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HOW TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN POSITIVE PARENT-TEACHER
RELATIONSHIPS

by
Tracy Cwiakala

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Science in Teaching Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
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Approved by _____
Dr. Hespe

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ABSTRACT

Tracy Cwiakala

HOW TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN POSITIVE PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

2006-2007

Dr. David Hespe

Master of Science in Teaching in Collaborative Education

Studies and literature have shown that when parents and teachers possess a positive relationship, students will be more successful and show an increase in academic achievement. The purposes of this research study were to (a) determine how to establish a positive parent-teacher relationship and (b) ascertain the most effective and ineffective methods, approaches and utilizations for maintaining a positive parent-teacher relationship. Teachers and parents defined what a parent-teacher relationship means to them as well as what roles they play within the relationship. Different obstacles and barriers encountered are discussed in addition to the best ways to approach them in order to maintain the relationship. The study takes place in a southern New Jersey elementary school where teachers and parents were interviewed, surveyed, and observed. The data was transferred into tables and reviewed to find common trends. Data showed that parent-teacher relationships should be established as early as possible in the school year. Newsletters and a homework planner with daily parent sign offs were proven to be the most effective whole class communication methods while phone calls and in person conferences are the most effective individual communication methods. The research study concludes the importance of having a home-school connection.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

No collaborative relationship is paved with pastel fairy stones and silks, but the ability to admit that it takes work to establish a positive, collaborative relationship sets both parties off on the road to mutual understanding in support of the child. Healthy relationships are cooperative relationships.

– Stephanie Brooks, 2004

Mrs. Jones implemented a behavior manager that is placed on each child's desk. During the course of the day, if a student breaks one of the classroom rules they receive a minus on their manager with an explanation of what the child has done to receive the minus. If a child has a perfect day, which meant that they followed the classroom rules, they received a star on their managers. At the end of the day the students take home their managers to show their parents and return with the managers signed by the parents the following day. The behavior manager was supposed to be one of the ways Mrs. Jones obtained classroom management as well as communicated with the parents on how their child behaved throughout each day. However, one student, who we will call Brian, constantly received minuses on his behavior manager. When Brian returned to school with his manager one morning there was a note from his mother to the teacher that read, "I never receive positive feedback about Brian from you. You seem to have a negative attitude towards my son, for once I would like to see something positive on his behavior

manager.” Mrs. Jones never realized that parents could look at her behavior managers as being something negative she was doing. She wanted the managers to be a way to communicate with the parents, not cause them to have a negative outlook on her teaching style. Mrs. Jones knew she had to change what she was doing with the behavior managers, so that she can once again establish a positive relationship with Brian’s mother and any other parent that may feel the same way. Mrs. Jones decided to change the manager to include each subject area taught throughout the day. Now, if a student gets a minus in one subject area they still are able to get stars on their manager for the other subjects. Mrs. Jones also started to write positive comments on the managers, instead of just writing the bad behavior a student performed to receive their minus. A week later, Brian’s mother wrote another note back to Mrs. Jones on his manager that read:

I really like the new system that you have started with the managers. I am happy that you took my note seriously and have made the necessary changes. Your positive notes on his manager allow me to see that my son just does not behave negatively. I have talked with my son about the negative behavior in class and have also praised him for when he behaves well. Once again I appreciate that you have taken my perspective into consideration and I hope that I can be of any assistance to you that you may need in the future.

Mrs. Jones could have easily ignored the letter from Brian’s mother and continued to have a negative relationship with her. However, Mrs. Jones realized that the way she was managing the student’s behavior cast a negative light on her teaching style and she did not want the parents to get this idea. Not all relationships with parents come without

problems like the quote by Stephanie Brooks states. Nonetheless, with work and effort from both sides, a positive relationship can be established and together, working cooperatively, both the teacher and parent can help the child succeed. When the parent and teacher do not work together and they form a negative relationship or no relationship at all, then trying to acquire parent cooperation will be challenging. Without parent cooperation and a relationship, trying to effectively implement projects, homework, class parties, or any other activity that would need the assistance from parents would be nearly impossible. However, when efficient strategies and approaches are put into practice a positive parent-teacher relationship is established and together they can work hand in hand to fully benefit the child's education and growth.

