

2000

Teacher-controlled web pages and their impact on home/school communication

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Abstract

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At the end of the one and one-half month period, the parents were surveyed again and the results indicated that the majority of parents felt that the Web page successfully helped communication between the school and their homes. Parents indicated that the Web page should be improved and implemented again during the following school year.

**TEACHER-CONTROLLED WEB PAGES AND THEIR IMPACT ON
HOME/SCHOOL COMMUNICATION**

A Graduate Research Project

Submitted to the

Division of Middle Level Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By
Colleen S. Hobus
July, 2000

This Research Project by: Colleen S. Hobus
Titled: Using the Internet in School to Home Communication

Has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

8/7/00
Date Approved

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Teacher-Controlled Web page and Its Impact on Home/School Communication

Chapter 1

Introduction

While research shows communication and collaboration between teachers and parents are essential to student learning, they are often the missing ingredients in today's classrooms. Due to hectic classroom schedules, teachers often have little contact with the community. In addition, numerous studies emphasize the importance parental involvement plays in children's education and how it contributes to their success in school. Today's parents are pulled in all directions by demands at the work place and busy activity schedules of their families. Parents can experience difficulty just finding the time to keep up with all the family schedules, not to mention staying involved and in-touch with their children's daily progress (Harris, 1999).

Advancements in technology can help alleviate the communication gap between home and school. The ultimate goal of schools will always be student achievement. What is one way we can raise student achievement? Schools can increase the level of parental involvement by opening the doors of communication. When it comes to using computers in education, we need to begin envisioning the future by asking, "why not?" If a school district's methods are not increasing student achievement then they need to take a look at their technology plan (Weston, 2000).

Why not use email or online discussion groups to increase the number and types of interactions between teachers and parents? Why not create teacher-controlled Web

pages where students and parents can access class information and extra homework outside of school? Why not build streaming media connections between home, work sites and school, so more people can contribute to the teaching and learning processes taking place in our schools? Since frequent assessment boosts learning, why not give teachers the tools to be able to take student work, evaluate it, and make it available with comments to students and parents through web portfolios? Imagine parents clicking on a class Web site and, through the use of streaming video and a class camera, seeing what is going on in their child's classroom. Dinnertime table talk about "what did you do in school" will never be the same (Weston, 2000).

Definitions

In order for readers to have a common understanding of the topic, the following definitions are provided:

School and family partnerships: "given that it is difficult to find consensus on the meaning of parent involvement, the term 'school and family partnerships' better expresses the shared interests, responsibilities, investments, and overlapping influences of families and schools in children's education through adolescence... [because] the two institutions share major responsibilities for children's education and both are needed" (Epstein & Connor, 1995, pp. 137-65).

Teacher-controlled Web page: a general term used to describe a Web page with direct access allowing a teacher to modify and

update as needed. It may have been created by using web design software such as FrontPage 2000 or an existing Web page template available at Web page host sites found on the Internet.

Streaming video/media:

is a sequence of "moving images" that are sent in compressed form over the Internet and displayed by the viewer as they arrive. Streaming media is streaming video with sound. With streaming video or streaming media, a Web user does not have to wait to download a large file before seeing the video or hearing the sound. Instead, the media is sent in a continuous stream and is played as it arrives. The user needs a *player*, which is a special program that uncompresses and sends video data to the display and audio data to speakers. A player can be either an integral part of a browser or downloaded from the software maker's Web site.

Major streaming video and streaming media technologies include RealSystem G2 from RealNetwork (What is?com, 2000).TechTarget.com, Inc.

<http://www.whatis.com/streamvd.htm>.

How might the capabilities of technology improve student achievement? Over the years, educators and researchers have found that there is no one simple method or practice that will simply raise student achievement. A balanced approach with clear learning goals, improved curriculum, increased time-on-task, improved teacher competencies, frequent authentic assessments, strong student relationships with caring adults, and involved parents works best (Weston, 2000). According to Weston, this means that the computer-achievement connection must become more rooted in proven teaching practices in order to produce higher student achievement. Technology, alone, is not the “cure-all” answer. A more cumulative approach must be taken in which computers are used in ways to increase *behaviors* that produce greater learning.

The focus of this project was the creation and implementation of a teacher controlled Web page and its potential impact on school/home communication and parenting partnerships.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

More Americans than ever have access to telephones, computers, and the Internet. However, the benefits that a teacher-controlled Web page can add to communication and partnerships between the home and the school are still largely unknown due to the timeliness of the topic and many families' lack of access to the Internet. For this reason, my research also included the topics of school/home communication, parent partnerships, and teacher use of technology as important elements in developing and maintaining a successful Web page. These four areas are intertwined in the success of a teacher-controlled Web page as a tool to improve communication between the home and school.

School and Parent Partnerships

The year 1999 marked the tenth anniversary of the first National Education Summit held by former President George Bush and the nation's governors. It was the first meeting between a president and governors that focused on how to improve America's educational performance. The 1989 Education Summit led to the adoption of six National Education Goals, which were later increased to eight goals by Congress in 1994 (National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners, 1999). One of the goals Congress added was:

Goal 8: Parental Participation--By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. (p. 1)

As stated in the National Middle School Association's 1995 document, *This We Believe*, one characteristic of developmentally responsive middle level schools is the use

of “Family and Community Partnerships.” The school takes the initiative in providing a wide variety of opportunities for parent and community involvement. Effective schools see parents as the child’s first teachers and support and assist families in creating and sustaining positive home learning environments. Because of a national trend with parents becoming less involved as their children reach the middle level, systematic, two-way communication with parents and families becomes critical.

Steinberg, Brown, and Dorsch (1997) at Temple University gathered data for over four years from 20,000 teenagers and their families. This information was compiled in their book, Beyond the Classroom: Why School Reform Has Failed and What Parents Need to Do. They cited the largest problem in public schools today as being the failure of parents and schools to connect. Steinberg et al. described this broken connection as a 'public health problem' and offered the following evidence:

- Two out of every ten parents have no connection at all to their child's educational life.
- Only one in five parents attend school programs regularly. Only forty percent have ever attended.
- One-third of the students said their parents have no idea of how they are doing in school.
- Only thirty percent of students say their parents spend any time talking to them each day. (Steinberg et al., 1997)

Recent research strongly supports the regular, active involvement of parents in successful schools. According to research done by Christine Nord (1994) in a report, *Running in Place: How American Families Are Fairing in a Changing Economy and an Individualistic Society*, students learn more and are much less likely to repeat a grade, be suspended or expelled if their parents are involved in their education. The 1994 report

was based on the National Household Education Survey and conducted by the Washington DC- based Child Trends research firm. The report also noted:

Yet, while parent support is considered crucial to adolescents' academic achievement, adult involvement drops dramatically once children enter middle school. Although three-quarters of elementary school parents are moderately or highly involved in their children's education, the figure falls to about fifty percent when children reach middle school. (p. 8)

There are many reasons for the decline of parental involvement. Some parents incorrectly assume that their middle school children are struggling for independence and do not want them involved. As children reach middle school, some families' priorities change as mothers return to full time jobs outside the home. Sometimes lower participation stems from the response parents receive from the school staff. Once students reach middle school, there may be less opportunity for parents to become involved. When parents are not involved, they do not know what is going on in the school and their children can take advantage of that (Seline, 1997).

