use to engage stakeholders at HPHS can be directly tied to the voice of the students, which Mr. Burton listened to, worked to adapt previous anti-social media policy, hence creating an opportunity to bring these ideas to fruition. The next section will detail the parents’ perspective of how family engagement occurs at Hewlett P. Ackard High School and the impact of the school principal’s efforts.

**Hewlett P. Ackard Parents**

Everybody has a comfort zone, in terms of what technologies they like to use. And people will find comfort in using a consistent tool for them. More importantly are that we do have various forms of communication available for us to use at this school. (HPHS parent)

The quote above by a Hewlett P. Ackard parent evidences the fact that there is more than one way parents are able to communicate with the school. When schools like this one offer a menu of opportunities to communicate, they help meet the varying communication comfort levels of parents. For some parents, they are comfortable sending a text or using Facebook or Twitter. For others, they still prefer to pick up the phone or send an email. Regardless of their preference, the school respects their preferences and provides multiple options.
Five Hewlett P. Ackard High School parent leaders were interviewed to gauge their perspectives regarding the effect of the principal’s use of social media in engaging parents in the students’ academic success. While The Lance student newspaper and Zipslipp are available in school for information dissemination, the parents collectively revealed that Facebook had been the most powerful family engagement tool in generating real-time commentaries from parents and other school stakeholders. One parents stated:

Hewlett P. Ackard has a Facebook page that engages us. The posts share what the students and teachers are doing during the school day and what events are coming up. Actually, before coming here tonight (to this interview) I realized that our school musical is tonight and my son’s girlfriend is singing in the chorus. She didn’t tell me what time it was so I quickly signed onto Facebook before I came and found out that it was at seven.

By having access to a continuously updated social media tool like Facebook, parents know that when they have a question or need clarification, they can visit the page to find their answer on their own, without the need to make contact with the school.

The parents also mentioned that the school rarely relies on paper anymore. A participant said that paper mode of communication has “almost become obsolete.” One parent shared that most of the parents she knows in the community use their phone as a computer now and communicate with the school accordingly. With more mobile phones being used as primary Internet access for parents, the social media tools being used must be mobile-friendly and work seamlessly with the communications sent home by HPHS.

In terms of the school website being used to engage parents in school activities, the parents revealed that they used the website as basic sources of information including telephone numbers, calendar, emails, and other general contact information. Parents further explained that all basic school information is published in the site, but that it was
a one-way communication tool. The HPHS Facebook often links back to an informational page on the website to direct parents to a certain new or archived resource.

Aside from Facebook, the parent focus group participants shared that the school also used other social media tools like Flickr, Youtube, Twitter, and Zippslip. The Zippslip tool appears to be a very convenient tool for parents:

Sometimes you have to sign something, a permission slip for a trip or something. You ask your child, where is the paper? It was lost. It wasn’t brought home. With this Zippslip tool we parents can log on and sign the form electronically instantly. With free tools like this available, many of us really don’t want nor need paper anymore. It’s almost become obsolete. I feel it’s an advantage that you can now see everything that is sent home now with the introduction of social media tools like this.

Two drawbacks of using social media tools came up during my discussion with the parents at Hewlett P. Ackard. One parent expressed that using these social media tools might jeopardize the promotion of accurate information. Specifically, they went on to share that one challenge with all these rapid, real-time information systems (social media) in general is that sometimes you get a lot of false positives since the information comes out so quickly. The comparison made was that of national news stations reporting news information too fast using social media tools without first verifying accuracy. In the case of school use, the principal or responsible social media coordinator at the school has the ultimate responsibility to make sure what gets posted using social media tools is accurate and meets the organization’s Acceptable Use Policy (AUP).

Parents also shared that there are people in town who are not on the computer and also another population of families who do not speak English as their first language. This is another reason for Hewlett P. Ackard to offer a wide array of communication options for parents’ comfort and accessibility levels.
Parents agreed that social media may have some disadvantages, but overall the group suggested that social media tools provide opportunities to build a strong pride for the school in a virtual manner. They expressed that social media unites their community without everyone having to be physically present at school. In other words, social media tools have the opportunity to put the entire school community in the same room for information sharing, feedback solicitation and relationship building. While this might be good for those who are “connected,” the parents without access, training or hardware are at a communication disadvantage, and it is up to the school to close this gap by providing hard copies, making home visits or meeting those parents where they are in terms of communication offerings.

In the next section, I reference actual social media artifacts referred to in the interviews with both HPHS parents and Mr. Burton over a 6-month time span. The posts included below are aimed to showcase how the use of social media tools by the schools has provided a two-way communication opportunity for families at Inquiry High School.

**Hewlett P. Ackard Social Media Artifacts**

As evidenced in the social media artifacts, the school’s Facebook account was examined in search of content and language used to engage parents in school activities. Several emerging themes were noted and captured. Themes that arose included (a) sharing achievements of the school; (b) posting reminders for families; and (c) generating funds to finance school activities. Ideas on how these themes might impact family and community engagement are included alongside examples of each social media artifact.

**Artifact 1: Sharing achievements of students, parents, and staff.** As the Figure 7 illustrates parents and teachers at Hewlett P. Ackard chime in on a teacher’s
Figure 7. Sharing achievements with school and staff.

various talents as an educator and person, and how lucky the school community is to have this person on staff. By just a few keystrokes, the school is able to recognize stakeholders publicly for the world to join in congratulating them. As you can see from
the post, the compliments continue in the comments section from fellow teachers and parents who have had this professional as their child’s teachers.

By using a social media tool like Facebook to broadcast out to the community, Hewlett P. Ackard High School has the ability to provide a constant flow of information out to the community well before local newspapers have the opportunity to be aware, interview and publish their own version.

In Figure 8, a student is recognized for her accomplishments at Cornell University during a fashion design competition. The use of social media to spread the word on this accomplishment is immediately seen by parents, neighbors, grandparents, current and former teachers, alumni, and community members. The post suggests that the school’s culture celebrates accomplishments of students as events occur rather than waiting for the monthly newsletter to come out or awards assembly to occur.

While it is important to celebrate the successes of members of the learning community, families need to know of upcoming events and current events to make sure they can support their child at the event, ensure they know everything they need to know to get the most out of the event.

**Artifact 2: Posting reminders for families.** The school’s 50th Anniversary Celebration and Carnival includes a time capsule as illustrated in Figure 9. This generates a question by a school alumnus, and the school is able to answer the question in a short time. This two-way communication offering by the school allows families to know that the school is listening and invested in making sure they have the information they need for the event as it responds to a question posed after the post was created. Of course, with a growing school parent population accessing social media tools like
Figure 8. Sharing achievements of students, parents, and staff.
Figure 9. Posting reminders for families.

Facebook from mobile devices, portions of these conversations may have taken place at the grocery store, at the bus stop, at the gym, or at work. For those with Internet access, communicating with today’s connected schools has never been easier.

Figure 10 represents another reminder for students and families. In any schools around the country, students are asked to leave their devices at home, or these contraband-referenced devices are confiscated by school personnel if they are caught using them in school. At HPHS, a new policy is in place called Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT). This program offers students can the opportunity to utilize their own personal computers, tablets and cell phones at school in the form of personal
learning devices. With more schools allowing personal devices to be used in schools, families can find out how to register their devices and get up and running in a concise manner. A follow-up post might include a link to the electronic form. The school might also send a Zippslip message to allow connected parents to complete the form electronically.

Figure 10. Reminders for students.

Besides sharing information with school stakeholders, HPHS leverages those inside and outside of its school network to raise money for school activities. The next artifact captures the enthusiasm of parents, students, and other stakeholders in posting comments and appreciation to individuals behind fundraising successes of the school.

Artifact 3: Generating funds to finance school activities. On the Hewlett P. Ackard Facebook page, a short video of the actual fundraising concert was posted following the event using Youtube (Figure 11). The posted video allows those who could
not attend the concert a glimpse into the action, with special attention to student performers and a summary of the efforts made on behalf of all stakeholders.

Figure 11. Share video footage of school events for those not in attendance.

Parents celebrated the success of the fundraising concert by liking the video posted and commenting below it. Using Facebook’s social media tool, parents, families, and friends who were unable to make the event physically can virtually share their
appreciation and recognition for the entire school community to enjoy. Instead of hanging a recognition up on the refrigerator, student families at HPHS can view their accomplishments from anywhere from any device with an Internet connection.

