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## Teachers' Use of Email for Communication with Students' Families

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Teachers' Use of Email for Communication with Students' Families

A Master's Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty  
Of the Department of Leadership Education  
College of Education  
Of Winona State University

By

Matthew T. Ferry

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of  
Master of Science in Educational Leadership

## **Abstract**

The educational system holds an important role and responsibility in the attempt to educate all the youth in the country. A critical dynamic in the success of educating America is connected to the teacher's ability to use online communication to build strong teacher-parent relationships. The purpose of this research study was to explore the levels of training that teachers have experienced in teacher education programs and professional development opportunities and the impacts it had on online communication to parents for their students. The study utilized surveys to poll teachers on the training they experienced during their career and the frequency in use in the tools they were trained to use. The sample for this study were 125 teachers in an urban/suburban district in a northern metropolitan area. The study found teachers were generally provided little or no training on the use of email as a parental or family communication tool.

## Chapter I

Teachers' success in educating students is related to the teacher's ability to communicate with students' families and build strong relationships. Students who have parents actively involved in their education perform at a higher level (Bordalba and Bochaca, 2019; Dubis and Bernadowski, 2017; Olmstead, 2018). Technology increased options for teachers to use when trying to communicate with parents, however support training is lacking. Communication using email, mobile devices and other online apps and platforms continues to increase in education (Bordalba and Bochaca, 2019). Bordalba and Bochaca (2019) report that teachers and parents prefer online communication because of accessibility and efficiency. Pew Research Center (2021) reports that 85% of US consumers owned a smartphone. Parents' preferred means of communication with school is email (Passey, 2021). This preference is further supported by De Gagne et al. (2020) who claim over 200 billion emails are sent in the world each day. However, literature reviews reflect that teachers are poorly prepared for how to use it effectively with parents (Gartmeir et al., 2018). Teachers today have a list of online options to communicate with parents that include Email, Talking points, Skype, Facetime, Messenger, texting, a variety of LMS, Facebook, Twitter and more (Thompson et al, 2015, Gartmier et al., 2016, Passey, 2021). One consequence of using online communication with little to no training on the part of the teachers and parents is miscommunication and increase in stress. Passey (2021) states that teachers' mental health was impacted by the poor writing skills and strategies on both the part of teachers and the parents.

## **Research Problem**

The problem is teachers do not receive adequate training in how to use online communication tools and strategies.

## **Research Questions**

RQ1: How do teachers use email to communicate with students' families?

RQ2: What training do teachers receive in using email to communicate with student's families?

RQ3: How is teachers' email use impacted by training?

## **Problem Background**

Increased use of online communication options is increased workloads and stress levels for teachers (Passey, 2019). "*Digital well-being*" is a term used to describe the mental health of a person in connection to demands resulting in the amount of technology used (Ferrar, 2019). Ferrar posits that a lack of training and skill in the technology tools being used in schools is directly related to teachers' digital well-being. Teachers need training during in-service or professional development sessions to help them feel competent in the use of the evolving technologies available (Fiorilli, et al., 2017).

Teacher use of new online technology evolves the ways teachers communicate to parents, with email being the most used form of technology. Passey (2021) posit that it is critical to assess uses of technology in this era to explore how parents are using email to communicate with teachers. Further investigation needs to be carried out to explore uses of new technologies as they come into use (Passey, 2021). Kunok (2021) posits that teachers and parent perceptions of

uses of technology differ. Research shows that teachers' use of modern technology is lower than perceived it to be (Kunok, 2021).

Teachers are using online technology to communicate with parents, and in most cases with little or no training. Gartmeier et al. (2016) report teachers were challenged to learn effective ways of communicating and are left to gain these skills on their own or from peers. Lack of training in the use of email, email literacy and aspects of communication through the various online applications allows for a lack of uniformity and a lack of success. Kunok (2021) states challenges exist because of a lack of training in email literacy. Without common netiquette, cyber civility and online norms, miscommunication is a risk (2021). De Gagne et al. (2021) posit that a lack of netiquette and a lack of facial expression results in mixed messages that result in communication being discontinued without a resolution or understanding.

Society continues to become more diverse on ethnic, racial, gender and cultural levels (Sears, 2021). This change in society creates challenges in building relationships and communication between teachers and parents. The evolution of online communication for teachers and parents adds to this complexity. Kirmachi (2019) emphasizes the need for research around the use of technology when communicating with diverse families as online communication often extends the gap between schools and parents.

Parents have less direct contact with teachers as their children increase in age. The day-to-day interaction of teacher and parent at drop off and pick up in the elementary years decreases as students ride buses and travel between home and school independently of parents. Bachman, et al., (2021) posit communication partnerships between teachers and parents through online communication starting in the middle school years. The decreased face time between adults

increases the need for teachers to be effective communicators using online options (Kirmaci, 2019).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to explore the training received by teachers for the use of online communication and the impact it has on how they communicate with parents. The study will investigate teacher education program training and professional development training for online communications between teachers and parents. The study will also investigate the impact this has on how teachers communicate with parents online.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following operational terms support this research study:

***Netiquette:*** refers to the rules for the proper and appropriate way to communicate using an electronic device or activities online (Brusco, 2011)

***Cyber-civility:*** refers to online behavior and use of social media and other digital tools in a responsible, respectful manner that allows individuals to communicate ideas without the threat of intimidation, harassment, or abuse.

***LMS:*** a software application system that allows for all aspects of the online learning process to take place.

***Parental Involvement:*** for the purpose of this study the term will refer to the parent behaviors of attendance at conferences, monitoring of online grades, and corresponding with teachers about academic progress.

## **Summary**

Chapter One provides the introduction for the impacts of inadequate teacher training in using online communications options Chapter One also outlined the problem statement and the purpose of the study. This chapter provided a comprehensive background of the problem, the impacts of inadequate teacher training in using online communications options. The research questions were stated, essential terms were defined, and the limitations and delimitations of the study were discussed. Finally, the chapter concluded with the significance of the study. Chapter Two will consist of a review of the literature employed for this study. Chapter Three outlines the methodology and describes how the data was collected and analyzed. Chapter Four presents the results from the research, and Chapter Five consists of the conclusion, discussion, and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter II**

This study explores teacher training impact in using online communications options when communicating with parents. This chapter is a summary of the literature related to teacher training related to parental communication, student success, email use, and training in online communications. The first section will provide a historical perspective of the topic. The second section of the chapter will focus on the impact of parental involvement on a child's success in school. The third section will share a review of the literature related to email use and how it evolved. The final section will focus on training in online communication and netiquette.

### **Historical Perspective**

The use of effective communication is critical to the success of any profession and especially important in education (Bachman, et al. 2021). Historically, teachers communicated with parents in face-to-face interactions, via phone calls, and occasionally by phone (Bachman, et al. 2021). As children age, become more independent in travel, and no longer need parents to transport them to school, face to face contact between teachers and parents decreases and the reliance on other means of communication increases. Bachmen et al. (2021) claim that teacher-parent online communication becomes more important when students enter middle school and secondary school because of growing independence. A historical transition for the modes of communication changed across the world with the advancements in online technology, in particular the introduction of email (Passey, 2021). As the transition happened, normative behavior evolved inconsistently, leading to an increase in miscommunication. The result of the increase in miscommunication impacted parent-teacher communication, decreasing parent engagement, and increasing stress. (Passey, 2021).