The National Middle School Association (1995) also noted that school achievement is directly linked to the degree of family support and involvement in the child's education. The school-family relationship must benefit all and have mutually understood roles and expectations. Schools should expect families to take advantage of opportunities provided for involvement in support of education. The report also added that families should spend time sharing and engaging in their children's learning and modeling behaviors and skills necessary for school success.

According to the report, *Playing Their Parts: Parents and Teachers Talk About Parental Involvement in Public Schools* (Reading Today, 1999), eighty-three percent of parents said the most important role they can play in their child's education is checking homework and encouraging their children to learn. However, while nearly seventy-four percent said they are more involved in their child's education than their parents were in theirs, nearly the same number said, that in general, parents need to get even more involved than they are now. Teachers agreed; seventy-six percent rated the parents at their school as only fair or poor in terms of their involvement.

The challenges of supporting and guiding children through difficult periods of change in emotional and social development require that parents be closely involved in their children's lives. Educators need to be sensitive to the stress parents face in raising their children. The structure of parent and family involvement can be improved through teacher support of parents and the complex nature of parental efficacy as related to family, school, and community relationships (Swick & Broadway, 1997).

Middle schools can overcome some of these challenges by changing their attitude toward parents. Schools need to make parents feel welcome and realize that the parents' needs as well as the schools' wants are important (Seline, 1997). Table 1 defines the elements necessary for successful partnerships.

Table 1

Tips for Fostering Successful School-Parent Partnerships	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the school inviting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate parent participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategize ways to involve parents in schools--many don't know how to become involved or feel intimidated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make parents equal partners with educators by allowing them a voice in school decisions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show respect for parents' perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep parents well-informed and encourage two-way communication

Note. From "Making Parent Involvement Meaningful," by K. Rasmussen, 1998, Education Update, 40, (1), p. 6. Copyright 1998 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Adapted with permission of ASCD.

One simple element can improve student academic success: relationships.

Perhaps in the past there has been too much emphasis on the nurturing aspect of successful middle schools and too little on the academic part, causing many educators to become skeptics (Scales, 1999). In reality, students are more likely to have success when both nurturing and an emphasis on academics are present. Scales continued by saying:

The relationship between parents and teachers is the unseen glue that connects the two vital pieces of children's lives. When the adults a child sees everyday know and talk with one another, a child has a better chance of being surrounded with consistency in values and expectations. Studies have found that when parents and teachers bond, teachers become more confident in those children, who in turn feel more connected to their schools, try harder, and get better grades. If adolescents feel connected to school, competent in class, engaged in their work, and supported by their parents, peers, and teachers, they are likely to attend school regularly, behave well, and achieve. That's how school success happens. It's relationships. (p. 23)

"We tend to declare middle and high school students 'grown'" (Comer, 1994, p. 32). Adults think they should be responsible for their own behavior without creating school settings that promote their development and desired behavior. At this vulnerable age, young people possibly need more support than ever from parents and the schools (Comer, 1994).

The first accomplishment that must be made in building a successful partnership is an establishment of trust. This can be very difficult if a partnership between the school and the home had previously been nonexistent. Family and middle level schools must share successes and failures as they learn. It is a chance to learn from one another and improve the middle level experience for the students and themselves (Schine, 1999).

Communication Between the Middle School and Homes

According to the **National Parent Teacher Association's National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs** (1997), communication is the foundation of a solid partnership. Communication should be regular, two-way, and meaningful. When effective communication takes place between parents and educators, positive relationships result, problems are solved more easily, and more student progress is seen. Ludwig (1999) suggests, "Good communication between you and the parents of your students is often one of the best ingredients for school year success. If the parents understand what's going on in your classroom and what's expected of them and the students, they'll be better able to help their child at home and will feel more comfortable with you and your teaching methods," (p. 60). Unfortunately, too often, school communication is one way, without the chance to share insights and ideas (Ludwig, 1999).

The **National PTA National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs** outlines thirteen quality indicators for successful partnership programs. Each of the indicators relate to school/home communication in some form:

1. Use a variety of communication tools on a regular basis, seeking to facilitate two-way interaction through each type of medium.

2. Establish opportunities for parents and educators to share partnering information such as student strengths and learning preferences.
3. Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities, student services, and optional programs.
4. Mail report cards and regular progress reports to parents. Provide services and follow-up conferences as needed.
5. Disseminate information on school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals, and include parents in any related decision-making process.
6. Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year, with follow-up as needed. These should accommodate the varied schedules of parents, language barriers, and the need for childcare.
7. Encourage immediate contact between parents and teachers when concerns arise.
8. Distribute student work for parental comment and review on a regular basis.
9. Translate communications to assist non-English-speaking parents.
10. Communicate with parents regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just regarding misbehavior or failure.
11. Provide opportunities for parents to communicate with principals and other administrative staff.
12. Promote informal activities at which parents, staff, and community members can interact.

13. Provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular two-way communication between the school and the family. (p. 1-2)

Hayes (1997) contends that when we communicate we have to do it in a way that gets the attention of our audience. Hayes suggests the following truths about communication: (1) We must have in mind our desired results. The communication must be concise and powerful, and we must have the confidence that our efforts will be rewarded in our results. (2) Good communication does not just happen. We have to work at it, and we have to be intentional about it. (3) Everyone involved must be clear about their own expectations and needs in order to decrease misunderstandings and conflicts.

With the belief that parents are the first, most consistent, and most influential teachers that children have, it is essential for parents to support their children's learning. When parents are aware of what is going on at school, they can monitor their child's progress, discover problems right away, and let teachers know where their child is having problems. As the level of communication increases, the level of comfort also increases for students and parents. Students gain confidence and the motivation to succeed in school (Crow, 2000).