Purpose Statement

Throughout a child's early childhood and elementary school years, parents and teachers are the most important adults that influence a child's life and education. "The central figures in fostering the potential of the early years of life are the significant adults in the child's world" (Swick, 1991, p. 8). Swick continues with saying, "It is impossible for children to carry out long-term successful engagements in their environment without the strong support and guidance of significant adults" (Swick, 1991, p. 10). Considering the "significant adults" in a child's life are parents and teachers, the child will have more success if the two work together forming a partnership rather than each one working alone or against one another. Some may believe with the notion, "teachers should teach and parents should parent" and the boundaries between the two should not overlap with one another (Brooks, 2004). However, if parents and teachers are the main role models

in a child's life then a child could benefit even more if they work together simultaneously as a team. Therefore, the relationship between the parent and teacher needs to be a positive one.

Parents and teachers both have a responsibility in the partnership when it comes to the child/student. Swick (1991) notes that the three major roles a teacher holds include support, education, and guidance. The different roles parents have in the relationship include learning, supporting, doing and participatory decision making (Swick, 1991). While each role is being carried out and implemented they both need to have high efficacy attributes that consist of warmth, sensitivity, listening, consistency, nurturance, and accessibility (Swick, 1991). The parents and teachers need to act in accordance with the roles and attributes so that their partnership and relationship can flourish. After all parents and teachers are both striving for the same goal; the goal being for the child to gain a proper education in order to succeed in life (Kaplan, 1950). The goals for the child will not be met if the parents and teachers do not carry out their roles that they need to do in order to have a relationship.

Although it is important for a parent and teacher to form a relationship, Brooks (2004, p.14) points out the fact that "partnerships are one of life's most challenging jobs". To form a relationship it takes work, effort, and determination. Considering that relationships are difficult to maintain and are challenging, problems and barriers may develop. The barriers and problems that the literature shows happen most frequently may include different cultures and values between the teacher and parent, contradicting perspectives on the parent and teacher roles, parents having unpleasant memories of their own school experiences, lack of time or effort, parents being not interested, and/or

problems with the way the teacher or parent style is (Swick, 1991; Keyes, 2000; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Keyes (2000) shows that when problems or barriers do surface they should be addressed as soon as possible so they can be resolved and a positive parent-teacher relationship once again can take its place.

The purpose of this research study looks at what are the most effective methods and strategies a teacher should use in order to establish and maintain a positive parent-teacher relationship so that the goals for the child are met. It is important to keep in mind that the ultimate objective in both the parents and teachers eyes is for the child/student to gain a proper education for them to be successful in life. When the parent and teacher work collaboratively and carry out certain approaches and strategies, a constructive relationship is formed that allows for the child to fully reap the benefits. The literature has shown several different methods and strategies that directly address the categories communication, parenting, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Barge and Loges, 2003; Greenwood and Hickman, 1991). Although methods and strategies are looked at within the literature that connect with the six different categories, the literature fails to mention which approaches work most effectively and efficiently with both the teacher and parent so the relationship once established can be maintained. This study will examine each category to determine what are the most successful and useful ways to create a partnership connecting parents and teachers as well as keeping the relationship maintained. The information and data that this study will present should be used and put into practice by both parents and teachers throughout every school so that they can form positive relationships, maintain those

relationships, and together help the child do well and achieve success in his or her education.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

Parents and teachers are the most significant influences and role models in a child's early elementary years. Therefore, parents and teachers need to form a positive relationship in order to accomplish their common goal; to see the child/student succeed. With any relationship or partnership barriers or conflicts may arrive. The question at hand is what are the most effective strategies and approaches a teacher should use in order to establish and maintain a positive parent-teacher relationship?