This act of liking posts on Facebook is the most commonly used method of physical “clapping for applause” using the Internet. The post in Figure 12 below shows the school raised $1,900. Future posts might include where these monies will be allocated, keeping families in the loop and continuing to build trust between home and school. Next time a fundraiser is attempted, families will know where their donations are going and how it is supporting the teaching and learning at Hewlett P. Ackard High School.

![Facebook Post](image.png)

*Figure 12. Generating funds for school activities.*

Each of the social media artifacts embedded in this case include the content and language used to engage the school’s learning community in a virtual way. Themes that emerged from the social media artifacts at Hewlett P. Ackard High School include Themes that arose include: (a) sharing the achievements of the school; (b) posting reminders for families; and (c) generating funds to finance school activities.
Principal Burton has put the students at the center of his family engagement efforts. The decision to move forward on the use of social media tools stemmed from his commitment to student voice at HPHS. His school has experienced engagement success in student-centered communications whether they are offered physically or virtually. The school offers a menu of communication offerings for the wide range of family communication needs. Finally, by using social media tools that provide real-time usage data on the part of HPHS families, the home-school team can make informed decisions on future communication efforts and offerings.

**School Case Study 3: Coral Stables Elementary**

Coral Stables Elementary School includes a K-6 population of families comprised of 24% free or reduced lunch. The school’s family demographics include 94% White, 5% Asian, 1% Hispanic, 1% Black, and 1% other. It is a Title 1 school.

Laurene Powell is the principal of Coral Stables Elementary School, a K-6 public school serving 450 students, located in a rural section of northeast state. She also serves as the district’s Elementary Technology Integrator and Coach. Mrs. Powell designs and implements professional learning opportunities for teachers to learn about the innovative shifts in teaching and learning and the integration of technology to support student learning and instruction. She shares her experiences on her blog, and is also a contributor to Connected Principals and PLP’s Voices from the Learning Revolution. She enjoys connecting and collaborating with other passionate educators and is an active voice on Twitter. Aside from email and Twitter, Mrs. Powell uses a school blog to leverage her school’s school, family, and community partnerships.
Laurene Powell, Principal

Maybe it’s a certain type of population (her blog). I know that if I want somebody to find something quickly, if I put it there, it’ll spread really quickly. This quote from Ms. Powell acknowledges that not every parent uses technology to communicate with their child’s school, but those that do clearly have an advantage in terms of rapidly receiving and having the opportunity to respond to school-home communications.

Being a former technology integration specialist, this principal sees through a strong digital lens in her day-to-day efforts to engaging families. She uses Twitter, Facebook, and blogs to leverage online home-school communications. Mrs. Powell shared that her school also uses several offline family engagement strategies. These strategies include: (a) open door policy; (b) liberal visitation policy; (c) volunteer program; and (d) meet the teacher nights. The home-school communication strategy implemented by the school also includes hard copy communications to connect with parents. Ms. Powell described this as follows:

Our teachers provide newsletters home to families. Over the past few years, teachers have developed their websites, and some are now moving to a blog platform, as well. When I first started, there was something called the Coral Stables Bugle, which was like the school newspaper and it was printed three times a year, run by a parent who owned a publishing company. The teachers would send their articles to her and she would put them together and she would put it out. We eventually transitioned that to an electronic (two-way communication) blog.

Mrs. Powell is another principal that has never had any formal training in the area of family engagement. Everything she has learned has come while “on the job.” The evolution of her school’s home-school communication practices began as a (one-way) newsletter, but now the staff has upgraded to a blog to offer more two-way
communications with school families. Teachers at Mrs. Powell’s school survey parents at the beginning of the year to find out which communications parents prefer with and without technology. Some of the teachers set up email ListServs with their parent groups and send out things that way, while offering hard copies to those parents without Internet access.

Ms. Powell suggested that among all the forms of social media being used at her school, the Facebook page generates the most parental engagement. She shares:

Our first social media push has been using Facebook. Due to district policy, the school is not permitted to start a Facebook account for our schools at this time. However, together with a PTO mom, who was very interested in getting a page started, we set it up together so the school is not the provider. We both have access to post information. I post my blog posts right to Facebook so parents can read it and we have, I think, about 90 followers now on that page and I know that I reach a lot of people that way. Between my own posts and that of the PTO and other parents, we’ve received good feedback and use of this tool.

Policy stands in the way of many great ideas and opportunities for student and staff, but sometimes it depends on who assumes responsibility whether something is approved by upper administration or not. By thinking outside of the box, Mrs. Powell has found a way to make the ideas of a parent within her school community come to life. Obviously, this parent’s preferred method of communication is Facebook and her leadership and partnership with the school principal have helped other parents become engaged in the school’s happenings and communications.

Ms. Powell shared that she followed the directives set forth by her school district in setting her short and long term goals for the school. However, she said, “Continuing to bring parents into these conversations is really important. It’s something that my
superintendent wants of us (principals) is to always communicate and make sure parents have the opportunity to know what’s going on here.”

District support of family engagement becomes clear here, although knowing “what’s going on” and creating a true partnership have different meanings. Principals must feel accountable to improving the home-school relationship and to have a leader who will support efforts going forward is very beneficial to the success of any and all efforts. However, how many school principals do not have this support, encouragement, and accountability when it comes to family engagement?

Mrs. Powell uses her blog posts to generate feedback and to inform stakeholders of the school’s accomplishments, vision and events. She recalled one post that recognized the accomplishments of a retired teachers in a short video. This little post provided a public platform for families to add their own well wishes below the video. The response from families was a lot of positive “We’ll miss you, Thank you for all you did” kind of comments.

When asked about the potential for negative online feedback using these social media tools, Mrs. Powell shares her approach:

People always ask me, “Do you get negative feedback from the things that you post?” That seems to be one of the fears. One time after one of my bulletins, a parent asked a question. It wasn’t disrespectful. They basically wanted to know more. They couldn’t understand why it was this way and not another way. I said, “Thank you for your question. I’d love to set up a meeting and talk with you about that.” So it doesn’t have to turn into a back and forth online conversation. It can be just a place where they can express their idea and you can take it farther.

Mrs. Powell believes conflict among teachers or parents is not something able to be solved online using technology or social media tools. By answering the parent’s question and offering a face-to-face interaction, this principal welcomes, honors, and
respects the eye contact, empathy, articulation, and tone necessary to work together through any issues that arise while building relationships. By posting this approach publicly, the principal also sets the overall vision for how the school will handle any online posts that are not complimentary.

Mrs. Powell also shared that facilitating a school blog is a responsibility shared by the staff and faculty. She pointed out that the faculty and her secretary “run their own spaces” within the blog she created. The shared social media opportunities the principal creates then delegates keeps everyone engaged in communication with families. It would be easy for this tech-savvy principal to own the blog and only send out her own posts, but she is working to build capacity with her school staff on the use of social media tools to diversify home-school communications. The vision the principal sets for her staff has a greater chance of being consistent across all grade levels and departments if all are working toward within the same frame of mind.

Ms. Powell shared that, like Facebook, school Twitter accounts are prohibited in the school district’s policies and guidelines. Maintaining these accounts must be the initiative of school parents who witness the need to encourage other parents through use of this medium. She said:

We have an Acceptable Use Policy, so everything we do follows that (in terms of not supporting Twitter nor Facebook). The nice thing is that they did adopt WordPress and Kidblogs, so they are supported here in our district. These tools are nice, but it hasn’t caught on district-wide yet because they haven’t done a whole lot of training. Pockets of my teachers know how to use it and they’ve gone through and taught other people.

Organizational policy comes into play again here, as School district AUPs are often written by attorneys who aim to protect the school district from litigation.
Unfortunately, these policies are limiting factors in terms of how schools, including this principal, might be able to engage more families, teachers, and students using today’s free social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, and social media blogs.

In summary, Mrs. Powell has all of the technology training she would ever need to build capacity within her staff and families to leverage various free social media tools available to her. Unfortunately, for her learning community, she is limited in terms of what she can and cannot do to take her digital communications to the next level. With what she is approved to offer, Mrs. Powell is maximizing the use of her blog with the efforts of the collective school staff at Coral Stables Elementary. The next section will detail the parents’ perspective of how family engagement occurs at Coral Stables Elementary School, and the impact of the school principal’s efforts.

**Coral Stables Elementary Parents**

If you don’t have the soft skills to engage the parents to make them want to come and want to learn from you, then you’re going to have a major communication gap there because the parents aren’t going to respond to you.