In February 1999, the Hughes Research Corporation for Horace Mann Educators Corporation conducted the *Horace Mann Survey of Educators* in which communication styles and practices were studied. The sample population consisted of 619 kindergarten through twelfth grade teachers nationwide. The survey revealed the percentages of teachers who like various types of parent-teacher communication and the percentages of

parents who use those types of communication. Teachers are generally satisfied with communication between school and home. About fifty-two percent of teachers said communications between teachers and parents are better today than when they began teaching, while twenty-three percent said it was about the same. Forty-seven percent of the participants were satisfied with communications between parents and teachers at their schools. The researchers cited better attitudes and greater involvement by both teachers and parents as the reasons for the improvements. A summary of the findings is shown in Table 2:

Table 2

Types of Parent-Teacher Communication		
	What Teachers Prefer	What Parents Do
Planned Meeting	85%	57%
Phone Call to School	71%	30%
Notes	70%	37%
Open House/Family Night	59%	51%
Phone Call at Home	48%	14%
Planned School Visit	33%	14%
Email	12%	2%

Note. Based on data from the 1999 article, "New Study Shows Teachers Teaching Parents Technology Having Little Impact".

The National PTA National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement

Programs (1997) stresses that teachers should implement various techniques to improve home/school communication. A teacher could take ten minutes a day to telephone, email, fax, write in assignment notebooks, or send postcards to parents. Using this method the teacher would be able to contact each family at least two times a month. A typical conversation could focus on student successes and the upcoming schedule.

Two essential outcomes occur when teachers and parents communicate, share in learning, and grow together. A bond is created with the child's well being in mind and a

support system is put in place. It is the responsibility of teachers to reflect upon their interpersonal support system, its effect, and improvements that need to be made (Swick et al., 1997). No matter what type of communication is used, parents are more eager to respond and support student/class goals if the contact is consistent and accessible.

Hayes (1997) states that in order for communication between schools and homes to improve enough to help students perform at standard, school systems must implement effective communication strategies. Even in the context of public education, communication is about personal relationships. More avenues for educators to talk to one another and the public are needed. This would allow for a collaborative rather than "hit/miss" approach. In closing, Hayes (1997) stated, "Unless educators become more effective communicators with each other and with their students' families and communities, the performance levels of most educators and most students will not improve" (p. 3).

Teachers and Technology

While there is more access to computers and the Internet in our nation's schools than ever before, and even with so much public interest in email and Web sites for schools, teachers do not feel these avenues are effective tools to communicate with families. In fact, in a survey of 619 kindergarten through twelfth grade teachers nationwide, sixty-nine percent of classroom teachers felt that technologies such as voice mail, email, homework hotlines, or school Web sites have not had any significant impact on the way schools communicate with families (Horace Mann Research Corporation, 1999). Forty-seven percent of the respondents in the same survey were satisfied with communications between parents and teachers at their schools, but they believed that

better attitudes and more involvement by both teachers and parents were the basis of the improvement (Horace Mann, 1999).

One of the factors that influences a teacher's use of technology is training.

"Teachers who have more technology training are more likely to use digital resources in their classrooms, feel better prepared to use them, and rely on them more heavily than teachers with less training," according to Fatemi (1999, p. 6). Fatemi (1999) reported that eighty percent of U.S. classroom teachers do not feel comfortable using computer technology. Due to a lack of preservice training, new teachers are no more likely to use digital content than teachers who have been teaching for more than twenty years.

Approximately forty percent of U.S. households now have Internet access. Over ninety percent of the 112,000 schools in the U.S. now have some form of Internet access. More than one-third of all K-12 classrooms reportedly has Internet access. However, students tend to be more computer and Internet literate than their teachers are (McCormack, 1999). In order for this to change, teachers must be educated. This training must start in preservice education programs. Professional development needs to model the concept of life-long learning. When teachers realize they will never stop learning, they will live by it, and model life-long learning for their students (Schrum, 2000).

Schrum (2000) stated that teachers are creative, intelligent people who can quickly see the power of technology. Once technology is implemented into the classroom, teachers can often find ways that it can improve their teaching. Enthusiasm for technology has to come from both the administration and the teachers.

Administrators must place value on learning about technology as an important aspect of

teaching because it is not going away. Accomplishment must be recognized and mistakes accepted as part of the learning process.

Teacher-Controlled Web Pages

Much emphasis in the last decade has been about technology's ability to make the world seem a much smaller place by opening the classroom doors to the rest of the world via Internet and satellites. However, technology is playing an equally significant role in connecting schools to their local communities. As a result of this, the public's involvement in schools is growing (Zehr, 1998).

Melanie Goldman, the manager of the National School Network, a research project initially funded by the National Science Foundation, was quoted in Zehr's (1998) article titled "Partnering with the Public". Goldman stated, "Schools have been isolated for a long time, and they can't be anymore. We're seeing resurgence in the interest from the community. Technology has unfrozen the structure that has been in place for a long time" (p. 7). As technology increases the public's access to schools, their interest and involvement is increasing as well.

In most schools, Web pages are being used as a tool for less direct home-school communication, such as publishing students' work and publishing monthly lunch schedules, rather than keeping parents informed on a daily basis about school and class happenings. Only a small amount of teacher-parent communication is occurring (Zehr, 1998).

A teacher-controlled Web page can be a great tool for working parents. It can keep parents on top of what is going on without having to be there (Zehr, 1998). On the Web page, the teacher can post report and project due dates, spelling words, project

directions and rubrics, class notes, news, class expectations and school vacations. It is an easy way to answer many routine questions throughout the year (Ludwig, 1999).

Many teachers are slow to jump on the "Web page band wagon" for various reasons. Teachers often suffer from a lack of time, lack of training, and a fear that giving parents so much access may not bring positive results. Many educators are still unclear about what the benefits of a Web page can be. The first wave of growing interest is now happening as teachers and parents observe new Internet possibilities. School Web pages are beginning to move from mere sources of monthly lunch menus to daily homework assignments and direct links to teachers (Rothman-Morris, 2000).

If computer and Internet access prices continue to decline further, the gap between the information "haves" and "have nots" may continue to get smaller. Creating and supporting community access centers at places such as local libraries and schools will help ensure equal access for all families. Access to computers and the Internet is becoming increasingly important. It is everyone's best interest to ensure that no one is left behind (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1998). For those parents without access to a computer with on-line capabilities, printing out a weekly copy of the Web page and making it available to families is a reasonable alternative (Ludwig, 1999), although, it is not a substitute for being in touch with the parents themselves (Zehr, 1998).