Story of the Question

I arrived at Back to School Night in my first fall placement an hour before the parents and students are expected to arrive. My cooperating teacher, "Mrs. S", is setting up her classroom to let the parents get the best insight on how she manages her classroom, projects, and instruction. On each child's desk she places a newsletter to the parents along with a parent survival kit. The newsletter includes when and how Mrs. S can be contacted, her classroom website link, how she works homework, projects, and other information she feels was important for the parents to know and understand. The parent survival kit included a zip lock bag that was filled with different odds and ends that included for example a band aid, a piece of string tied in a bow, a jewel and a pencil. Along with the assortment of objects there was a note that indicated what each one represented. For example, the piece of string was a reminder that Mrs. S was only a

phone call, e-mail, or visit away if they had any questions, comments or concerns. The jewel represented that the child/student remains priceless in the eyes of both the parents and the teacher. On a table right when you enter the class is a sign-in sheet where the parents are instructed to write their name, contact information, and any way they want to be involved in the classroom. Next to the sign-in sheet, the teacher lists examples of how parents have helped and been involved in the classroom in the past.

As the parents and students began to show up, the teacher greeted each one in a very welcoming manner. Mrs. S told the students to give their parents a tour of the room. Once all the parents and students were in the classroom, the teacher welcomed everyone once again and began speaking to the parents in a very inviting tone. The teacher went over the materials each parent found on their child's desk in detail, so the parents knew exactly what they were receiving. Once she finished discussing the very informative newsletter, Mrs. S discussed her classroom management, what they can expect now that their child was in fourth grade, and ways that they can help their child at home to increase their success. Following her discussion enlightening the parents with all the information she thought was imperative for them to know, Mrs. S passed out a card that read, "What would you like me to know about your child? Write a brief note and drop it in the basket by the door before leaving tonight" and signed the card with your partner in learning.

As the parents were leaving, the teacher announced that if they had any questions, concerns, or comments to not hesitate to come up and ask her. When all the parents and students were gone and Back to School Night came to a close, I was fascinated to see how well the night went. All of the parents left very happy, with their questions answered, and excited about being involved with their child's fourth grade school year.

A few parents even complimented the teacher with the way she presented the information and letting her know how helpful and insightful Back to School Night was.

Mrs. S and I reviewed the sign-in/sign-up sheet and I was astonished to see the list filled with the parents willing to help in many different ways. Mrs. S told me that Back to School Night gives her the opportunity to reach out to all of the parents, get off on the right foot with them, and establish a partnership or as she put it “a team”. She said:

Forming a team between the parents and yourself allows for a more successful school year. When you communicate with parents and share with them what is going on in the classroom, the parents will respond in a positive way. Without a positive relationship with the parents, it is hard to get the support and involvement that you need.

As I left Back to School Night, I began to reflect about the night as well as what my cooperating teacher said about the importance of forming a relationship with the parents of your students. I began to think how the sign-up/sign-in sheet was filled, the parents complimenting Mrs. S on how insightful she was, and the way Mrs. S utilized Back to School Night using a newsletter, parent survival kit, and the information she informed the parents with. After realizing that there is a significance with forming a positive parent/teacher relationship and seeing firsthand the ways Mrs. S went about to establish a partnership, questions began to come to mind. What outcomes can result from a positive parent-teacher relationship? What strategies and methods are the best ways to establish a positive parent-teacher relationship? What strategies and methods are the best ways to maintain a positive parent-teacher relationship? Are some methods or strategies more effective than others? What about the parents that are busy, have no time, or are difficult;

what are ways you can form a relationship with them? With all of the questions that were racing through my mind, I realized that I wanted to study how to establish and maintain a positive parent-teacher relationship and understand what methods, strategies, or approaches work best.