This quote from Coral Stables Elementary Parents was a common theme throughout our discussion. Even with the presence of the latest and greatest technology tools, the investment in face-to-face, relationship-building opportunities with eye contact, tone, empathy, and mutual respect weighs very heavily with school parents. While useful for some, this statement should help educators and leaders understand that the heart of all family engagement efforts must be built upon real relationships and face-to-face interactions that build them.

Coral Stables Elementary School parents were interviewed to gauge their perspectives regarding the effect of the principal’s use of social media in engaging the
participation of parents in the students’ academic success. All of the participants commended the school’s use of electronic communications in encouraging parents to participate in school activities of their children. They indicated that email and social media such as Facebook and blogs are being used frequently by both parents, teachers, and the principal. The participants agreed that Facebook and blogs are capable of embedding videos and photos of school activities, which really bring these communications to life and encourages deeper engagement to support student learning.

When asked about the impact of these social media tools on the relationship between parents and teachers, parents revealed that while teachers encourage parents to be involved in school activities, some lack the soft skills to involve parents in good communication. One parent shared:

I think sometimes an email can come across as more compassionate at times, and then you actually do face-to-face time, and then the teacher can kind of seem blindsided on the emotional aspect of the situation, which is kind of back to that soft skills thing. Are we learning to communicate better through technology or through are face-to-face interactions? If you don’t have the soft skills to engage the parents to make them want to come and want to learn from you, then you’re going to have a major communication gap there because the parents aren’t going to respond to you.

While one parent perseverated on her perceived lack of soft skills by a member of the school staff, all parents were in agreement that communications must stem from a real relationship. The group went further in articulating these insights on the thought of technology training to build social media skills capacity across other parents at the school:

Training is not going to happen before relationship building occurs, and that’s in any school that’s going technical. If you don’t have that strong foundation in relationships before the training or learning can take place, just like the student and teacher. If they don’t have that relationship, it’s not going to grow. To be a
technically driven relationship that thrives with those tools, there has to be some relationship there. Just like when you “like” somebody on Facebook, you’re not going to like somebody you don’t know.

The benefits of the social media tools being used at Coral Stables were described in great detail by the parents. In supporting the in-school learning, one parent shared:

On some of the teachers’ websites (one-way) and the school blog (two-way), they’ll have links to math games or those type of feeds. My son is all about math so he will go and play math games. So I wouldn’t necessarily know about those links except through the school. He’ll go and play different games based upon which tools the teachers encourage for my child’s needs. There are so many websites out there, but I trust my child’s teacher to recommend the ones that will benefit him most given his age and skill level.

The difference in using websites and a blog is evidenced above. If the website links are posted on the school’s blog, then everyone within the learning community in the school community has exposure and access to these links to support classroom instruction. If the links are only posted to the teacher’s website, only the 20-30 student families in the class will have be able to take advantage of the resources shared. The two-way blog also provides an opportunity for parents to share other resources with the school or with other parents working to support similar learning standards in the home.

Parents had varying experiences with their use of digital communications and resources offered by the school teachers. Parents agree that teachers and leaders have a distinct style and skill set when it comes to teaching strategies, and technology integration is no different. If parents have the “tech-savvy teacher,” the chances of being able to engage electronically in and out of school goes up tremendously. If the child’s teacher has great fears of technology, hard copies might be the default means of communication. Without offering a menu of opportunities to communicate, teachers
provide a limited home-school communications, and force the families to meet the teacher where he or she is comfortable instead of the other way around.

Coral Stables Elementary has evolved in its use of digital tools for communications, but still sends home hard copies on Fridays for all families to help with paper organization. As parents become less dependent on paper and Internet for all families continues to rise, these Friday Folders may go away for those that do not require a hard copy. For now, the school is invested in providing a comprehensive manner of communicating between home and school. As schools are encouraged to go green in the best interested of being fiscally responsible, it is important to note that going green does not always equal good family engagement sense when it means some families get skipped on communications creating an even larger communication gap for families.

Overall, Coral Stables Elementary School believes that families need to be provided a menu of technology and non-technology related opportunities to communicate. The feeling among this group of parents was the more two-way opportunities being provided by the school, the greater the chance of a strong relationship forming between school and home. The value of face-to-face, two-way interactions is high at this school. The parents believe in the power of social media tools to engage and support their child’s learning, but want their school staff to be proficient in leveraging the human soft skills.

In the next section, I will reference actual social media artifacts referred to in the interviews with both Coral Stables parents and the Mrs. Powell over a 6-month time span. The posts included below are aimed to showcase how the use of social media tools by the
schools has provided a two-way communication opportunity for families at Inquiry High School.

**Coral Stables Social Media Artifacts**

As you will see in the social media artifacts that follow, Coral Stable’s Facebook page and blog were examined in search of content and language used to engage parents in school activities. Several emerging themes were noted and captured. The review revealed three emerging themes: (a) Sharing of resources to support at home education; (b) Appreciation of school stakeholders; and (c) Information on past, present, and future events. A summary of how these themes might impact family and community engagement is included below.

**Artifact 1: Sharing of resources to encourage home education.** By providing links to curricular topics, lesson objectives, and school-related parenting resources, the school allows parents the opportunity to align home education efforts closely to the school’s curriculum. For example, the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School left many parents feeling helpless and without direction on how to speak with their children. This school, on the same day, posted resources on how to best speak with children of varying ages about the tragedy? This post is illustrated in Figure 13. Social emotional support for students often serves as the table upon which all learning can occur. By providing parents research-based resources in a timely fashion, the school responds to the needs of their families who saw or heard about the tragic events occurring in Newtown, Connecticut.
While sharing resources electronically with families is important, showing appreciation for those who contribute to the learning community shapes a school’s culture. It is important to Coral Stables Elementary principal Laurene Powell that the school’s blog offer a section recognizing the work of others. The next social media artifacts describe this in greater detail.

**Artifact 2: Showing appreciation of school stakeholders.** It is easy to see how valued the teaching staff is at this school. Each month a new staff member is highlighted as part of an ongoing staff spotlight at this school. In an elementary school setting, often
students and families only get to know one teacher each school year. Sharing about the entire school community multiple staff from around the building helps create more familiar faces for all connected to the school and, in turn, develops a culture of everyone knows your name. The two-way communication opportunities that a staff spotlight offers are many. Parents, like the ones commenting, can add their own personal examples to recognize a particular teacher. Of course, this could also allow someone to comment in a negative manner, against the core values set up for use of social media at this school. Figures 14 and 15 illustrate the monthly staff spotlight embedded in the Coral Stables family blog.

Figure 14. Showing appreciation of school stakeholders.
Figure 15. Sharing appreciation of school stakeholders.

The next artifact evidences real-time updates and news about the happenings of the school. Connected parents and community members have the opportunity to stay up to date on Coral Stables Elementary School using various social media tools.

Artifact 3: Sharing information on past, present, and future events. As evidenced by their comments in reaction to a post introducing a new after-school running club for students (see Figure 16), parents applauded the new program. For those parents still at work checking their Facebook accounts, they have the opportunity to see their child in a picture exercising, having fun with friends under the supervision of their school gym teacher. Posts sharing events like “Dads with Donuts” or announcing upcoming Home and School Meetings as reminders that all are invited are also posted using the
school’s Facebook page. For parents who are connected and using the social media tools provided by this school principal, the pulse of the school is at their fingertips.

![Image of Coral Stables E.S. Facebook post]

*Figure 16.* Information on past, present, and future events.

Each of the social media artifacts embedded in this case contain content and language used to engage school stakeholders in a virtual way. Themes that emerged from the social media artifacts at Coral Stables Elementary School include: (a) sharing of resources to support home education; (b) showing appreciation for school stakeholders; and (c) sharing information on the past, present, and future of the school.

Principal Laurene Powell leads a learning environment with parents and teachers who use a wide range of digital and non-digital tools to communicate. She has worked with her staff to encourage more two-way communication offerings, while meeting the
parents where they are in terms of their communication preferences. Policy stands in the way of implementing other effective social media tools, but the principal and parent leadership have found ways around policy to provide a hybrid version of these tools to school families.

According to Coral Stable’s parents, face-to-face, two-way exchanges as a foundation for relationships are imperative in developing the home-school partnership. If these relationships between educators and parents do not exist, parents suggest that the social media tools in place will be limited in their impact and shared purpose to engage all stakeholders. The next section will look at each case across the three distinct sources of data: the principals, parent focus groups and social media artifacts. Emerging themes will be described and articulated further in the final chapter.