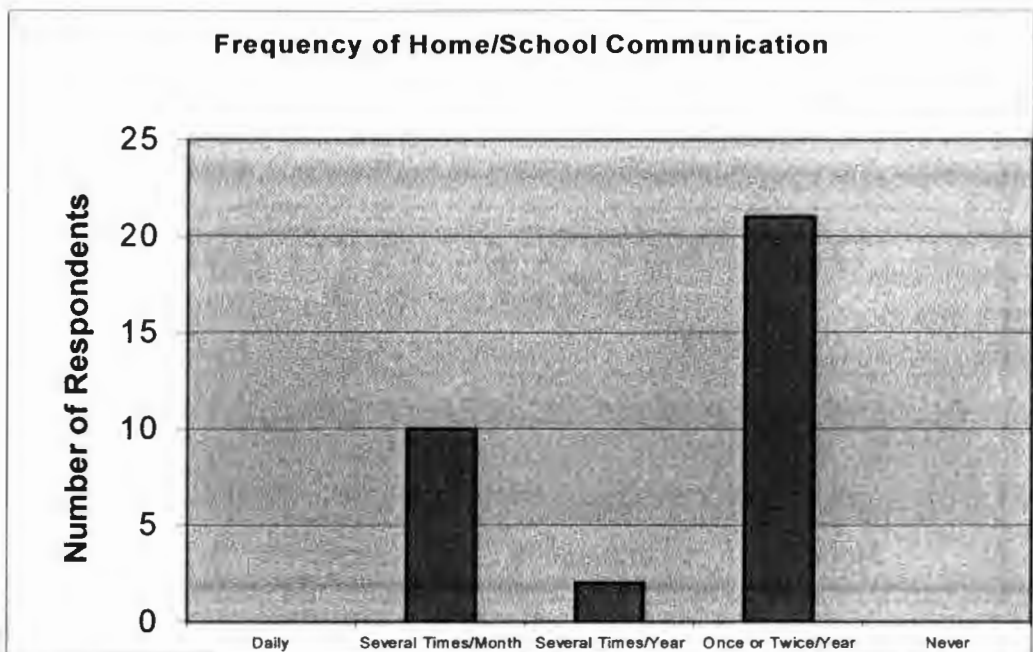
Chapter 3

Methodology

I began the research process by examining existing teacher-created Web pages. This process helped formulate the criteria from which I would design my Web page.

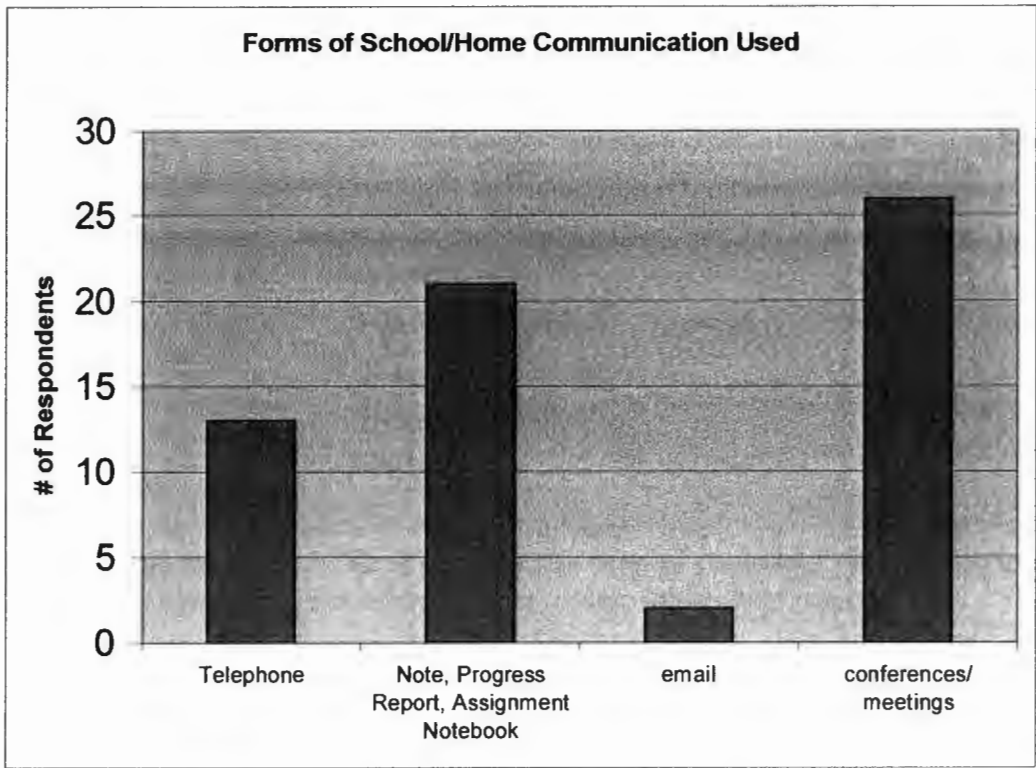
At the end of the third quarter term, parents of all eighth grade students were informed that I was in the process of setting up a Web page to supplement home/school communication. Thirty-three parents completed the survey on a volunteer basis. This survey examined the types of school/home communication practices that were used between parents and teachers at the Avoca-Hancock-Shelby-Tennant Middle School during the 1999-2000 school year. Sixty-one percent of the parents responded. Charts 1-7 illustrate the results of this survey.

Chart 1:



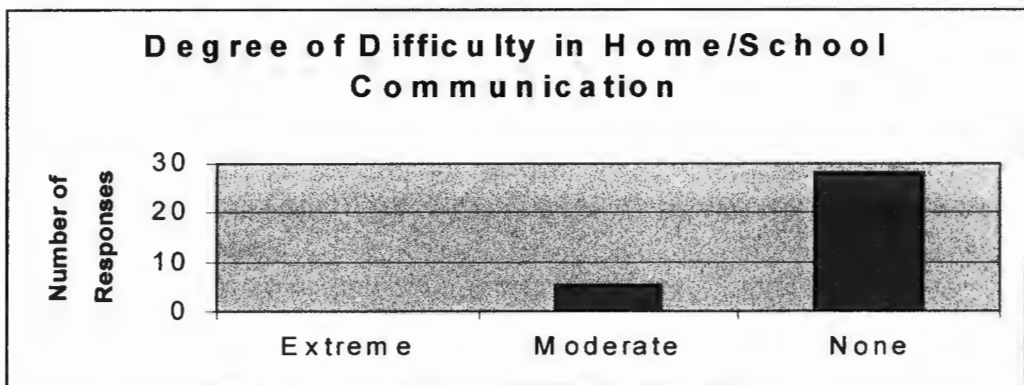
Note. Parents were asked: "How often do you communicate with your child's teacher (via telephone, notes, conferences, etc.)?" There were thirty-three respondents to the question.