Organization of Thesis

This chapter presents the question and the purpose being studied. Chapter II includes the literature review, where the chapter discusses and examines literature and research that has been done in the past to provide further background information about the research question. The literature review is divided into four different themes that take a look at the importance of developing a positive parent-teacher relationship, the teachers and parents roles and significant attributes in forming a positive parent-teacher relationship, the problems/barriers that may prevent or intervene with establishing and maintaining a positive parent-teacher relationship, and the strategies and approaches to establishing a positive parent-teacher relationship. Chapter III presents the methodology of the study. This chapter discusses where the research will take place, the research paradigm, and the type of research that will be done in the study. Chapter III will also provide the reader with an explanation of what data collection methods and sources of data were used to conduct the question being studied. Chapter IV presents the findings and results of the study. Chapter V concludes the study and answers the research question as well as recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter is divided into four different sections which look at the relevant literature that discuss positive parent-teacher relationships. The first section, “The Importance of Developing a Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship”, focuses on the reasons why such a relationship is crucial as well as shows specific research that has proven the benefits of having a positive parent-teacher relationship. The second section, “The Teachers’ and Parents’ Roles and Significant Attributes in Forming a Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship”, explores the different characteristics, qualities, and responsibilities both the teacher and parent need to convey in order for a positive parent-teacher relationship to even take place and succeed. This section also looks at the roles the school and community can play in helping to implement the partnership between the parent and teacher. “Addressing the Problems/Barriers that may Prevent or Intervene with Establishing and Maintaining a Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship” examines possible troubles that may arrive between the parent and teacher as well as techniques on how to manage the conflicts with the intention to retain a positive parent-teacher relationship. The fourth and final section, “Strategies and Approaches to Establishing a Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship”, looks at different methods and practices that facilitate and help pave the way for a positive parent-teacher partnership.

The Importance of Developing a Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship

Swick (1991) notes that in order to develop a positive parent-teacher relationship, one must first understand why it is even important to have one in the first place. In society's eyes parents have always played a major part in their child's education (Barge and Loges, 2003). Both state and federal legislation have also shown the importance of including parental involvement with implementing the Educate America Act and Title I of Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 which put emphasis on the significance of having parent-school collaborations and relationships (Barge and Loges, 2003). Today with families and schools working hand in hand and sharing the responsibilities of the children's education, promotes academic success as well as achievement (Hill and Taylor, 2004).

The literature shows that neither the parent nor the teacher can ultimately do their jobs alone without the help or assistance from the other. Students need inspiration, confidence, and guidance that teachers or parents cannot provide solely by themselves (Becker & Epstein, 1982). When the student sees that the most important people in his or her life have a positive relationship and are working together, it makes the student feel good and work even harder to make them both proud ("Going to School," 2006). When parents and teachers work separately, then the child will do the same. If the parent is not following and coinciding with the teacher, then the child may feel as if he or she should do the same. Why should the student listen and care what the teacher says when the child is at home, if the parents do not care or pay attention to what goes on with their child at school? Parents and teachers need to realize and comprehend that they are both striving for the same goal; the goal being for the child to gain a proper education in order to

succeed in life. In order for this goal to be met, the parent and teacher must have a positive relationship (Kaplan, 1950).

Greenwood and Hickman (1991) state how a positive relationship is a working one; one where both parties are making an equal amount of effort. It takes work and time to have an effective and positive relationship; for this is the case with any relationship. Nevertheless, the time and effort devoted to form a parent/teacher relationship is worth every single breath or minute put forth. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) look at the Coleman Report, Mosteller and Moynihan's reanalysis of the Coleman Report, and other considerable research that shows having a positive parent/teacher relationship brings upon positive outcomes and results for the child. Such outcomes that have been proven include an increase in academic achievement, student feeling of comfort and ease, school attendance, student and parent insights of the classroom and school environment, positive student performance and conduct, an increase in student grades, willingness to do homework/projects, parent and student forming a closer bond, shared goals between parents and students for higher education, and a fulfillment on both the parent and teacher end. (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991)

Although there are people across the literature that believe "teachers should teach and parents should parent", research shows that when there are no boundaries between the two and instead they intertwine to form a relationship, positive outcomes become present (Brooks, 2004, p.13). Adunyarrittigun in 1997 implemented a study to show the relationship between when teachers involve parents in their child's learning and reading performance and when they do not. Four fourth grade and six sixth grade students from various socioeconomic backgrounds were measured on the students' word recognition

ability and comprehension skills before their parents were involved. The results did show that the students reading ability was poor and their motivation to read were low.