**Cross-Case Analysis**

Data from three principals, three parent groups, and three groups of social media artifacts were collected explore further how social media usage varies from one school setting to another. Specifically, what kind of two-way communication and engagement stand out from the various social media tools being offered in the schools of these three principals?

**Principals**

First, it is important to note that in each of the three settings, the principals were the ones driving the social media efforts. In order for schools to extend their respective family engagement strategies into the realms of social media, the principal had to buy in and have the capacity to harness the tools available and allowed by school and district policy. The social media efforts on the part of the principals took the form of sharing,
contacting, interacting, conveying a message to one person or a group of people through various mediums, understanding, talking, listening. These actions involved people including students, parents, teachers, community members, local and global personal learning network (PLN) members, alumni, and colleagues. The social media tools offered (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Youtube, Flickr, Zippslip) provided opportunity for two-way exchange of information or ideas.

The schools and parents are communicated with in a real-time way. This opportunity may or may not be able to happen in another medium such as formal physical meetings and/or school events. There is a level of access to the school principal that parents enjoy in using social media. The social media tools being used allow parents to get closer to the principal and engage in true relationship-building.

With each post about the school’s learning community, educational branding in real time is taking place for each respective school. With access to the day-to-day operations of the school, parents have the pulse of the teaching and learning going on at any given time. In offering a public comment section in each of these social tools, parents and staff can be brought into the same (virtual) room with the possibility of real-time feedback solicitation, collaboration, transparency, and relationship-building.

In bringing parents and teachers to the same room, the potential for conversation around a critical conversation around applicable issues is apparent. Neither of the three school principals shared using social media tools to ask parents take a stand on a given topic, so it is unclear if digital etiquette issues would arise if a critical conversation did take place. Each of the principals were very clear in the guidelines they set out in using
social media for parents that conflict would only be solved in a face-to-face manner and not in through any means of technology.

Each school had a large number of participants that were connected or registered as a participant to the social media tools by either liking (Facebook), following (Twitter), or subscribing (blog). However, there is no way of knowing how many families read, saw, and engaged with the school’s happenings without physically typing onto the tool. Many parents utilize social media as a view-only means and simply consume the media without actually taking part in the formal two-way or multi-way communications. An example would be a parent who came up to one of the principals at school and thanked him for highlighting the efforts of the swim team and helping her daughter feel special for her accomplishments. Although this parent did not type onto the Facebook page to express her gratitude, the principal knows she saw it because of this follow-up conversation.

Each of the principals seemed to focus on making public what would have been private to parents and the community. In sharing the daily events, student, staff, and parent recognitions, relationship-building across these stakeholders was apparent. The trust created by the school leader and in the parents was explicitly shared online for the world to see. However, without the school principal’s leadership to engage families using innovative tools like social media, none of these families would have had the opportunity to build a deeper relationship with the school using the medium.

Finally, each of the principals was asked about formal family engagement training. With the exception of a bookchat led by a leading family engagement researcher, neither of the three had ever received any formal training on how to engage
parents whether physically or virtually. This lack of training is a real issue and will continue to be an issue as more tools are introduced to communicate electronically with families. Principals and educators must come to understand the natural consequences of their interactions with parents are no different online than they are in person. If principals are looking to build real relationships with parents, educators must remain online the same caring, open, and honest person they are in real life.

Parents

It was quite evident that face-to-face interactions were valued differently by each principal. In speaking to parents at each of the schools, the culture of the school became very evident, as well as the core values in place for family engagement offerings overall. While there were discrepancies in the ways principals engaged parents, each of the parent groups felt very lucky to have the social media tools in place at their schools.

At Coral Stables, parents wished that more face-to-face conversations occurred to develop a deeper relationship between home and school. The fact that these parents felt technology served a higher purpose than actual face-to-face relationships is highlights the importance of a strong foundation in the school leader’s soft skills in building home-school relationships. The parents related this “soft-skills first” idea to knowing someone before you “friend them” on Facebook.

Parents interviewed learned how to utilize social media tools from each other, not from training provided by the school. Parent leadership in building capacity for social media tools led parents to create new social media spaces according to the needs of the school. The excitement and opportunity started by the school was passed along to the parents within the schools in a variety of ways. This “menu of communication offerings”
was embraced by families who valued different means of communication. Rarely did anyone in any of the three interview groups agree on what communications method worked best for them, stressing further that schools need to be diverse in their offerings to maximize the two-way communication reach and opportunities provided to its families and overall learning community.

**Social Media Artifacts**

The social media artifacts consisted of multiple ways to recognize students, parents, and staff at the school. From sharing teacher and student names, to awards earned, Facebook served as a two-way interactive bulletin board for encouraging people to take pride in the accomplishments of their learning community.

Aside from recognition, parents displayed their trust in the school through content embedded in their posts. If the school began a post with information, parents had the opportunity to continue or piggyback on the post with their own thoughts, which led to affirmations of school accomplishments and offerings. This two-way dialogue was more apparent in one school, but was offered in all three.

The school was not the only party to start a social media post. Parents could post on the school’s page at any time and offer kudos in recognizing staff efforts during any time of day, thus building and reinforcing the brand of the school and the student body from their unique parent lens. As more of this online community-building took place, parents were exposed to other parents at the school to collaborate and get to know in and outside of school happenings.

Finally, basic information like reminders and updates were used widely on social media sites. For some families, Facebook served as the main hub of communication to
find weather delays, the final score of a sporting event or a big anticipated student announcement. With consistent use of one particular social media tool, the school built capacity within that tool while reinforcing to parents where they could find certain information in real time using their computer, cell phone or other Internet-enabled device.

In summary, the overall culture of the three schools became clear as the data was analyzed. A culture of meeting families where they are, with and without the use of technology, was under ongoing construction at each of these three schools. Even without formal family engagement training, the three principals used the technology skills they had learned on their own to build capacity within their own settings, suggesting that harnessing the power of social media in schools without tech-savvy principals might be difficult. Each of these principals also had tech-savvy parents supporting their efforts in communication and training offerings in informal offerings. In all three cases, the use of electronic family and community engagement tools served as a complement, not a replacement, to face-to-face, two-way communications.
CHAPTER 4: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This exploratory study examined the impact of school principals’ use of social media tools to communicate between home and school. Using a qualitative case study analysis, this research revealed a set of behaviors, practices, processes and strategies that seem to be fundamental for using social media to complement overall school, family, and community engagements efforts.

This study has been driven by a comprehensive school, family and community partnerships model (Epstein, 1995). Specifically, this study focused on the use of two-way and multi-way communication opportunities that social media tools provide to those working in today’s schools. During the course of this research and through my interactions with participating school leaders, I learned that the principals all approached their positions as individuals who would engage families in the ways they knew best and were most familiar with, despite the lack of any formal family engagement training during their careers as educators and leaders.

As the literature suggests, there are essential characteristics of school principals that make them “key” to putting his or her school in a position to become true partners with the parent community. There is also a substantial amount of research providing educators and leaders with explicit strategies to implement a comprehensive school, family, and community partnership program at their respective school.

It was the intent of this study to broaden the literature base of what constitutes a comprehensive family engagement program that supports student achievement. It is through the findings that principals and superintendents may change the way they
practice and classroom school, family, and community partnerships practices would also change.

The principal is viewed as the primary leader of the school organization and who often supplies the conditions to influence members of the school organization. The study examined the principal’s use of social media tools to communicate between home and school as articulated by school principals, parents at their schools and by examining the social media artifacts publicly available online. The findings across the three schools suggest new ways for school leaders to step into the social media in education pool, taking into account the challenges of access, professional development needs and what parents are already using in terms of home technologies.

**Summary of Research Questions**

As schools adopt new policies that allow for teachers and leaders to use social media tools, there is a need to identify effective use of social media tools for enhancing school, family, and community partnerships. Essentially, how do schools include a digital component to complement traditional efforts? This study examined the following research question: In what ways does the use of social media by school principals affect the communication between home and school?

The theoretical framework underlying this study draws primarily on the work of Joyce Epstein in the field of school, family, and community partnerships. Aside from confirming comprehensive family and community engagement research, a review of relevant literature examined how the role of school principals in engaging families, how social media technologies have been used broadly in U.S. society, in education and in other fields. This study expands Epstein’s conceptual framework by considering the use
of social media as a form of communication to increase and enhance family and community engagement in the 21st century.