Chart 2:



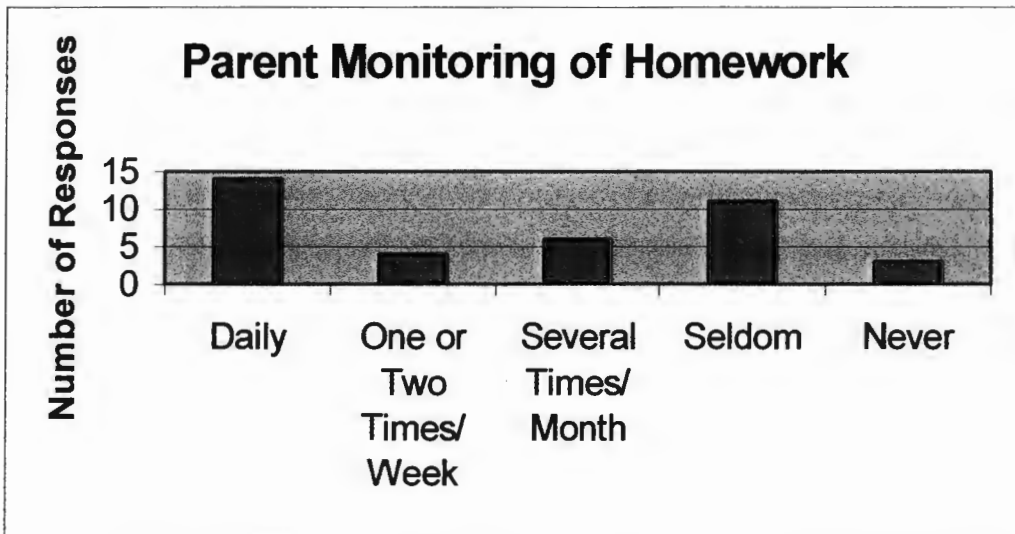
Note. Parents were asked the question, "When you do communicate with your child's teacher, what forms of communication do you use?" More than one answer was allowed. Thirty-three respondents offered sixty-two responses to the question.

Chart 3:



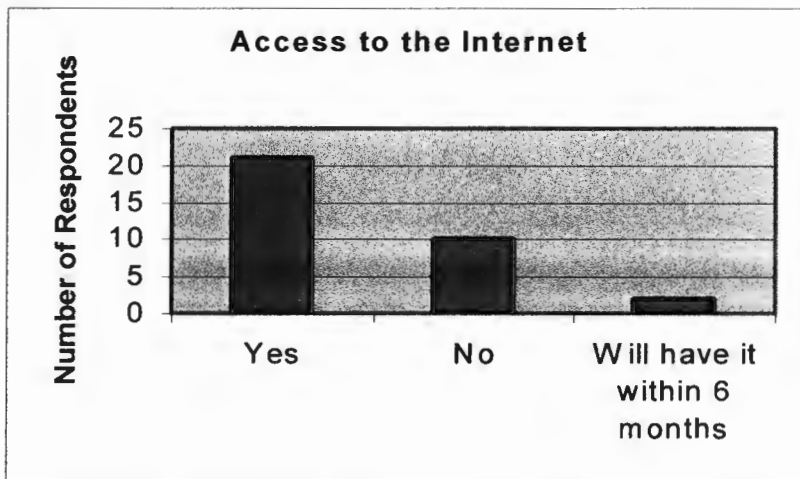
Note. Parents were asked, "How difficult do you find it to communicate with your child's teacher?" There were thirty-three responses to the question.

Chart 4:



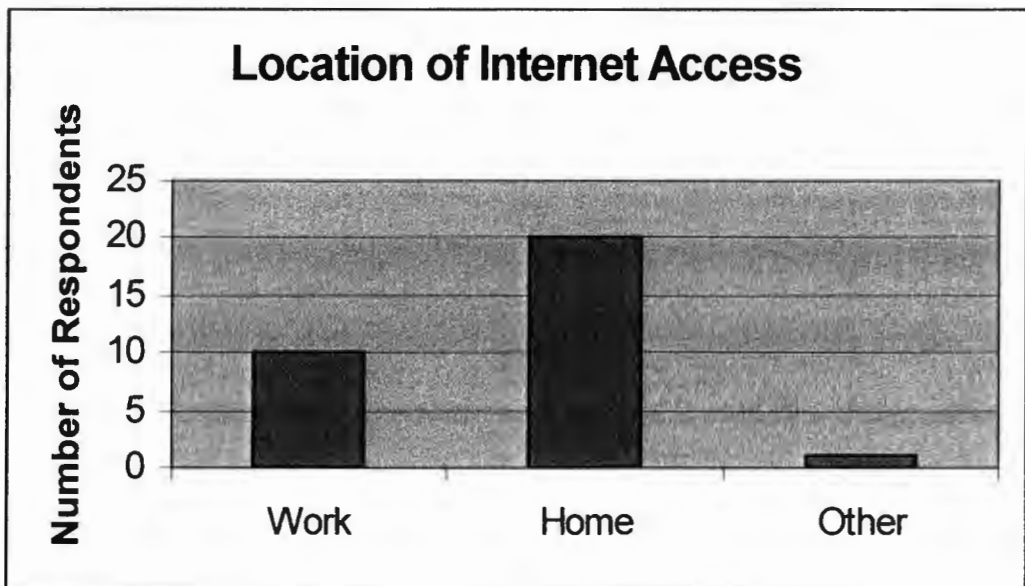
Note. Parents were asked, "How often do you monitor your child's homework by checking their assignment notebook?" There were thirty-three responses.

Chart 5:



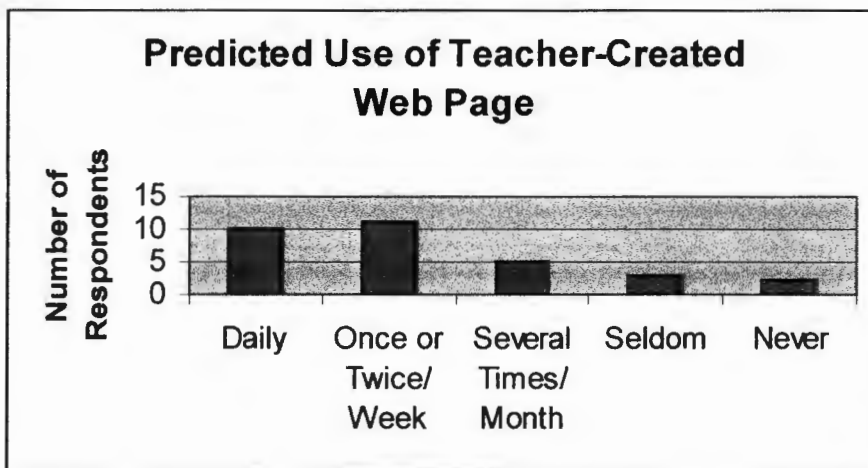
Note. Parents were asked, "Do you have access to the Internet?" There were thirty-three responses.