Adunyarrittigun found that once parents were involved in their child's education, the students' self-perception as a reader and motivation to read increased. (Machen, Notar and Wilson, 2005)

Barge and Loges (2003, p.143) conducted research focusing on six middle schools during April to October 2000 collecting information from parents, students and teachers concerning their insights on parental involvement. A separate focus group was set up for both students and parents. During the focus groups, discussions revolved around questions pertaining to parental involvement such as: (a) From your experience, what are some positive ways parents have become involved in their child's education? and (b) What do you believe are the most and least effective ways for parents to get involved? The teachers received a ten question survey consisting of open-ended and closed questions. The questions related directly to their insights on parental involvement and one of the open-ended questions asked, "What are three things that parents can do that help their students do well in school?" After all the data and responses were analyzed the major theme that surfaced from the parents, students, and teachers were that building positive relationships with teachers allows for a more successful school year and parental involvement. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers and parents do their part and play their role so that a positive relationship is formed between the two in order for the student (child) to fully blossom and succeed. (Barge and Loges, 2003, p.144-146)

The Teachers' and Parents' Roles and Significant Attributes in Forming a Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship

Swick (1991) recognized that after gaining the knowledge of why it is important to have a positive parent-teacher relationship, we must then learn what roles each the teacher and the parent must possess in order to form such a partnership. Barge and Loges (2003) acknowledges the importance of the different roles that each the parents and teachers contribute to the partnership as well. Barge and Loges (2003) in the study they implemented where parents and teachers spoke out about parental involvement, the parents and teachers agreed that in order to have an effected and positive relationship both sides must be equally committed. The parents and teachers expressed that if only one side is devoted then there will be no progress or success in the relationship and ultimately for the child (Barge and Loges, 2003). Swick (1991) points out that when both sides are committed, the parents' and teacher's efficacy also plays an importance. High-efficacy found in both the teacher and parent is a vital component for a good relationship (Swick, 1991). When both the parent and teach are committed, have a high level of efficacy (or efficacy in general), and understand the outcomes that a positive relationship can accomplish, they must then look at the individual roles and responsibilities they each need to carry out. Each distinctive and balancing roles that the teachers and parents have and show are the foundation for a strong partnership (Swick, 1991).

Swick (1991) notes three major roles a teacher holds include support, education, and guidance. A teacher shows and gives support to the parent to let them know that they care about their child. Support is given in any means or way possible through obtaining effective resources for the parents, listening to the parents' needs or concerns, and giving

out his or her professional advice and wisdom. The teacher's primary role in the relationship is to educate the child in the best and possible manner. While educating the parent's child, the teacher must also educate the parents as well. The teacher must give insight and communicate with the parents on what is going on in the classroom, so the parent can help and better suit their child at home. If the parent does not know or understand what the teacher is educating their child on then the parent will not be able to perform their role in the relationship. A teacher must also provide guidance to the parents. He or She must guide or assist the parents and children through the school year. If there is no guidance, then the parents will not know the goals or direction the teacher is heading in with their child that may lead to confusion and frustration on both ends. (Swick, 1991)

Swick (1991) stresses with each role the teacher must show sensitivity, flexibility, reliability, and accessibility. Sensitive teachers show concern and attention for both the parent and child, through responding to questions, problems, or apprehensions they might have in a kindhearted way (Swick, 1991). Being flexible, allows for the teacher to be open to ideas or suggestions the parents may have and change or adapt their teaching style in order to accommodate the parents requests (Swick, 1991). Even though, the teacher may not agree with the ideas or suggestions that the parent is offering, he or she should still actively listen to the parent and respond in a way to help the parent understand why the teacher feels the way he or she does (Swick, 1991). Swick (1991) believes a teacher that is reliable must show this attribute in his or her performance, communication, involvement, and with the child's well-being. When a teacher shows that they are reliable, a parent feels more at ease with the teacher's performance as well

as with being more committed to their relationship (Swick, 1991). Swick (1991) states it is also important for the teacher to make him or herself accessible to the parents. Katz & Others (1996) points out that as early as possible in the school year, the teacher should make it known to the parents how and when they can be contacted. The teacher should make the times and ways he or she can be contacted as convenient as possible for the parents (Katz & Others, 1996). Carol Keyes in *Parent-Teacher Partnerships: a Theoretical Approach for Teacher* (2000, p.107) sums up the importance of the teacher fulfilling their roles and attributes with the quote, “teachers are really the glue that hold the home/school partnerships together.”