As previously posited by Kunok (2021), students who have parents actively involved in the education process perform at a higher level. Teachers' need to communicate effectively to build engagement with parents. Teachers often share information with parents in online formats; LMS, OGS and particularly through email. Miller, et al. (2016) posits that there is a difference between sharing information and communicating. Sharing information does not ensure the information is received, if received, understood, and if understood, understood with shared meaning. Communication theory uses the definition that shared information only becomes communication between parties when there is shared meaning (Conrad and Poole, 1998). Miller et al. (2016) also posit that when communication was not done effectively, it can create tension and reduce participation from parents. This further illustrates the impact that teachers' use of online communication may have on the amount of success for students in schools. Research related to communication theory states the importance of understanding the significance of strategic use of the communication process to achieve goals and missions (Taylor and Francis, 2022).

The teaching occupation is full of challenges and stressors that are leading to a burnout rate in unprecedented numbers (Peterson, 2021). The use of online communications is one of the contributing factors to the increase in this stress. Lack of training in online communication use and lack of training in dealing with stress couple together to impact this situation (Peterson, 2021, Passey, 2021, Kunok 2021). The culture of online communication has evolved organically, and the result of this evolution is a lack of norms of how technology should be used and how it should be used to communicate (Conrad and Poole, 1998). The lack of normative communication style builds on the challenges that exist in the growing multicultural nature of our society. Families that are not native English speakers in America express their challenges

and frustration with using communication in general and particularly the use of online communication (Chen, 2022). Jeynes (2003) posits that developing communication practices that work for all families will result in the most parents actively engaging in their students' education. The effectiveness of communication through email not only will improve engagement, but it will also reduce the amount of stress for all parties and improve overall mental health for everyone involved (Jeynes, 2003).

### **Impact of Parental Involvement**

Public schools are tasked with educating the youth in the community to be successful, contributing members to society. Ross (2016) states that a student's success in school is directly related to social mobility, physical and mental health, and future involvement in civic participation. Most have mission statements or purpose statements stating the goals. Research claims that the success experienced by the students in these schools is directly correlated to the level of parental involvement of each student. Students who have parents actively involved in their education perform at a higher level (Bordalba and Bochaca, 2019; Dubis and Bernadowski, 2017). Evans (2017) states the importance of parental involvement was recognized by researchers, policy makers and educators. Parental involvement exists in various forms that include parents: volunteering and observing in classrooms, supervising, and supporting with assignments that are homework, monitoring student performance and holding their children accountable, attending open houses-conferences, and other community events, and communicating with teachers via online options (Evans, 2017).

### **Email**

Ross (2016) posits that a key component of parental involvement in a child's education is centered around a two-way communication between teachers and parents. Bordalba and Bochaca

(2019) report that teachers and parents prefer online communication because of accessibility and efficiency. Families continue to become more active and operate on the go. This may be connected to the fact that over 85% of US consumers owned a smartphone in 2021 (PRS, 2021) and parents are able to fulfill responsibilities like tracking student performance and communicating with teachers while on the go. Parents' desired mode of communication with schools and teachers is via email (Passey, 2021). The need for email use is critical when students enter the high school years. Pierskalla (2021) posits that parental participation during conferences drops off significantly during secondary school, creating the need for alternative modes for communication.

Email has many advantages when it comes to tools for communications between teachers and parents. Bordalba and Bochaca (2019) state that efficiency and immediacy make email more effective than traditional modes of communication being used in education. Society continues to become more diverse, increasing the potential for conflict of cultural norms and communication styles (Evans, 2017). Effective use of email can help navigate these communication variables. Email also serves to build relationships between teachers and parents (Gonzales, 2016).

### **Teacher Training**

Teacher certification programs require years of education and multiple hours of professional development to maintain (MDE, 2022). However, there are zero requirements, or hours for a teacher in the state of Minnesota related to online communication, email, or netiquette (MDE, 2022). Dubis and Bernadowski (2017) posit implementing effective email protocol expectations and training could improve parental involvement and thus student achievement.

Learning to use email effectively is essential for teachers' success. Increases in cultural diversity connected to norms and communication style make it critical that teachers learn and understand how written communication is used in different cultures in order to build relationships and not create misunderstanding and frustration (Hu, et al., 2019). Hu, et al. (2019) claim serious focus should be placed on email literacy for teacher educators and in the professional development offered by school systems. Research makes it clear the importance of email users becoming more educated and better trained. Training should not be limited to educators. School systems and teachers need to make efforts to help parents understand how to use email effectively as well Dubis and Bernadowski (2017). Miller, et al. (2016), posit all members involved in online communications between teachers and parents, including students and administration, need to be educated related to the positive and negative impacts the practice on using online communications can create for all the parties involved.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework provides structure for research and provides organization, connects related literature analyzed in the literature review, establishes foundations, points out areas for further research and constructs meaning of the sum of the information included in the study. (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Communication theory encapsulates the collection of theories that sum up the understanding of the communication process and connects the components of this study (Littlejohn, 1983). In addition, Social Constructionism theory establishes a framework for the components of this study connected to the dynamics of cultural diversity and varying viewpoints.

Communication theory focuses on the theories related to the communication process. Thus, it is central to communication theory to establish a core definition or understanding of

what communication means. Communication is a complex process that is central to establishing a common meaning or understanding for two or more people that incorporates context, place, location, perspectives, backgrounds and more (Conrad and Poole, 1998, Taylor and Francis, 2022). Conrad and Poole (1998) state further emphasize the active and organic nature of communication as a process. Communication is more complex than the basic exchange of information.

Communication Theory is separated out into three different perspectives related to the process of communication (Taylor and Francis, 2022). The first perspective approaches communication as a one-way process for the purpose of constructing meaning for the receiver. The second perspective approaches communication as a process where meaning is constructed by two or more individuals working together. The third perspective approaches communication as an “omnidirectional diachronic” process. This third perspective places an emphasis on the evolving nature of meaning. Taylor and Francis (2022) posit an essential component is not simply the meaning, but also the purpose behind the communication.

## **Summary**

Chapter Two contained a comprehensive literature review surrounding the topic of the impact of teacher training and online communication. The chapter focused on the following areas: historical background in teacher-parent communication, student success, email use, and training in online communications. Current scholarly research, grounded in communication theory and related to the topic of this paper, was reviewed, and analyzed to produce the literature review in this chapter. Chapter Three will provide an overview of the methodology used to complete this research study.

## **Chapter III**

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' use of email communication when communicating with student's families and training experience for using email. Chapter three provides methodology and rationale for this study. The study explores the type of emails teachers send to student's families, the frequency that teachers send emails to student's families, and the training levels teachers have in email use. Chapter three will provide a description of the setting, sample, and methods for collecting data, and a summary.