Chart 6:



Note. Thirty-one parents who responded that they had Internet access were asked the following question, "If you do have Internet access, where is it located?"

Chart 7:



Note. Parents were asked, "If a Web page was made available listing your child's daily assignment, project requirement, helpful Internet Web site links, weekly/monthly news, etc., how often would you take advantage of it?" There were thirty-one responses to the question.

I then began the process of researching literature related to teacher-controlled Web pages. As stated earlier, this topic is relatively new with minimal available data. A teacher-controlled Web page can generate more teacher-parent communication and

improve parenting partnerships. Teacher use of technology plays an important role in whether Web pages will ever get off the ground. Additional information about Web pages and their impact is increasingly beginning to appear in educational journals and magazines such as Education Week, The Journal, and Teaching Pre K-8.

My first attempt at Web design was quite frustrating. It was like trying to put together a barbecue grill without an instruction manual. It was intimidating because the tools were there, but no clear set of directions was available. I used Web design software located at www.geocities.com and published my page on their hosting site. This was the web site used by my students and parents. I put only the very basics on this web page due to the lack of time available, my other teaching responsibilities, and my inexperience in using the software. I posted daily assignments, made a link to my email address, provided links to current event Web sites, and used a "hit counter" to see how many visits the Web page was getting. The Web page was up and running during April and May.

My Web page can be found at:

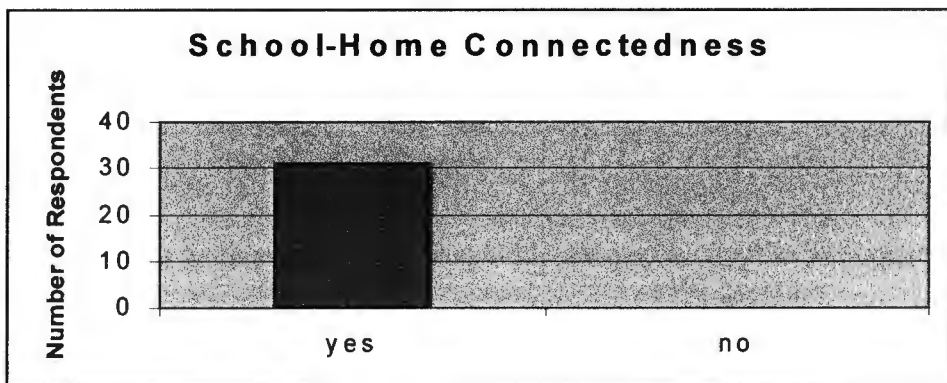
http://www.geocities.com/EnchantedForest/B0005170827/8382/ms_hobus_homepage.htm. To view pages from my current teacher Web Page created during June 2000, by using Microsoft's FrontPage 2000 Web design software, refer to Appendix D. More general information and suggestions about the creation of teacher Web pages can be found in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Results

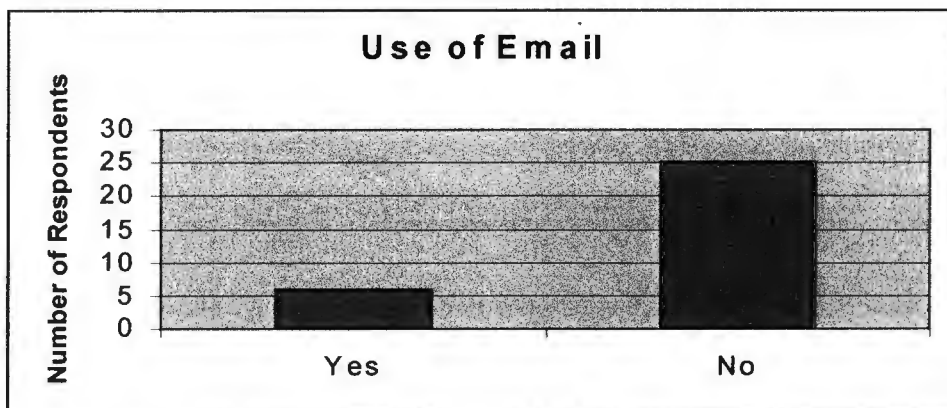
On May 24, 2000, I asked the parents with Internet connection from the initial survey to complete a follow-up survey. The results are illustrated in Charts 8-12.

Chart 8:



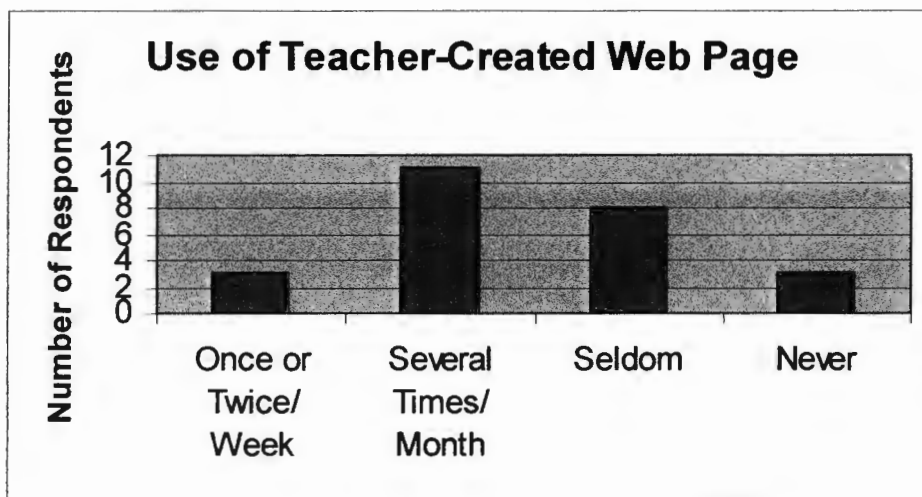
Note. Parents were asked, "Did the creation of the Web page help you feel more connected with our classroom?" Thirty-one parents with Internet access responded to the question.