As the researcher and also a school principal practitioner using the very social media tools examined in this study, I bring my own biases in terms of the benefits and challenges these social media tools offer students, parents, leaders, educators and the learning community as a whole. For example, at our school we use 15 different communication methods to communicate between home and school. We have expanded our communication offerings based upon regular feedback from our families. Our parents and teachers have participated in ongoing family engagement capacity building through bookchats, online conversations, and informal conversations between home and school. The greatest bias I bring to this study is that I lead a school that is committed to offering a very comprehensive family and community engagement approach, which perhaps puts us in the minority of schools around the country.

As described in Chapter 1, the principals for this study were nominated because they are early adopters of using social media in education, and many around the country are currently learning from their face to face and virtual sharing of what they consider to be “best practice” in this area. The principals selected in this convenience sample represent elementary and high schools in rural locations, suburban and urban settings. The principals vary in their range of experience as school principals. Each of these educators/leaders has spoken during national conferences on the use of social media in schools and how these tools are used to connect students, teachers, parents and community members. Currently, there are few educational leaders leveraging social media tools on a daily basis. Although this is not an exhaustive sample, these three
leaders are considered by many to be the trailblazers in the use of social media tools to communicate, collaborate and share.

**Implications of Social Media for Home-School Partnerships**

Lack of access to new technologies has always presented challenges among various family demographics to thwart any true consideration of how these tools might deepen the partnership between home and school. However, new statistics suggest that these gaps have closed substantially. The rise of mobile technologies like smart phones and free wireless Internet access in public areas have exposed a greater population of school parents to social media tools used in daily life for work and recreational purposes.

Having access to the day-to-day operations of the school, parents in this study appreciated staying connected and having a constant “pulse” of the school even though they were not able to be physically in attendance due to work, transportation, parking cost or childcare. Even from afar, these social media tools created an opportunity for parents and teachers to exist in the same room for discussion and relationship-building.

Even the parents who used the tools to observe the online conversations without making any comments may have benefitted from the information included from the collection of staff and parent posts. By making public what would otherwise be private, social media tools have knocked down previously existing walls between home and school, allowing the culture of the school to become transparent to anyone with an Internet connection. The language being shared while using these social media tools is brief, immediate and consistent. Parents on the go appreciate the brevity and concise nature of these communications, and are easily able to check in on school happenings from a standard four-inch mobile phone screen.

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Because real relationships stem from face-to-face conversations with eye contact, tone, empathy, and mutual respect, social media tools cannot build relationships on their own. Instead they serve as a complement to the traditional means of communication. Establishing mutual trust is a key aspect to building a partnership between home and school. Only when home-school relationships are strong will buy-in of social media tools by all the stakeholders occur. Basically, parents must have a vested interested in the school to want to follow their updates and communicate freely using social media tools.

Parents are the first and most important teachers in a child’s life. So why are parents and school teachers not in a state of constant collaboration to complement each other’s efforts? Social media tools have the ability to put parents and teachers in the same room regardless of physically proximity or time constraints. If we build the capacity of everyone in the learning community, these tools can offer the transparent collaboration that many home-school situations lack. Many older schools were not constructed with collaborative design in mind, with narrow hallways, little to no common areas, and classrooms set up for standard rows of desks. With the arrival of social media tools, traditional school spaces, physically unfriendly to parents, become open to the entire learning community in a virtual way.

**Implications for Principals and Superintendents**

As the research suggests, the responsibility for building partnerships between school and home rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders. Each of the three school principals assumed full responsibility and leadership for facilitating real-time communication using social media tools. These principals, with their respective district’s support, frame and convey a vision for their schools that affects staff expectations,
influences teacher selection and motivation, and increases the likelihood of staff consensus regarding the school’s mission. In using these tools, principals work to bring all ends of the school community into daily life to benefit teachers, families, and students. Without this leadership by the principal or a well-supported designee, it is hard to see how these added communication efforts could not be sustained or successful.

Prior research also tells us that poor communication is one of the barriers to building and maintaining home-school relationships (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). By thinking outside the box and using innovative two-way/multi-way communications like Facebook, blogs, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, and other social media tools, school principals can work to develop a positive school climate that welcomes, honors, and respect families and community partners in a transparent and collaborative way.

Although two-way/multi-way communication was the focus of this study, embedding social media tools as options in each of the six types of parental involvement might maximize school, family, and community partnerships in the areas of parenting, community collaboration, volunteering, in-home learning and decision-making (Epstein et al., 2011). For example, Table 1 shows how the three schools used social media tools to complement each of these six types of involvement.

With each exchanged idea using social media, relationship-building is occurring among teachers, leaders, parents, community members, and students. Self-regulated, real-time branding by learning community members is possible at any time of day. Of course, this branding could be seen as good press or bad press, but none of the three schools studied reported any negative feedback online since the time social media was adopted at their respective school. Each school leader identified the manner in which
Table 1. *Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement Through a Social Media Lens*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Involvement</th>
<th>Example of the use of social media tools in these domains.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Parenting</td>
<td>School offers an article using Facebook or Twitter on how to talk to kids following a school shooting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Communication</td>
<td>School offers a weekly online conversation using Twitter called a hashtag chat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Community collaboration</td>
<td>School offers a global Facebook page to generate funds to buy laptops for every child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Volunteering</td>
<td>School offers a “Volunteer Here” tab on the mobile app or Facebook page for parents to come in to help out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. In-home learning</td>
<td>School offers a short video lesson from inside the classroom to help parents support student learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Decision-making</td>
<td>School offers a monthly audio/video feed to the Home and School meeting, where decisions get made with school leadership.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questionable comments would be addressed if they were to happen—getting off technology and working through any conflict or misunderstanding in a face-to-face manner or via telephone. It was the opinion of each school leader that conflict could not be solved online, and needed eye contact, tone, respect and empathy necessary to working through any hard feelings and emotions. When the parents realize that the school is willing to do whatever it takes to meet them where they are in regards to their preference in communication, deeper engagement may ensure with or without technology.

It takes time for stakeholders to buy into a school’s social media offerings, if they buy in at all. Not all parents are technologically astute or have the means to participate.
For these parents, it is imperative that the school solicit feedback to identify which parents should, for example, receive hard copies of a school newsletter instead of expecting them to access it from a Facebook page. Sometimes a visit to the student’s home is necessary to check in with them and show them the level of commitment the school has for their son or daughter’s education. Getting to know families in person lets them know how schools intend to become acquainted with them in person as well as through other means according to what the family needs. Providing a differentiated family engagement approach becomes important here in the form of a menu of communication offerings, from hard copy communications home to using social media tools and text messaging to communicate (two-way/multi-way) with parents and the community.

Families rarely come into school and tell principals how they want to communicate and engage with them. They need school leaders to set a carefully orchestrated vision, while removing the roadblocks in the way of home-school partnerships. There must be supports in place. There has to be time for professional development for parents and teachers any tools the school puts in place. The leader has to be a role model of the partnership and the core beliefs that go along with it, starting from a real face to face relationship complete with a focus on the soft skills. If school leaders are using social media tools like Zippslip that include analytics information on precisely which parents are reading and responding to the electronic communications, they can make informed decisions on next steps to closing any apparent communication gaps.
Despite the evidence validating that schools with strong, positive relationships with parents are successful, school principals still find it difficult to connect. The work of the three principals studied might serve as an inspiration to other school administrators struggling to find innovative ways to reach out and connect with parents (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Wanat, 1994). Connecting today requires school administrators to think beyond traditional methods in order to communicate and partner with families in ways that will support children and ensure success. It is important for schools and school leaders to identify what works for their own populations. A one-size-fits-all approach is not the method any of these schools have taken to arrive at the tools and strategies they offer to school families.

Another factor in determining if social media tools will be successful is current education policy. None of the schools studied had a policy in place that mandated their everyday use of social media to communicate with parents, but one school was prohibited from using most social media tools. For school principals, superintendents, and technology directors, not allowing school leaders to exercise their best judgment in terms of responding to the readiness of families to engage using these tools may limit the relationships built between home and school, hence decreasing the impact home-school partnerships can have on meeting the diverse needs of today’s students. When the school administrator collaborates with staff, parents, and the community to respond to the diverse interests and needs of the children, positive outcomes occur (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

Finally, parents are more engaged in their child’s learning if their child is in the spotlight. When students are recognized publicly, parents do not want to miss these
special moments. Each of these three principals kept the students as the core focus in each of the social media tools being used. One principal was even drawn to using social media tools because his students told him it would be the best way to communicate and engage them. Listening to what our students have to say allows us to set a course with their interests in mind, encouraging a student-centered culture and reason for parents to want to buy-in.