### **Research Design**

This was a mixed methods research study to explore how email was being used by teachers to communicate with the families of their students. It was descriptive and phenomenological in nature, seeking to describe the lived experience of a group of people (Creswell, 2018). Lochmiller and Lester (2017) posit mixed methods research explores the human experience and interprets the findings in the research. Surveys were in this study to collect information about the lived experience of teachers in the sample. The survey combined the use of Likert questions and open-ended questions to capture the lived experience and perspectives of the respondents.

### **Research Questions**

The following two questions serve as the overarching themes of this study.

RQ1: How do teachers use email to communicate with students' families?

RQ2: What training do teachers receive in using email to communicate with student's families?

RQ3: How is teachers' email use impacted by training?

### **Setting and Sample**

The setting for this study was a suburban community in the Twin Cities Metro area of Minnesota. Sandplains School District comprises two early childhood centers, sixteen elementary schools, four middle schools and four high schools and six educational learning centers that served a student population of approximately 21,000 (SPSD, 2021). The racial demographics for the district report out as 42% White, 24.5% Black, 16.1% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 9.4% Hispanic/Latino, 0.9% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. In addition, 7.1% of students are two or more races (U.S. Newsreport, 2021). Additional demographics for Sandplains School district are the free or reduced lunch population is 26.7% and the multilingual learner population is 15.1%. (U.S. Newsreport, 2021).

The sample for this study included teachers from one high school, one middle school, and two elementary schools in Sandplains School district. Schools selected represent the district population and overall demographics of the families in the district.

### **Instrumentation**

This study utilizes an original survey created by the researcher. The survey was designed to generate responses on teacher background, teacher email use, and teacher training related to email use. The survey included an open-ended option for teachers to provide additional information they deem valid to the study. The research data was collected electronically with the use of an online Qualtrics survey.

### **Institutional Review Board (IRB) Process**

This mixed-method study required the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) according to the guidelines of Winona State University (WSU, 2021). The steps to receive approval include successful completion of the Humans Subject Educational Module (WSU,

2021). The next step requires the submission of an application for approval to the IRB.

Completion of these steps demonstrated the commitment of the researcher to produce quality research.

### **Summary**

Chapter Three discussed the research methodology of the study. This chapter included the research design, explanation of purpose and rationale for the study, survey questions, setting, participant demographics, and data collection, and the IRB process. Chapter Four will focus on research results.

## Chapter IV

### Results

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' use of email when communicating with students' families and training experience for using email. The study explores the type of emails teachers send to students' families, the frequency that teachers send emails to students' families, and the training levels teachers had in email use. The method for collecting this data involved a Qualtrics survey distributed to teachers in three schools: one elementary, one middle school, and one high school in the Sandplains School District. Chapter Four describes the sample of participants and a complete analysis of the data collected.

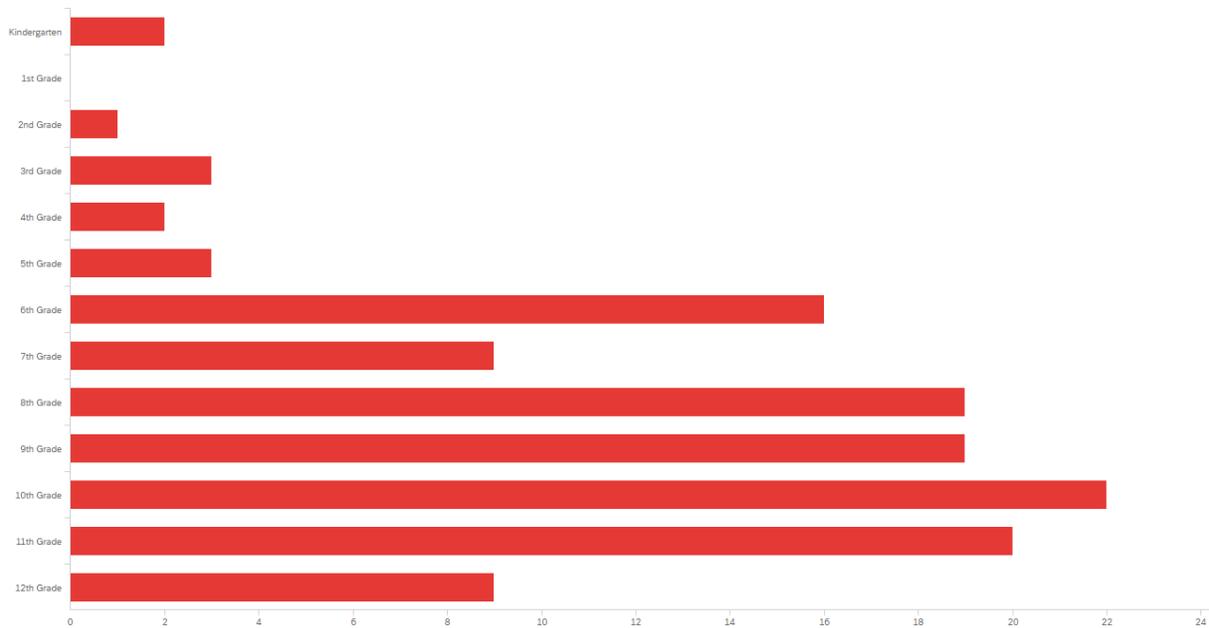
### Description of Sample

The participants of this study include all teachers from three schools: Sandplains Elementary, Sandplains Middle School and Sandplains High School. Every teacher in these schools received the Qualtrics survey. Each teacher had the option to voluntarily and anonymously reply to any or all of the questions in the survey. The total number of teachers who received the survey was 190. The number of respondents who completed the survey was 125, or 66% of potential participants. Every respondent completed the entire survey.

The overall breakdown of participants is as follows:

#### **Table 1:**

*Respondents by Grade Level Taught*



The number of high school teachers who responded was 70 out of a potential 101. This number is 69% of potential high school participants. High school respondents make up 56% of the total number of teachers who completed the survey. The number of middle school teachers who responded was 44 out of a potential 53. This number is 83% of potential middle school participants. Middle school respondents make up 35% of the total number of teachers who completed the survey. The number of elementary school teachers who responded was 11 out of a potential 36. This number is 30% of potential elementary school participants. Elementary school respondents make up 9% of the total number of teachers who completed the survey. This information is summarized in the bar graph below.

	Number of Respondents	Potential Number of Respondents	Percent Participation by School	Percent of Overall Respondents
High School	70	101	69%	56%
Middle School	44	53	83%	35%

Elementary School	11	36	30%	9%
Total	125	190		

**Table 2: Participation Level by School**

The bar graph that follows shows the years of teaching experience for each of the respondents. The consistent pattern is most respondents had at least 11 or more years of experience in the classroom. At all three levels, over 65% of respondents were in this category, with elementary teachers tallying 81.8%. Neither middle school nor elementary school had respondents in the experience category of 8-10 years. All other categories had less than 20% of total respondents reporting.