Like Swick (1991) notes different roles for teachers, he also states that parents have four roles themselves which include learning, supporting, doing, and participatory decision making. The parents need to educate themselves and learn about what the child is doing within their classroom. Knowledge is power and by parents gaining the knowledge they are able to help their child at home. Just like the teacher needs to support and help out the parent in any way possible, the parent must reciprocate by giving their support as well. The parent must support their child and make sure their child does the work that is given out by the teacher in addition to supporting the teacher through backing the teacher’s teaching style and helping out in any means possible. The doing role of the parent is where they actively become involved in the classroom and at home. The parent doing role involves doing activities with the child at home in correlation with what the teacher is teaching and actively participating in the classroom in any way that your schedule allows you too. Such activities can include going on field trips, helping put up displays or bulletin boards, classroom housekeeping, clerical work, helping or

providing materials, or providing any other assistance where a skill the parent possesses would be of assistance. The last role Swick (1991) discusses is the role of participatory decision making where the parent assists with helping the teacher come up with goals and strategies to improve the classroom, school, and the child (student). (Swick, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991)

Parents have attributes that they must possess along with their roles just like teachers did (Swick, 1991). The attributes that parents have to possess and execute include warmth, sensitivity, nurturance, listening, and consistency. Among these attributes the parent must also demonstrate trust and respect for the teacher. The teacher, after all, has the leadership role and has the degree to be able to teach. He or she knows what they are doing. The parent must be able to understand the role of the teacher and if they have a problem with the way the teacher does something, then they must communicate in a respectable manner. Nevertheless, the parent first should use their attribute of listening to pay attention and take note of the reasons why the teacher is doing what they are doing. A parent should be consistent with their roles and attributes; inconsistency may cause uncertainty and aggravation. It is also the parent's duty to make themselves easily available to be contacted as well. A teacher can not perform their role of reaching out to the parents if the parent is not able to be contacted. (Swick, 1991; "Going to School," n.d.; Katz & Others, 1996)

Even though the parents and teachers each have their own distinct roles and attributes they have to bring to the table, it is also important for them to find common ground along with performing other common roles that they share (Swick, 1991). The common roles that they must share allows for the partnership to be established and grow

(Swick, 1991). Swick (1991) illustrates a figure that shows the shared/common roles which include collaboration, planning, communication, and evaluation. Swick (1991) discusses collaboration as being the chief role for the parent and teacher to share. It is through collaboration that the parents and teachers work together, combining both of their individual roles, to make a positive impact on the child's home-school environment. A shared effort must go into planning the teacher-parent relationship. Each party must put in an effort to plan how they will carry out their individual roles, so that together they can plan on how each of their roles will function effectively in the classroom and at home. To ultimately achieve these roles properly and successfully the parent and teacher must use communication. Communication can take place in many different forms such as through newsletters, e-mails, phone calls, conferences, homework planners, etc. (Swick, 1991) In the article *Going to School* (2006, p.1), Susan Becker expresses the importance of communication stating, "The parents need information about what and how their child is learning, and the teacher needs important feedback from the parent about the child's academic and social development." Communication also allows for feedback from the teacher and parent to take place (Becker, 2006). Feedback leaves room for evaluation of how the relationship is occurring. Through evaluation the parent and teacher can adapt, change, or alter the way they are performing their roles as needs be (Becker, 2006). As the parent and teacher perform the plan to collaborate and carry out both their individual and shared roles, a positive parent-teacher relationship will be successful (Swick, 1991). However, considering the many roles that each party must possess, problems or barriers may arrive that with time and patience can be worked out if each party remembers the attributes that he or she must carry out (Becker, 2006).