For school leaders looking to learn introduce social media tools to complement their family engagement efforts, it is important to build capacity among all stake-holders. The following steps are meant to serve as a guide in helping school leaders cross over into this medium.

**Getting Started With Social Media Checklist**

1. Identify and invest in family engagement core values.
2. Become a connected educator.
3. Understand the distinct communication needs of your school families.
4. Understand the parameters.
5. Share decision-making.
7. Technology is not the answer to solving conflict.
8. Introduce new tools.
9. Offer a menu of offerings.
10. Ongoing fidelity checks are necessary.
Getting Started With Social Media

1. Define your family engagement core beliefs. Since these tools offer transparency by default, it is important to identify where transparency is apparent or absent in the efforts of the leader. Offering an open and transparent access into the school day is possible without technology if school leaders are truly invested in welcoming, honoring, and respecting families. In other words, four core beliefs about home-school relationships (Henderson & Mapp, 2008) are embedded into daily communications, interactions, and decisions within the home-school environment.

- Core Belief 1: All parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
- Core Belief 2: All parents have the capacity to support their children’s learning.
- Core Belief 3: Parents and school staff should be equal partners.
- Core Belief 4: The responsibility for building partnerships between school and home rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders.

Before focusing on learning how to use social media tools, recognize and solidify the core beliefs that your school’s family engagement approach follows. If there is not a healthy home-school partnership in place as a foundation, starting with social media tools is not recommended, as the tool will serve as an amplifier of the culture already in place.

2. Become a connected educator. As the saying goes: When the principal sneezes, the whole school gets a cold. This quote by educational leader and author Todd Whitaker also applies in terms of educational innovation in schools. Today’s parents are communicating in a variety of digital ways which might stretch beyond the digital
competencies of the school principal. With this in mind, it is important for school principals to have a working knowledge of how to use devices for texting, creating and sharing collaborative documents, and relying upon cloud technologies. Taking into consideration the continued absence of technology integration coursework in educational leadership programs, today’s leaders need to seek personalized learning on how to become familiar with these tools by becoming a connected educator. A connected educator might be defined as someone who interacts with other educators around the world on a daily basis using Twitter, Facebook, blogs, video, and/or photo applications to find the best resources for teaching, learning and leadership.

The main vehicle connected educators use to learn and share with each other is Twitter. Through Twitter, educators can choose what they want to learn (i.e., for family engagement ideas search #ptchat [Parent-Teacher Chat]). School principals wanting to talk with other educators, parents, school principals about meeting challenges of their school families can interact with thousands of other like-minded professionals working toward the same goals in a online or virtual support group. Even though these people may be interacting from all over the globe, Twitter puts them all in the same room for an ongoing virtual conversation. Using Twitter, school principals are exposed to blog posts pushing the beliefs of every area of education. For example, a school principal who is not very tech savvy can find blogs other educators have written to help him/her become proficient in the areas of weakness or insecurity. There is always someone writing a helpful blog post on the #cpchat hashtag (Connected Principals). Once principals feel comfortable communicating online, they might decide take their learning online with a reflective and transparent blog to share their thoughts and ideas. This allows the rest of
the world to push their thinking within the comments section of the post. This, in turn, closes the loop on the social media give-take of becoming a connected educator. The greatest benefit in becoming a connected educator is that having a continuous stream of information and ideas from people you trust around the world through your personal learning network or PLN. The PLN is built upon relationships.

3. **Understand your families’ distinct communication needs.** Every school community is different. It is important for schools to identify what their families are already using in terms of internet access, mobile technology, or no technology. Soliciting feedback through surveys (offer online and hard copy) is imperative in terms of making decisions on how schools will communicate with families. The best time to solicit this feedback is when the greatest amount of families are at the school. For some schools this is the beginning of the year at Back to School night. A simple 2-minute survey (see example in Table 2) submitted at the end of the night can provide vital information in terms of making decisions on how schools will communicate. From the information gathered, school leaders have an opportunity to identify and implement communication mediums (i.e., texting, Twitter, Facebook, blogs, mobile apps) that school parents are already using in their lives for work, parenting, and play.

4. **Understand your parameters.** Every organization has a set of administrative and school board policies. Before adopting new tools, it is important to understand these parameters. For example, if all of the tools that your families are using outside of email or the main website are blocked and/or prohibited, conversations will need to be had at the administrative level to develop and adopt policies before those communications can be embedded into practice. There are many available articles and videos in recent school
leadership organizational publications including the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), and National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) designed to expose school board and upper level district administration to the potential benefits social media tools have for today’s learning organizations.

Table 2. Sample 2 Minute Home Survey

2-Minute Technology Survey, Any School, USA

No name necessary
Circle your responses
1. My child is in grade(s) _______________________
2. [TRUE/FALSE] My child has regular access to a computer with Internet at home to support academics.
3. [TRUE/FALSE] I have access to email to receive digital school communications. If answering false, please write your name AND child’s name below on the line provide and we send home a hard copy of all future digital communications.
4. I mostly access the Internet for digital school communications using my [home device, work computer, mobile phone, child’s computer].
5. [YES/NO] I am interested in attending the “Connected Parent” workshop coming up on (date) here at (Any School, USA). Information and email/mail confirmation should be sent to (email address or physical address).

If applicable: Parent contact information (name and address to send home hard copies)

5. Share decision-making. Decision-making is one of Epstein et al.’s (2011) Six Types of Involvement. With the knowledge of what families are using outside of school, school principals have the opportunity to work with parent leaders from the start in implementing any new communication mediums including social media tools. For example, if the school has learned that 83% of their families are using Facebook, 71% of families are texting regularly, and 33% use Twitter, the school might focus on the most
widely used tool (Facebook) and build the vision and capacity around offering two-way/multi-way communications to complement the physical learning environment. Instead of the school principal creating the vision and guidelines for using Facebook to communicate, there is an opportunity here to develop a shared approach with stakeholders from both the home and the school.

6. Build capacity. There may be many ways school parents are communicating outside of school with friends and family. Schools should start slow in adopting new tools to complement home-school communications. For example, if the school is adopting Facebook, it is important to share the proposed use of the tool, what its purpose is, and how it will be implemented before it is actually launched. School principals may want to offer conversation and field questions at home-school meetings before tools are launched, ensuring a clear and well-thought out process. Parents, like many educators, might fear social media tools, so starting slow when offering opportunities to build capacity among all stakeholders is vital. This is a whole new way of communicating for many.

Another way to help parents understand the benefits of what the new tool might offer is to expose them to other exemplary schools using social media tools. These schools can easily be found though the connected educator’s PLN (refer to Step 2). Providing training opportunities to use this tool for teachers and parents is imperative. If the use of the tool will flourish, parents and teachers need to understand it’s capabilities, the etiquette for use, and how others in similar roles are currently using it to support students. Offering the opportunities before, during, and after school is important to incorporate a wide range of teacher and parent schedules. Archiving training sessions on
the school website and sharing notes and minutes in school newsletters can help encourage those not in attendance to participate. To encourage the partnership in moving forward with harnessing these tools, a parent position to help other parents become connected can build capacity in the absence of school personnel to facilitate multiple trainings.

7. Technology should not be used to solve conflict. The three principals in this study chose to handle conflict outside of social media tools. Social media gives us the opportunity to transparently broadcast our values, expectations, and vision with each interaction. If we truly believe in building relationships, working through conflict must include face to face or a minimum of Skype or phone conversations to offer the eye contact, tone, empathy, and respect that these conversations deserve.

8. Introduce a new tool. Once stake-holder capacity has been built and the shared foundation and purpose has been set, the school principal or designee should proceed in utilizing the tool on a consistent basis based on how its purpose and use was shared with families. For example, if the tool is only used once a month, families might not see value in staying current with those communications. If using a social media tool like Facebook, a default two way/ multi way communication medium, posts should encourage follow up conversations such as the following ways to encourage dialogue:

   a. Ask a question or create a poll.
   
   b. Share a picture or video.
   
   c. Make a special announcement.
It is important to carefully monitor online feedback as the new tool offering evolves. Solicit ongoing feedback using surveys, informal conversations with parents at school to make decisions on further uses of the tool.