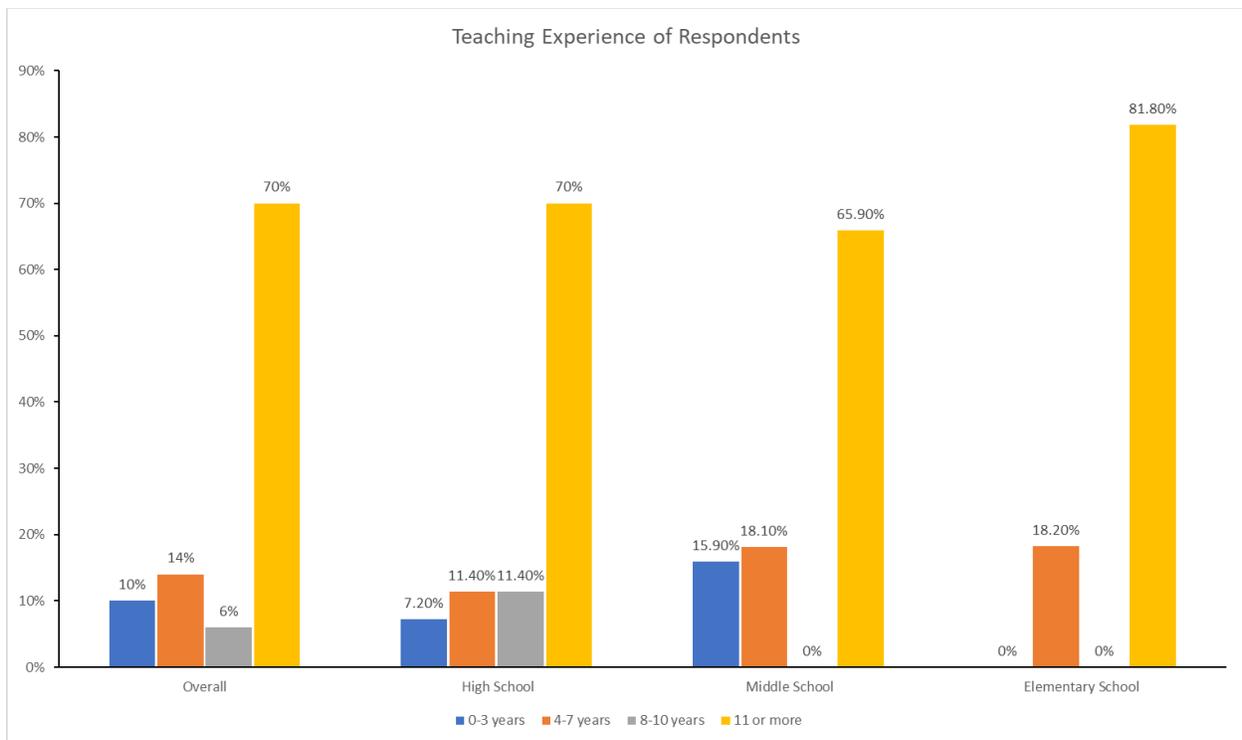
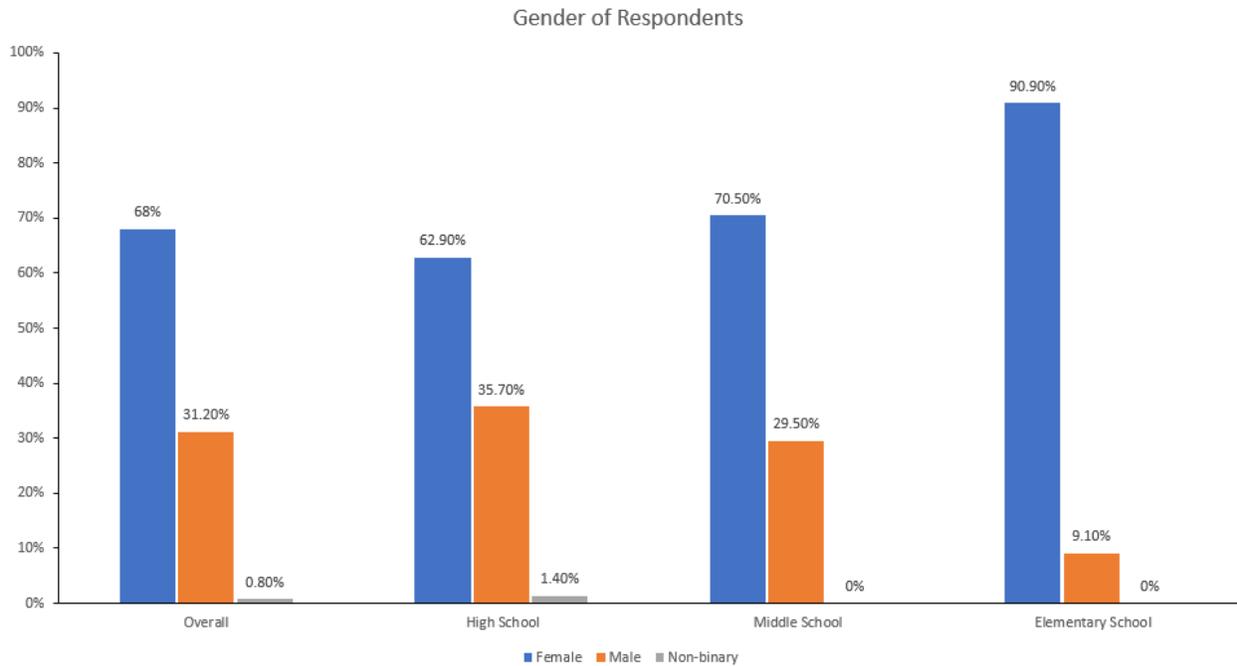


Table 4 breaks down the self-identified gender of each respondent. These numbers nearly mirror the national averages, with 68% of respondents identifying as female and 31.2% identifying as male. One out of the 125 respondents identified as non-binary. Zippa (2022)

reports that the national breakdown is 74.3% female and 25.7% male. No numbers were reported for non-binary.



The information described regarding the sample was generated with the use of Qualtrics survey questions one through seven.

### Data Analysis

This research study addressed three research questions:

RQ1: How do teachers use email to communicate with students' families?

RQ2: What training do teachers receive in using email to communicate with student's families?