Chart 9:



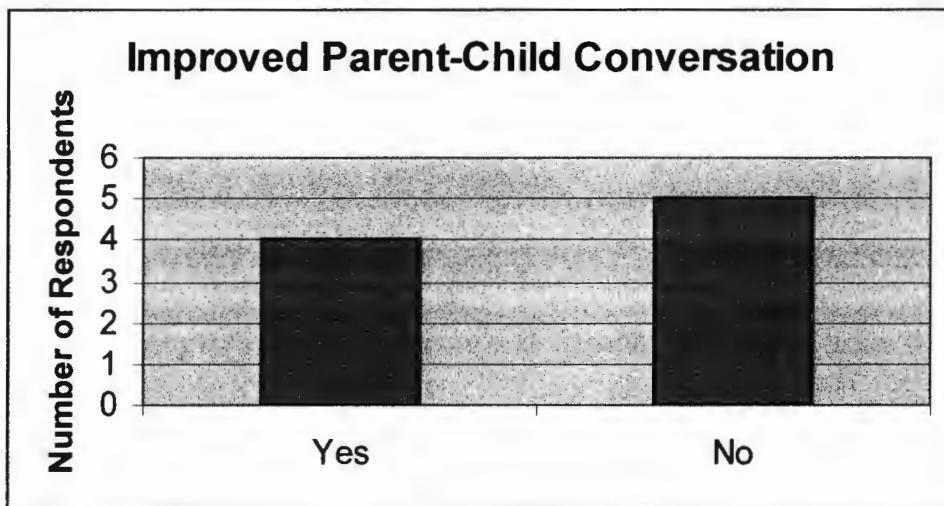
Note. Parents were asked, "Did you email the teacher from the email link located on the Web page?" Thirty-one parents with Internet access responded to the question.

Chart 10:



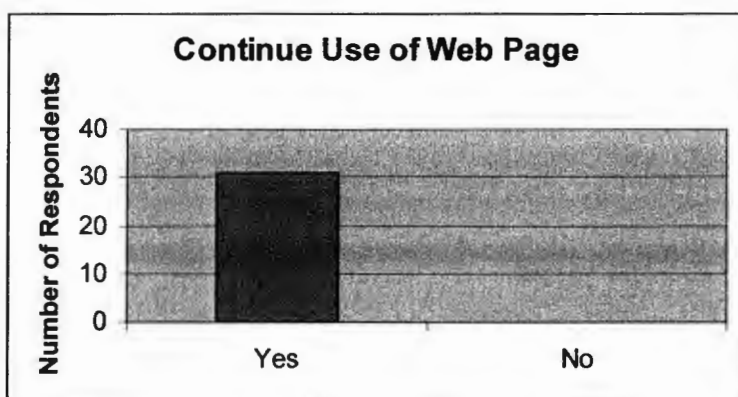
Note. Parents were asked, "How frequently did you access the Web page?" Thirty-one parents with Internet access responded to the question.

Chart 11:



Note. Parents who had responded that they visited the Web page at least once or twice per week were asked to answer the following question, "Have you experienced more detailed conversations with your child concerning their school work?" Thirty-one parents with Internet access responded to the question.

Chart 12:



Note. Parents were asked, "Do you feel the Web page is a good idea and should be improved and used next school year?" Thirty-three parents responded to the question.

Upon compiling the results of the follow-up survey, I believe a teacher-controlled Web page can make an impact on school/home communication. I was very pleased with the overall use of the Web page and the positive response it received.

The following comments are from email messages I received:

- "I now have a better conversation starter other than 'how was school today, do you have any homework?'"
- "It is nice to know about weekend homework assignments before Jenny makes plans to go out with friends....She stayed home this weekend!"
- "This has been helpful. Thank you."
- "Nice Web page. I would hope Sam would use it if he were missing school because of an illness to help with his make-up work. Students need to be responsible for their own projects, daily assignments, etc."

After receiving positive responses based on the initial Web page, I decided to expand and make some improvements. In June, I attended a two day workshop conducted by Randy Richardson entitled "Working in a Webbed World: Creating Web Pages" at my local Area Education Association and reproduced the Web page. Table number two contains criteria I recommend for teachers wishing to establish a Web page. Much of this knowledge was gained from working with Randy Richardson our AEA technology specialist and from noting my likes/dislikes of other teacher-created Web pages.

Table 3:

Background Color	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep the audience in mind. Avoid dark or bright colors. Go for practicality, not prettiness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stick to a basic background; busy backgrounds become distracting to the eye
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very pale colors work well-blue, yellow, pink, beige (texture is good) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Off-white works well if the page contains a lot of text
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Light gray works well with photos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AVOID red
Text Color	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep the audience in mind. Select a color that is easily visible. Many people spend their day looking at a computer screen which causes eye strain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid blue and red because they are associated with hyper-links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 point is a good minimum font size; 12-Bold may also work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stick to the basic fonts: Times, New Roman, Helvetica, Garamond, Impact
Pictures and Photos	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't overuse clipart; it slows computers down; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital pictures slow down Web pages; keep them small. If you have many, bring them in as a thumbnail to save memory
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use animation sparingly; one per page 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and students will not become regular visitors of your site if it is SLOW!

Chapter 5

Conclusions/Recommendations

Because of the timeliness of teacher-created Web pages, little is known about its long-term effects on school/home communication and parenting partnerships. Much more research needs to be done as teachers begin designing and implementing Web pages. First of all, are teachers equipped with the knowledge, time, and resources to build their own Web pages? Teachers have no extra time and energy. In order to raise student achievement through parental involvement these needs will have to be met.

A number of companies are making it easier for schools and teachers to set up a Web site. These companies typically offer free hosting service and a "fill-in-the-template" type Web building tool. Some well-known companies on the Web include MySchoolOnline.com (www.familyeducation.com/golocal), part of the Family Education Network; School Notes (www.edgate.com/notes.html), part of the Copernicus Education Gateway; High Wired.com (www.highwired.com), an online publishing service for high schools; Electric SchoolHouse (www.eschoolhouse.com); and bigchalk.com (www.bigchalk.com). The publishing powerhouse Scholastic (www.scholastic.com) is improving the teacher-to-parent portion of its Web site.

A strong commitment on the teachers' part is needed in order for a teacher-controlled Web page to succeed. Daily updating is the biggest key to increasing the number of times parents and students visit the site. Involve the students. Allow them to share their interests and talents by taking part in the design and upkeep of the Web page. Parents must believe they will miss something if they don't log on to the site. It can become a habit-forming activity much like checking daily email. It is my hope that

students will make a habit of visiting the Web page to check daily assignments and announcements, too.