9. *Have a menu of offerings.* As new communication mediums are offered by schools, it is important for families to know they are not expected to use ALL communications offered by the school. With respect to the varying needs of today’s families, tools should be utilized as a “menu item” chosen by the respective parent for each interaction. For example, a school parent might text the school to ask a question about the date of graduation, but later might call the school to report their child absent. For each parent, this menu means something different. The school has an opportunity to respect and/or offer flexibility in meeting families where they are in regards to school-home communications.

10. *Have frequent fidelity checks.* As your school’s menu of offerings continues to evolve, it is important to revisit the original purpose for use in communications and if these communications over time are still serving that purpose. Facilitating an ongoing inventory of the successes and challenges since implementing the tool will help identify areas for future parent teacher capacity building based upon data collected by the school.

**Study Limitations**

This study investigated what constitutes the practices for effective use of social media by school principals to communicate with families. While I do trust the data, recognizing the limitations with its limited scope is an important part of the study.

First, there were a limited number of participants, and each of them was preselected. The sample was made up of principals with multiple years of prior
experience using these social media tools in the field, and these three leaders are not representative of all principals. By design, I chose to highlight the best social media-using school leaders I found in my own day-to-day work as a school leader harnessing these tools for my own learning community. This design was intentional and appropriate, as this study is an initial descriptive exploration of a fairly unexplored phenomenon.

I would suggest that further examination of this particular research question include a set of randomly selected principals to analyze claims of effective family engagement with a use of social media tools. It would be interesting to see if the same emerging themes emerged within the random sample. The sample would then include principals having varying degrees of experience in using these tools as well as varying degrees of family engagement leadership training. To further understand how social media impacts school, family, and community partnerships, we could study elementary efforts as compared to secondary efforts, or examine whether younger parents within the 18-35 age group are utilizing social media tools as the latest national usage statistics suggest. It would also be interesting to see if efforts need to be differentiated by students’ ages, needs, and curriculum.

Next, I would suggest expanding the study to a broader urban, suburban, and rural areas to compare and contrast the data and investigate if the emerging themes would be consistent with those offered by this study of an urban, suburban and rural school. Another limitation is its purely qualitative methodology. It would be interesting to incorporate mixed methods and measure the implementation of social media tools at schools where the majority of parents user social media regularly compared to another
school with similar make-up who are not using these tools. Does using social media tools increase parent participation? Does it increase parent satisfaction with the school?

Finally, a potential or partial limitation to the study is my role as a principal-researcher who has been virtually connecting with each of the three principals within the study for several years. I have learned a great deal in terms of my own social media prowess from watching following their digital footprints. In my own school, I have embedded multiple social media tools including Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, blogs, a live stream monthly Home and School meeting offering, Zippslip, texting options, a mobile phone school app, family engagement wiki, and more. This serves as a limitation, as I found myself doing much more comparing and contrasting my school’s efforts to theirs, instead of learning the detailed intricacies of new technologies from scratch. However, this perspective also enabled me to be a more informed researcher about the very phenomenon I have been studying, and perhaps to understand or question the data in ways another researcher without this level of expertise might not.

Conclusion

Effective school, family, and community partnerships start with visionary leadership. If the school leader is not willing to involve the students, teachers, parents, administration in meeting the diverse needs of the learning community, efforts may be limited. Just as teachers differentiate for a variety of learning styles in the classroom, schools must also differentiate their communication efforts to maximize home-school partnerships. Like our students, today’s families are also evolving in the tools they use each day as moms and dads, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and anyone else classified under “family” for a particular child. Today’s fastest growing technology, social media, is now
accessible to the majority of Americans with increased ownership of Internet-enabled mobile phones, devices and personal computers.

As an everyday social media user both personally and professionally, one of my own fears is that educators without family engagement training will not value the face-to-face interactions necessary to build solid relationships between home and school. For this reason, I choose to refer to using these digital tools to support a comprehensive family engagement program as eFACE or electronic Family And Community Engagement, to draw attention to the vital FACE portion of the acronym. As described in multiple cases within my research, the face to face commitment on the part of teachers and leaders must serve as the home button for these tools to create and maintain home-school partnerships. For true partnerships consisting of an ongoing exchange of ideas, these communications need to have plenty of two-way/multi-way options, not just one-way broadcasting of information.

Using social media tools to complement a comprehensive family engagement plan opens doors by providing access to conversations already happening in virtual spaces. Technology should not be the answer to home-school partnership challenges, but serve as an accessible and facilitating support to the challenges of physical proximity when attempting to bring stakeholders together for collaboration and relationship-building.

The research on family engagement is robust. When parents are involved, kids succeed in school and in life. Technology should not cause change in what family engagement researchers like Joyce Epstein, Karen Mapp, Anne Henderson, and others have taught us over the years. Face to face two-way/multi-way communications should continue to be at the root of our communication efforts. Evolving and fine-tuning these
efforts along the way is vital. Whether the two-way/multi-way feedback comes while using technology or not shouldn’t be the focus. However, not offering these tools as a part of a school’s overall menu of communication limits those parents who are already most comfortable using them to live, work, learn and play.

School leaders need the proper family engagement and technology integration training in place from undergraduate studies through leadership preparation to make sound decisions on how to best infuse social media tools into school, family, and community partnership efforts. They need administrators above them to open up policies that prevent educators and leaders from using social media tools that exist freely in every area of life besides schools and prisons. As we work to educate children on what it means to be a contributing member of society in today’s world, it is important that we model healthy relationships, collaboration that occurs with and without technology, and a life-long learner mentality that allows us to grow with our evolving world in and outside the bricks and mortar of the traditional school building.
APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF TECHNOLOGY RELATED TERMS

**1:1 laptop initiative**: A technology-rich educational reform where access to technology is not shared, but where all teachers and students have ubiquitous access to laptop computers.

**Acceptable Use Policy (AUP)**: A set of rules applied by the manager of a network, website or large computer system that restrict the ways in which the network, website or system may be used. AUP documents are written for corporations, businesses, universities, schools, internet service providers, and website owners often to reduce the potential for legal action that may be taken by a user, and often with little prospect of enforcement.

**Blog**: A discussion or informational site published on the Internet consisting of entries often called (“posts”) displayed with the most recent post appears first. Blogs from newspapers, other media outlets, universities, think tanks, interest groups and similar institutions contribute to blog traffic. Blog can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog. Examples of popular free blogs available to students, teachers and parents include Wordpress, Blogger, Edublogs and Kidblogs.

**Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) Initiative**: Encourages students to bring their personal technology tools to school for learning. This practice also sometimes often referred to as BYOD or Bring Your Own Device. It is an initiative that is having an impact in the business world as well as in education. From a user’s point of view, there is a certain comfort with using a technology tool that has been customized and personalized to one’s needs and interests.

**eCommunication**: Term used to describe any communications sent home to families that do not involve paper. Examples include social media tools, email, website, listserv, etc.

**Facebook**: A popular social media tool. Users must register before using the site, after which they may create a personal profile, add other users as friends, and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their profile. Additionally, users may join common-interest user groups, organized by workplace, school or college, or other characteristics, and categorize their friends into lists such as "People From Work" or "Close Friends". Can be synced with other social media tools like Facebook.

**Hashtag**: A component of Twitter allowing users to create their own personal channel to organize the content found in respective tweets. Examples are #cpchat (Connected Principals Chat) and #ptchat (Parent-Teacher Chat).

**Instagram**: An online photo-sharing and social media tool that enables its users to take pictures, apply digital filters to them, and share them on a variety of social media sites including Facebook or Twitter.
**Listserv**: A method of communicating with a group of people via email. You send one email message to the “reflector” email address, and the software sends the email to all of the group’s subscribers.

**Microblogging**: A form of blogging that allows users to write brief text updates (usually less than 140 characters) and publish them, either to be viewed by anyone or by a restricted group which can be chosen by the user. These messages can be submitted by a variety of ways, including text messaging, instant messaging, e-mail, MP3 or the Web.

**Mobile Learning Devices (MLD)**: Such as cell phones, personal digital assistants, MP3 players, handheld games, digital audio players, and laptops in classrooms. Advocates of MLDs view today’s students as accustomed to having instant access to information and receiving immediate feedback. When used within appropriate guidelines, and with attention to instructional goals, MLDs are powerful, cost-effective learning tools that increase student engagement dramatically, allowing students to learn anytime, anywhere.

**Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment)**: A web application that educators can use to create effective online learning sites for students.

**Parent portal**: When offered by schools, parents can view student information electronically using a secure interface. Access may be granted to the following types of information: Academic Records, Student Accounts, Financial Aid, Housing and/or Conduct Records.

**SLATE**: A student management tool that could most easily be compared to Blackboard, the learning management system (LMS) giant commonly used on college campuses to facilitate communication between students, teachers, parents.

**Social media tool**: The means of interaction among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks including but not limited to Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Wikis, Blogs, Instagram. Using these tools, individuals and communities can share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content.

**Twitter**: A social media tool and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based messages of up to 140 characters, known as "tweets". Can be synced with other social media tools like Facebook. The feed of all Twitter accounts one follows is called their Twitterfeed.

**Wiki**: Means short in Hawaiian. A public or private webspace where permission holding users can quickly edit and share. An example is Knapp Elementary’s Family Engagement Wiki--knappwiki.wikispaces.com

**Web 2.0 tools**: The term Web 2.0 is used to describe web sites that use technology beyond the static pages of earlier web sites. A Web 2.0 site may allow users to interact
and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue as creators of user-generated content in a virtual community, in contrast to websites where people are limited to the passive viewing of content. Examples of Web 2.0 include social media tools including blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, hosted services, web applications and others.

**Youtube:** A video-sharing social media tool which users can upload, view and share a wide variety of user-generated video content, including movie clips, TV clips, and music videos, as well as amateur content such as video blogging, short original videos, and educational videos.

**Zippslip:** A social media tool aimed to enable schools and parents to process paper forms online, from smartphones or computer. Communications are tracked and displayed within the school’s account. Parents have the option to sign up in lieu of paper forms, and have the opportunity to engage in a two way, secure interaction with parents and the community.
APPENDIX B: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I want to thank you for your time in helping to provide me with some information about your school’s use of social media. As you know, I am completing a dissertation studying the ways social media is used by schools impacts the communications between home and school. This study is meant to learn about the ways your school employs social media to engage families, and also how it implements its use to all families. I will collect information from this interview, as well as from a parent with a child who attends your school. The information gathered from study will be used for the sole content of completion of this dissertation. Following the study, all names will be kept anonymous. I will analyze the content of the actual social media tools you are using to measure any impact from posts, tweets or other virtual feedback.

Questions for Principals

1. Describe all family engagement strategies your school employs.
   - Talk about your long and short term family engagement goals?
   - What social media technologies are you using to build home-school partnerships at your school to meet these goals?
   - How does your use of social media relate to your overall family engagement goals?
   - Does two-way communication occur, or are these tools only used to disseminate information?
   - Does your school have a Facebook site? If so, how is it used for FACE?
   - Does your school have a Twitter account? If so, how is it used for SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS?
   - Do you write a blog to engage families? If so, what is it used for?
   - Do you offer virtual office hours or opportunities for Skype, Google Hangouts or other video chat for families? If so, describe how this is used?
   - Who’s in charge of the social media? Does it have to be the principal?
   - Why or why not?
   - Other questions:

2. How are these electronic partnerships initiated and maintained?
   - What was the first social media tool used at your school?
   - What factors contributed to introducing this tool?
   - What obstacles have you encountered along the way and what have you done to address them?
   - Provide a timeline of your school’s use of social media use since instituting.
   - Which is the preferred social media tool for your population of parents? How do you know?
   - How are new social media tools chosen and introduced?
   - Are these tools working to build and maintain partnerships with parents? How do you know?
3. Do you solicit feedback from parents on whether these tools are working? How? How often?
   - How did you first learn how to use social media with parents?
   - How do you continue to professionally develop yourself in this eFACE area?
   - Does your district leadership support and encourage the use of social media in building and maintaining partnerships with parents? Share any district policies that relate to this.
   - Does your school district provide professional development in using social media with parents? If yes, describe the training components.
   - Can parents receive social media training by appointment at your school? If so, what does this look like?
   - What social media tools do parents find easiest to use at your school? Why? Which do they find most difficult to use? Why? How do you know this?
   - How do you fine-tune your social media workshops for parents from session to session? How do you know they have become proficient in its use?
   - Do parents use school computers or do they bring their own devices for these trainings?

4. Do all families within the school have access? How does your school meet these challenges?
   - What types of access challenges does your school possess? (English Language Learner (ELL), economically disadvantaged, lack of computer/Internet in residence)
   - How do you engage these families in two way communication?
     - ELL?
     - Economically-disadvantaged?
     - No computer/Internet?
   - Describe any tools/survey data that you have recently collected? Describe frequency of data collection in an electronic or non-electronic manner.
   - What are the strategies that work well in addressing families with the above-mentioned needs? What strategies have you tried without success?
   - Are you partnered with any Internet Service Providers (ISPs) that offer discounted Internet access to your school families? If so, describe these offers and how many families have taken advantage of them.
   - Does the school district offer families a home computer as a part of any partnership or loan program?

5. Does using social media increase to and from home communications? Evidence?
   - How do you use mobile phones to build and maintain two way communications with your parents?
   - What areas have you seen an increase in family engagement since you began using social media tools? How do you know? Which social media tools have are mainly responsible for this growth?
   - What areas have you seen a decrease or no increase at all in family engagement since you began using social media tools? How do you know?
• Are social media tools used at your school compatible with mobile phones used by your parents?
Dear Parents of ___________ School:

Thank you for taking part in this interview designed to solicit your feedback on the means by which you communicate with your child’s school. It is meant to highlight the areas you depend on the most throughout the school year. The results will be used to complete a dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania measuring electronic communication efforts used at your child’s school. For those parents who do not have Internet access, there will be a hard copy option provided. All entries will remain anonymous and data will be destroyed following analysis. Again, thank you for your time in participating in my study.

1. What electronic communication tools do you use to communicate with your school?
   - Paper Yes, No, N/A
   - Phone Yes, No, N/A
   - Email Yes, No, N/A
   - Website Yes, No, N/A
   - Twitter Yes, No, N/A
   - Blog Yes, No, N/A
   - Facebook Yes, No, N/A
   - Youtube Yes, No, N/A
   - None of the above

2. How many times per week do you use each tool?
   - Paper Never, 1-2x, 3-4x, 5x or more
   - Phone Never, 1-2x, 3-4x, 5x or more
   - Email Never, 1-2x, 3-4x, 5x or more
   - Website Never, 1-2x, 3-4x, 5x or more
   - Twitter Never, 1-2x, 3-4x, 5x or more
   - Blog Never, 1-2x, 3-4x, 5x or more
   - Facebook Never, 1-2x, 3-4x, 5x or more
   - Youtube Never, 1-2x, 3-4x, 5x or more

3. Has your relationship with the school changed as a result of your using these forms of communications?
   - Paper Yes for the better, No stayed the same, No, for the worse
   - Phone Yes for the better, No stayed the same, No, for the worse
   - Email Yes for the better, No stayed the same, No, for the worse
   - Website Yes for the better, No stayed the same, No, for the worse
   - Twitter Yes for the better, No stayed the same, No, for the worse
   - Blog Yes for the better, No stayed the same, No, for the worse
   - Facebook Yes for the better, No stayed the same, No, for the worse
   - Youtube Yes for the better, No stayed the same, No, for the worse
4. Which communication tool provides the **best access** to both school-to-home and home-to-school communications?
   - Paper
   - Phone
   - Email
   - Website
   - Twitter
   - Blog
   - Facebook
   - Youtube

5. Which communication tool provides **little or no access** to both school-to-home and home-to-school communications?
   - Paper
   - Phone
   - Email
   - Website
   - Twitter
   - Blog
   - Facebook
   - Youtube

6. Which communication tool provides the **most frequent** access for both school-to-home and home-to-school communications?
   - Paper
   - Phone
   - Email
   - Website
   - Twitter
   - Blog
   - Facebook
   - Youtube

7. Please take a moment and elaborate on how social media tools used by your school has changed communication between home and school.

Actual social media evidence by each school at the time of principal interview

How does what each principal’s use of social media tool(s) complement or provide
   - Overall family engagement strategies?
   - Maintaining of partnerships?
   - Two-way feedback from parents?
   - Access to parents?
   - Home-school communications?
Social Media Tools Examined
- Twitter
- Blog
- Facebook
- Youtube
REFERENCES