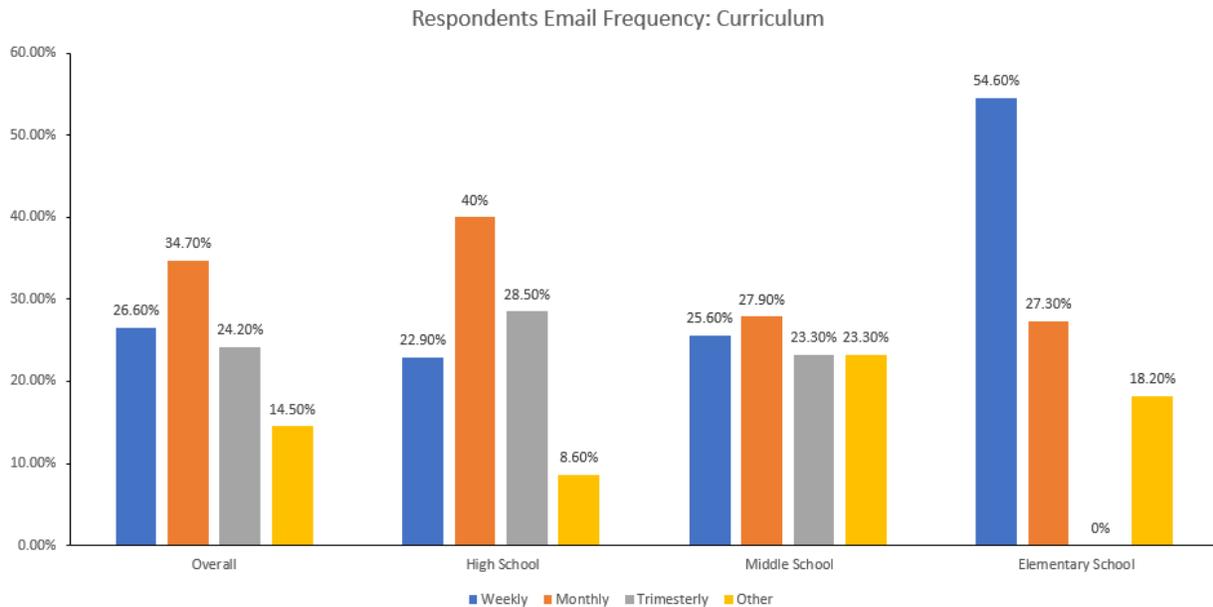
RQ3: How is teachers' email use impacted by training?

Data related to RQ1 (How do teachers use email to communicate with students' families?) was generated with the use of three survey questions. These three questions are explained and summarized below. Qualtrics survey questions 8, 9 and 10 provide data related to the topic and frequency that teachers use email to communicate with students' families.

### Teacher Use of Email

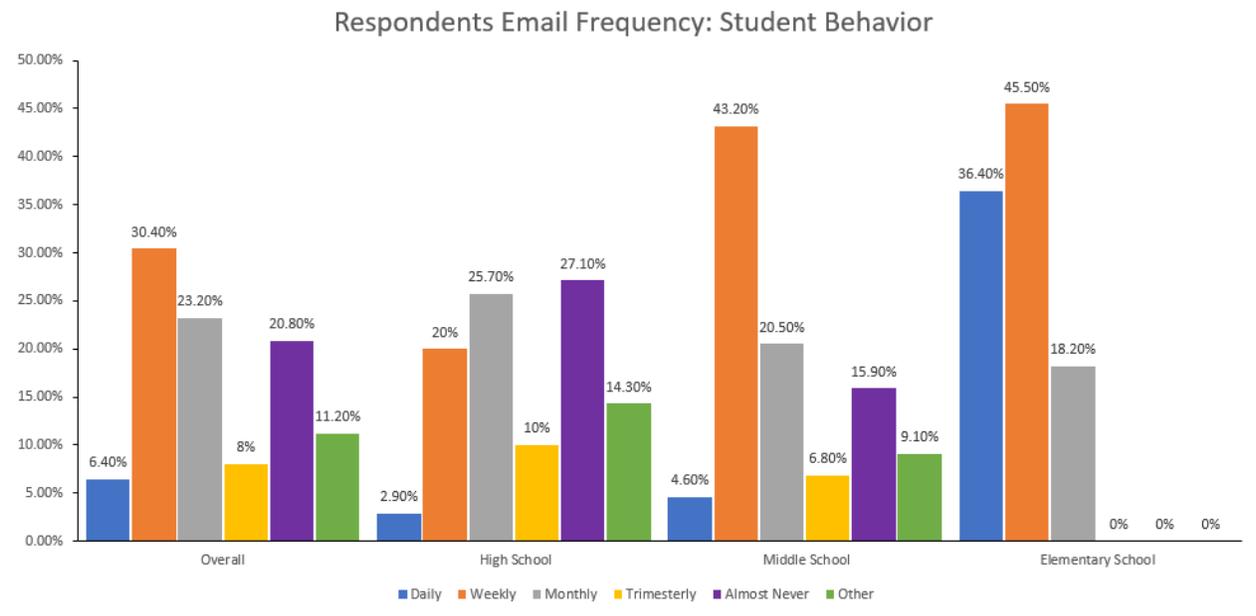
The following three bar graphs show the frequency emails were used to communicate to students’ families. Three topics of emails were examined: curriculum of the class, student behavior in class, and student grades in class.

The first bar graph shows the frequency of teacher email use to communicate about curriculum. Monthly use of curriculum email ranked the highest at 34.1% for overall respondents. Weekly use of curriculum email at 26.6%, and trimesterly use of curriculum email at 24.2% followed next. Other use of curriculum email ranked last at 14.5%. Elementary teachers' weekly use of email related to curriculum was the highest of any category at 54.6%. The next highest dropped to 40% with high school teachers using email for curriculum monthly. The two categories with the lowest percentage of respondents were 8.6% of high school teachers selecting “other” and no elementary school teachers selecting trimesterly use.



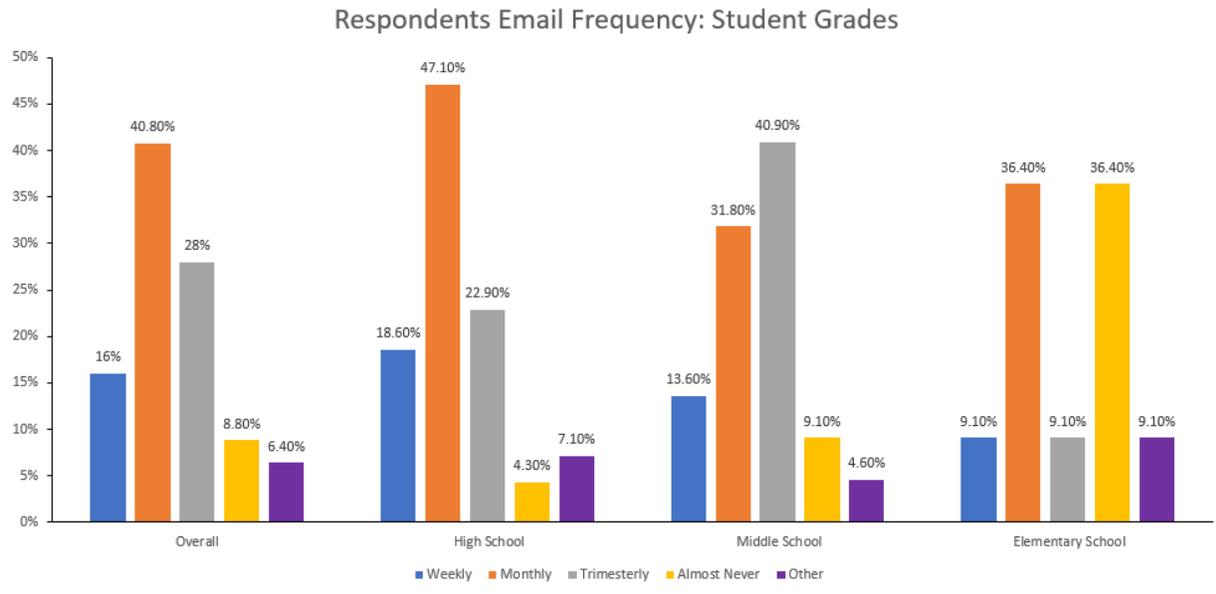
The next bar graph illustrates teachers’ use of email to students’ families related to classroom behavior. The highest overall category for teachers emailing families about behavior was weekly use at 30.4%. This was followed by monthly use at 23.2% and almost never at 20.8%.