I realize that maintaining a Web page is a continuous process that needs regular evaluation and may not be feasible for all teachers at this point. Hopefully, as teachers build Web pages, they will find them beneficial and something they do not want to be without. Internet technology continues to expand into something that we generally take for granted in our everyday lives. This is even truer for our students. Education cannot afford to not take part in this amazing revolution.

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Appendix A

Letter of Consent

I, Colleen Hobus, am completing an Action Research Project as part of a fulfillment to obtain a Master of Arts in Education from the University of Northern Iowa. This project will include research on parent involvement, communication between parents and teachers, and the use of teacher-created Web pages to improve home/school communication. Participation in this survey is voluntary. All information about current communication practices in our middle school will be kept confidential.

You may contact the office of the Human Subjects Coordinator, University of Northern Iowa; (319) 273-2748 for answers to questions about the research and about the rights of the research subjects.

For additional information or questions you may also contact Colleen Hobus, (712) 755-5701 or graduate advisor Dr. Donna Schumacher-Douglas, (319) 273-5880.

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement.

(Signature of subject or responsible agent)

Date

(Printed name of subject)

(Signature of investigator)

Appendix B

Initial Web Page Survey

Dear Parents,

I am in the process of setting up a parent-teacher-student Internet Web page to improve home-school communication for our eighth grade team. Please take a few minutes to fill out the following survey. Thank you for your time.

Colleen Hobus, AHST 8th Grade Team

1. How often do you communicate with your child's teacher (via telephone, notes, conferences, etc.)?
 - daily
 - several times a month
 - several times a year
 - once or twice a year
 - never

2. When you do communicate with your child's teacher, what form of communication do you use?
 - telephone
 - written notes, progress reports and/or assignment notebook
 - email
 - parent-teacher conferences/meetings

3. How difficult do you find it to communicate with your child's teacher?
 - extremely difficult or impossible
 - moderately difficult
 - not difficult

4. How often do you monitor your child's homework by looking at their assignment notebook?
 - daily
 - one or two times a week
 - several times a month
 - seldom
 - never

5. Do you have access to the Internet?
 - yes
 - no

6. If you answered yes to question number 5, where is your Internet access?
 - work
 - home
 - other (explain) _____

7. If a Web page were made available listing your child's daily assignments, project requirements, helpful Internet Web sites, weekly/monthly news, etc., how often would you take advantage of it?
 - daily
 - once or twice a week
 - several times a month
 - seldom
 - never

If you would be willing to visit my Web page, as I get it up and running, to provide input and/or suggestions, please write your email address below.

Additional Comments/Suggestions:

Appendix C

Follow-Up Survey

Dear Parents,

Thank you for your patience as I made my first attempt at Web page design. Please take a few minutes to fill out this follow-up survey. Thank you for your time.

Colleen Hobus, AHST 8th Grade Team

1. Did the creation of the Web page help you feel more connected with our classroom?
 yes
 no
2. Did you email the teacher from the email link located throughout the Web page?
 yes
 no
3. How frequently did you access the Web page?
 daily
 once or twice per week
 several times per month
 seldom
 never
4. Referring back to question number three, if you answered "daily" or "once or twice per week", have you experienced more detailed conversations with your child concerning their school work?
 yes
 no
5. Do you feel the Web page is a good idea and should be improved and used next school year?
 yes
 no

Additional Comments/Suggestions:

Appendix D

Letter of Permission to Reprint Document

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development DATE: _____
Christine Richards, Permissions Coordinator
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Alexandria, VA 22311-1714
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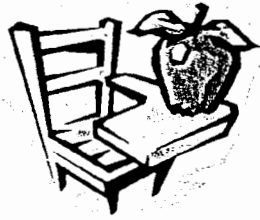
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Appendix E

Sample Pages from Ms. Hobus' Web Page



Ms. Hobus' Home Page

AHST Middle School

8th Grade Team

Web Page Created by

Colleen Hobus

Welcome to my home page. I hope you enjoy your visit.

Keep logging on for updates on the upcoming school year. Send me an email with Web page suggestions, links you would like to see, etc.

Class Announcements

8th Grade Social
Studies

7th & 8th Grade
Pre Algebra

AHST Home Page

AHST History Day

AEA XIII Social
Studies

AEA XIII Technology

Favorite Links

Students

xdrive Online
File Storage

Scholastic

Parents

National Parent
Information
Network

Teachers

xdrive Online File Storage

Education World

Integrated/Interdisciplinary
Education Resources

Middle Level Links

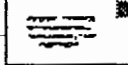
Click here to go back to the [AHST School Web Site](#).

School Telephone Number: (712) 544-2440

School Fax Number: (712) 544-2219

Page Last Updated
07/19/00 09:29 PM

School Address: AHST Middle School
304 Western Ave.
Shelby, IA 51537

[Ms. Hobus' Email](#) 

You are visitor #



This web page is best viewed with Netscape 4.0 or Internet Explorer 5.0.

N W S F A S H

Attention: Middle School class supply lists are now available online at the [AHST Middle School Home Page](#).



8th Grade Social Studies

Ms. Hobus

Assignments for the Week of August 23-25, 2000

Monday: Teacher Inservice

Tuesday: Teacher Inservice

Wednesday:

Thursday:

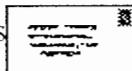
Friday:

Cemetery Field Trip, May 2000



[Misplaced Project Directions or Rubric? Click Here.](#)

Email Ms. Hobus



[Ms. Hobus' Home Page](#)

[AHST Home Page](#)

AHST History Day

Ms. Hobus



2001 History Day Theme

Frontiers in History: People, Places, Ideas

National History Day Office
College Park, Maryland



2000 History Day Students
hard at work on their Media Project
entitled, "The Federal Interstate System:
The Map of America Redrawn"

AEA XIII History
Day Resources

National History Day Themes
(tentative)

2002 Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History

2003 Rights and Responsibilities in History

2004 Exploration, Encounter, Exchange in History

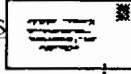
2005 Communication in History: The Key to Understanding

2006 Taking a Stand in History

2007 Triumph and Tragedy in History

2008 The Individual in History

Email Ms. Hobus



Ms. Hobus' Home Page

AHST Home Page

7th and 8th Pre Algebra

Ms. Hobus



7th Grade Assignments for the Week of August 23-25, 2000

Monday: Teacher Inservice

Tuesday: Teacher Inservice

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

8th Grade Assignments for the Week of August 23-25, 2000

Monday: Teacher Inservice

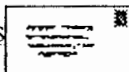
Tuesday: Teacher Inservice

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

Email Ms. Hobus



[Ms. Hobus' Home Page](#)