Elementary teachers' weekly use of email related to behavior has the highest email use rate at 54.5%. Middle school teachers' weekly use of email related to behavior is the second highest email use rate at 43.2%. Elementary teachers' daily use of email related to behavior has the third highest email use rate at 36.4%. High school teachers' highest percentage category was almost never scoring at 27.1%.



The final bar graph in this section illustrates teachers' use of email to students' families related to student grades. The highest overall category for teachers emailing families about grades was monthly use at 40.8%. This was followed by trimesterly use at 28% and weekly at 16%. High school teachers' monthly use of email related to grades has the highest email use rate at 47.1%. Middle school teachers' weekly use of email related to grades is the second highest email use rate at 40.9%. Elementary teachers' weekly and trimesterly use of email related to grades were the third highest email use rate at 36.4%

each.

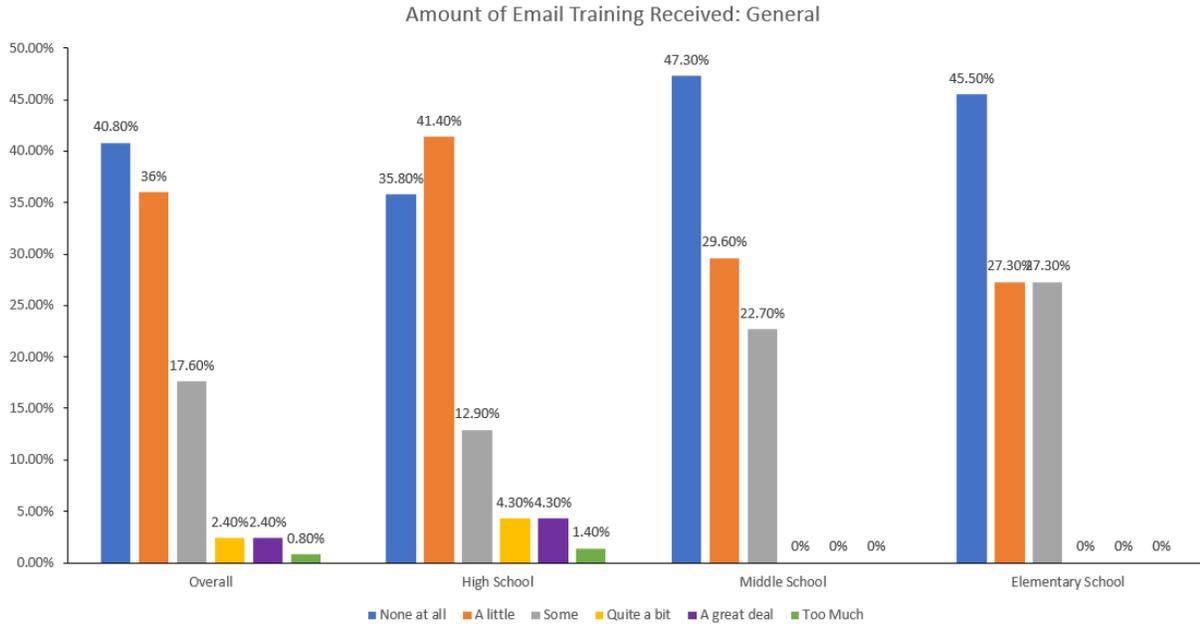


## Teacher Training for Email

Data related to RQ2 (What training do teachers receive in using email to communicate with student’s families?) was generated with the use of three survey questions. These three questions are explained and summarized below. Qualtrics survey questions 11, 12, and 13 provide data related to the topic and training that teachers have received related to the use of how to use email to communicate with students’ families.

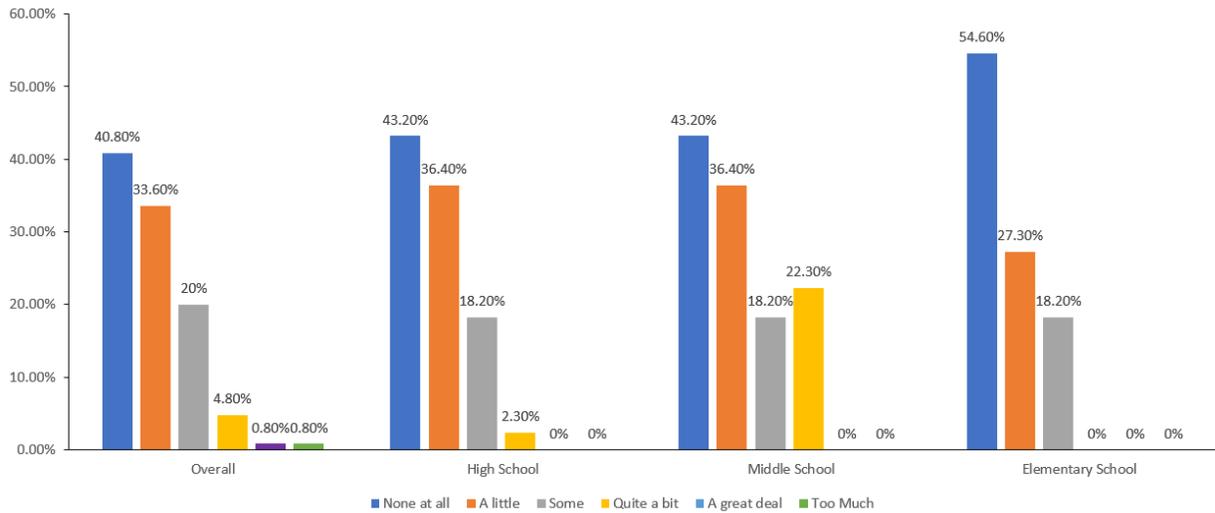
Qualtrics survey question number eleven focused on general training in the use of email related teacher-family communications. These findings are illustrated in the table below. Teacher participants' overall responses show that little to no training exists. 76.8% of respondents

answered in these two categories. This is consistent across all three grade levels with high school teachers' rate at 77.2%, middle school teachers at 86.9% and elementary school teachers at 72.8%. The high school level was the only grade level with participants reporting a great deal or too much. The respondents in this category run parallel with the selection of "other" in previous questions. Deeper analysis shows these respondents reporting the use of *Talking Points*, an alternative online communication platform, as their main mode of communication with student families.



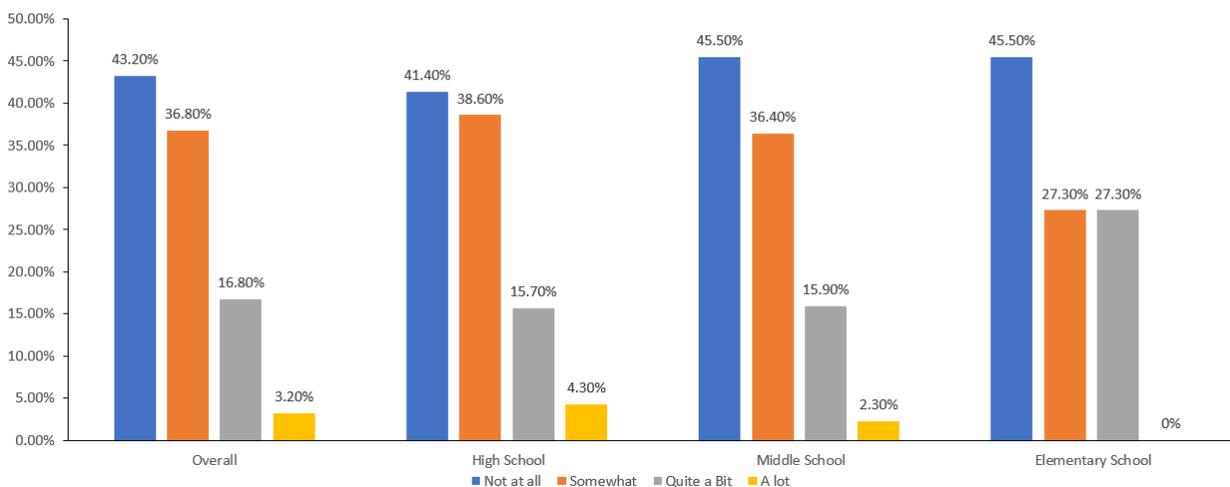
Qualtrics survey question number twelve focused specifically on training related to cultural communication and in the use of email related teacher-family communications. These findings are illustrated in the table below. Overall, these findings are the same as the previous question related to training in general.

Amount of Email Training Received: Culture Related



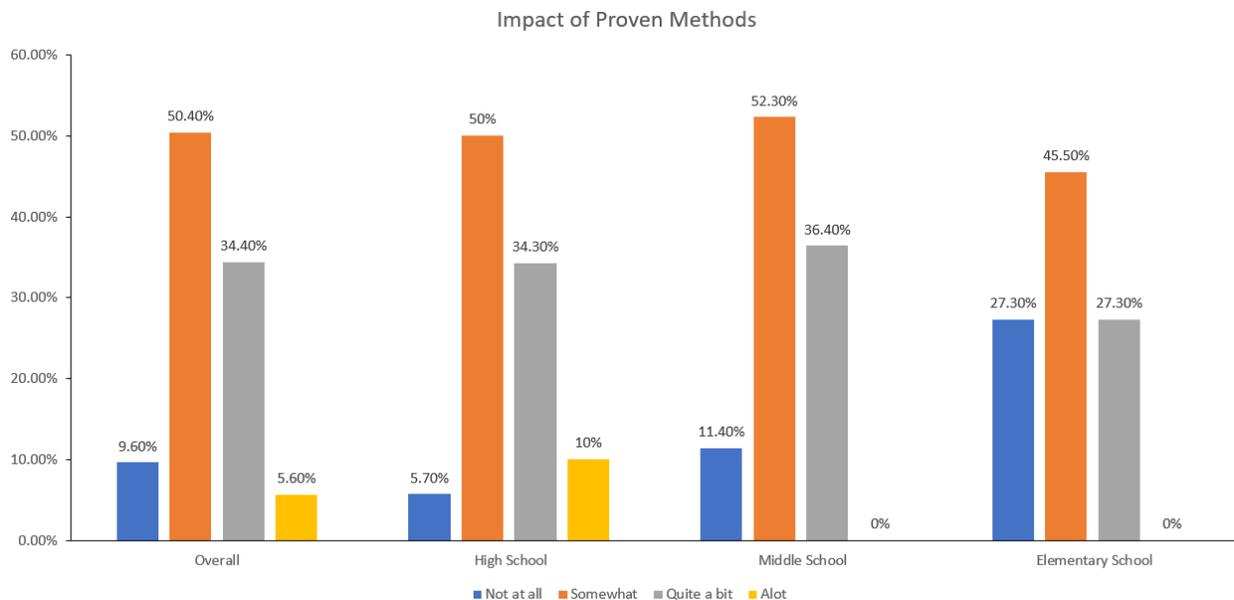
The overall response of participants shows that 40.8% of respondents do not use any ready-made templates and 33.6% of respondents use them a little. These findings parallel the previous two questions related to training with nearly 75% of respondents not using training to assist them in email communications to students’ families. These numbers were consistent across all three grade levels. No groups in the sample had more than 5% of responses indicating they used templates a lot.

Use of Ready Made Templates



## Teacher Impact for Training of Email

Data related to RQ3 (How is teachers' email use impacted by training?) was generated with the use of survey question 14. Qualtrics survey questions 14 provides data related to the topic of how training impacts the use of how teachers use email to communicate with students' families. The question asked teachers in the sample if they think training with proven templates and approaches would impact their email use. The findings are illustrated in the bar graph below. Overall findings show that 50.4% of participants believe email use would be *somewhat* impacted. This was also the highest category chosen with all three grade levels. Middle school teachers were highest in the choice of *somewhat* of an impact at 52.3%, followed by high school teachers at 50% and elementary school teachers were followed by high school teachers and then elementary school teachers with scores of 36.4%, 34.3%, and 27.3% respectively. High school teachers were the only grade level that had participants select *a lot*, with 10% of responses in this category.



Teachers open ended responses present a consistent theme. Over 50% of open-ended responses commented related to TalkingPoints. TalkingPoints is an application that allows teachers to compose and email that will be translated into the language of choice by the family and then converted to a text message families can receive on their smartphones.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 presented the data collected from the Qualtrics survey for this study. Responses were collected from teachers in the Sandplains School District at the elementary, middle school, and high school level. The data was broken out into demographics of the sample, teachers' use of email, teachers training exposure, and impact of training on email use. Chapter 5 provides a discussion and conclusions based on the findings in the survey. Chapter 5 will discuss how email is and is not utilized by teachers at various grade levels, as well as implications of training and teachers' use of email. Chapter 5 will also provide recommendations for further use and future research on this topic.

## **Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusions**

The purpose of this mix-method research study was to explore the use of email by teachers in communicating with students' families. The research examined how teachers are using email in regard to communication of curriculum, student behavior and students' grades. The research also examined how much training teachers have received related to the use of email in teacher-family communication, and the impact training may have on teachers' overall use of email. The previous four chapters have outlined the background of the problem, literature review of the topic, methodology of the study, description of the findings, and illustration of the findings. Chapter 5 presents the discussion of the findings, conclusions made from this data, limitations of the research and recommendations for further study.

### **Discussion**

This research study centered on three research questions.

RQ1: How do teachers use email to communicate with students' families?

RQ2: What training do teachers receive in using email to communicate with student's families?

RQ3: How is teachers' email use impacted by training?

The researcher used a Qualtrics survey to collect data anonymously and voluntarily from teachers at the elementary, middle school, and high school level in the Sandplains District. Seven survey questions were used to collect information to provide data related to the three research questions. Three themes emerged from the information analyzed in this research.

(1) Teachers' use of email to communicate with students varies both within grade levels and across grade levels.

(2) Teachers across grade levels receive limited training in the use of email for communicating with students' families.

(3) Training in the use of teacher-family email communication would impact how teachers communicate with students' families.

### **Theoretical Connection**

This mixed-method study focused on teacher to family communication in relation to students. Research demonstrates that students who have families actively involved in their education perform at a higher level (Bordalba and Bochaca, 2019). One challenge related to teacher-family communication is the lack of normative behavior in the use of email communication. Conrad and Poole (1998) reported online communication has evolved organically, and the result of this evolution is a lack of norms of how and when technology should be used to communicate. The findings in this study will illustrate how this continues in education today. The Minnesota Department of Education (2022) does not require any training related to online communication or email use for teacher licensure American society grows more diverse each year and it is critical for teachers to grow in the skills necessary to effectively communicate with students' families (Hu, et al., 2019).

### **Research Question 1**

Research question 1 focused on *How do teachers use email to communicate with students' families?*

The survey used three specific questions to determine how teachers are using email to communicate with students' families on the topic of curriculum, student behavior and students' grades.

### **Conclusion:**

Analysis of the responses show there is no clear pattern of email use within or across grades levels. Middle school use of email to communicate about curriculum breaks out almost equally for the four choice options. Middle school *weekly use* was 25.6%, *monthly use* was 27.9%, *trimesterly use* was 23.3% and *other use* was also 23.3%. The only category that showed a majority of use was elementary teachers' weekly use of email to communicate about curriculum. This response rate entered a majority with the percentage of response registering 54.6%.

### **Implications:**

System wide use of email needs to be planned, implemented, and monitored. Historical and contemporary research shows that teacher-family communication impacts student success. This study highlights that gaps exist in the communication process still today. This study demonstrates the lack of uniformity and consistency in place at Sandplains Area Schools. Leaders who invest in developing an effective systemic plan will be able to increase teacher-family communication and thus, student success.

### **Research Question 2**

Research question 2 focused on *What training do teachers receive in using email to communicate with student's families?* The Qualtrics survey used two questions to determine the

quantity and type of training teachers received related to the use of email when communicating to their students' families. Two questions surveyed teachers related to the amount of general training received for using email to communicate with families and related to the amount of specific training received for using email to communicate with families of various cultural backgrounds.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the survey illustrate that teachers' level of training is limited to non-existent. The highest percentage of responses for both questions, at all three grade levels was no training was received. The lowest two response categories for the question related to training produced 72.8% of responses. At the middle school level, 22.7% received some training. This percentage rose to 27.3% at the elementary level. High school level teachers were the only group to receive responses for quite a bit, a great deal, or too much, with response rates of 4.3%, 4.3% and 1.4% respectively.

### **Implications**

Teacher education programs and school leaders need to prepare teachers to succeed in parental communications. A lack of training still exists in the education of teachers when it relates to communicating with students' families. The data from these two questions illuminate the opportunity for growth in teacher-family communication. Growth in teacher-family communication will then transfer to student success in education.

### **Research Question 3**

Research question 3 focused on *How teachers email use is impacted by training?* The survey used two questions to determine how training may impact teachers' use of email to

communicate with students' families. The first question examined teachers' use of readymade templates in emails to students' families. The second question solicited teachers' perspective on how training would impact their use of email.

## **Conclusion**

Training teachers better would impact teachers' communication with student families. Survey questions related to how much training teachers receive illustrated that less than 25% of teachers reported they received more than “a little” training. The data in this survey shows a shift up in email use when additional training enters the context. The use of readymade templates parallels the amount of training received by teachers. However, comparisons between the percentages of teachers that res

## **Implications**

Teacher education programs and school leaders that implement training related to email use will increase the amount of communication teachers initiate with students' families. Teachers who have the training and skills to use effective email and communication strategies will email students' families more often. These communications will positively impact teacher-family relationships and increase family participation in the lives of their students.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research explored dynamics of teacher email use when communicating with families in the Sandplains district. The first recommendation is to replicate this study in more school systems to determine if comparable results occur. Sample size should be increased at the elementary level and for teachers with ten or less years of experience. The second recommendation is to explore Talking Points technology and how it impacts teachers' online

communication and use or lack of use of email. Multiple teachers in this study had responses related to Talking Points. A third recommendation is to explore how training impacts email or online communication. This study focused on teachers' beliefs. Future research should analyze how training impacts use.

### **Summary**

Chapter 5 presented the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations for future research from the research. The chapter provided theoretical connections of the study and produced conclusions and implications related to the three overarching research questions of the study. The research focused on teacher email practices, training received in email use, and teachers views on email training.

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## Appendix: Survey

Q2 If you agree to participate, responding to the survey questions constitutes your consent. Participation is voluntary and you may stop participating at any time.

Click "Yes" if you agree to participate in this study and confirm.

Click "No" if you do not wish to participate in this study.

Participation is voluntary and you may stop participating at any time.)

I confirm I am at least 18 years of age.

Q3 Which school are you assigned?

Q4 Grade levels taught in the 2021-2022 School Year

- Kindergarten (1)
  - 1st Grade (2)
  - 2nd Grade (3)
  - 3rd Grade (4)
  - 4th Grade (5)
  - 5th Grade (6)
  - 6th Grade (7)
  - 7th Grade (8)
  - 8th Grade (9)
  - 9th Grade (10)
  - 10th Grade (11)
  - 11th Grade (12)
  - 12th Grade (13)
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Q6 Years of Experience in Education

- 0-3 years (1)
- 4-7 (2)
- 7-10 (3)
- 10+ (4)

Q7 Gender

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Q8 How often do you use email to communicate with your student's families about learning and curriculum in your class?

- Weekly (1)
- Monthly (2)
- Trimestery (3)
- Other (4) \_\_\_\_\_

Q9 How often do you use email to communicate with your student's families about a student's classroom behavior in your classroom

- Daily (1)
- Weekly (2)
- Monthly (3)
- Trimesterly (4)
- Almost Never (5)
- Other (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q10 How often do you use email to communicate with your student's families about a student's grades and academic performance in your class?

- Weekly (1)
- Monthly (2)
- Trimesterly (3)
- Almost Never (4)
- Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q11 How much training have you received on HOW to use email to communicate with your student's families?

- None at all (1)
- A little (2)
- Some (3)
- Quite a bit (4)
- A great deal (5)
- Too Much (6)

Q12 How much training have you received on how to use email to communicate with your student's families from different cultural backgrounds?

- None at all (1)
- A little (2)
- Some (3)
- Quite a bit (4)
- Alot (5)
- Too Much (6)

Q13 Do you use ready made templates for communicating with your student's families?

- Not at all (1)
- Sometimes (2)
- Most of the time (3)
- Almost all the time (4)

Q14 How do you think training and examples of proven communication templates would impact the frequency that you email to communicate with your student's families?

- Not at all (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- Quite a bit (3)
- A lot (4)

Q15 What other information would you like to share about communicating with parents with email?

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