Jones (2001) discusses how along with teachers and parents committing and carrying out their own roles in order to establish and maintain a positive parent-teacher relationship, schools as a whole have their own roles in contributing to the relationship. Jones (2001) quotes Epstein in her article who identifies six roles schools must implement to promote parent involvement which will make it more feasible for parents and teachers to establish and maintain a positive relationship. The roles Epstein encourage include providing parent-education activities, keeping communication lines between schools and family open, allowing for volunteer opportunities, promoting at home learning activities, decision-making opportunities, and community collaborations (Jones, 2001). Jones (2001) elaborates and agrees with Epstein's six school roles and classifies them as training teachers to work with parents, reaching out to parents, staying in touch, encouraging parents to advocate for their children, and investing in family involvement. Schools should invest in family-involvement programs which federal and state funds are available to implement them (Jones, 2001). Swick (1991) declares that schools need to have a concrete framework or program that supports families throughout the entire school system. By school leaders promoting parent-involvement and carrying out the roles a school should supply to parents they are providing a model as well as support for parents and teachers (Swick, 1991). Swick (1991, p. 155) notes Rich who cites that schools need to be "arenas where parents and teachers are building an environment in which home learning is used in collaboration with school learning to build productive lifelong learners."

Keyes (2000) mentions that as schools work to promote parent involvement and as parents and teachers begin to form a relationship another party should be involved as

well which is the society and the community. Communities can and should play a role and/or force in promoting and providing for a successful relationship amongst the school and teachers with the parents (Keyes, 2000). Swick (1991) acknowledges that in order to create a learning environment for children to achieve success schools need to work hand in hand with the community to reach out to the families. The roles a community should play to contribute to the school and learning environment in promoting a parent-teacher relationship include providing health, social support, economic development, spiritual nurturance, cultural enrichment, and information sharing services (Swick, 1991). The three main backgrounds a community ought to provide for families and schools are the services previously mentioned, support, and collaborative learning (Swick, 1991). Swick (1991, p. 159) states about communities that, “new supports are needed in the form of collaborative efforts to enable parents to have family development time and for parents and teachers to have partnership time.” Through supportive and strong communities families and schools can conquer any problems/barriers that may surface, reinforce partnerships between schools, teachers, and parents, and encourage parent involvement programs that benefit the children (Swick, 1991).

Addressing the Problems/Barriers That May Prevent or Intervene with Establishing and Maintaining a Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship

The literature reviewed points out several of these barriers and problems involving the roles of teachers and parents that could include clashing culture and values amongst teacher and parent, societal forces at work on family and school, different perspectives and views on the parent and teacher roles, parent foster bad memories of

their own when they were in school, unsure of how to express or communicate, parents being disinterested, lack of time or effort, and/or problems with the way the teacher or parent style is (Swick, 1991; Keyes, 2000; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).

Keyes (2000) points out that with any relationship or partnership barriers or problems will surface. However, when they do occur they should not be ignored or pushed to the side (Keyes, 2000). Instead, the problems and/or barriers should be addressed in order for them to be resolved so a positive parent-teacher relationship once again can take its place (Keyes, 2000).

The article *Going to School* (2006) presents four concepts parents should keep in mind when they are going to address a problem with their child's teacher; acknowledge your child's feelings, consider the teacher's point of view, evaluate teachers fairly, and meet with administration. When a child is constantly complaining about a problem that is occurring within school the parent should listen to their child, confirm what the child is saying and then take a rational action (*Going to School*, 2006). Although the action may get in the way with the relationship with the teacher, being a parent you must take your child's feelings sincerely and by addressing the problem in a rational matter the teacher will be able to help your concern (*Going to School*, 2006). Parents must evaluate teachers fairly by not jumping to conclusions, not listening to what they have heard from others, and by considering the teacher's point of view (*Going to School*, 2006). A parent should always communicate and meet with the teacher first in a polite manner, but if the parent and teacher can not come to an agreement they then should meet with someone from the administration to find a solution to the problem and the eventually move on to reestablish a relationship (*Going To School*, 2006).

Just like there are ways parents should go about addressing a problem, teachers should address a problem in a certain way as well (Sumsion, 1999). Sumsion (1999) realized that teachers must give good reason behind what they are doing and show parents where they are coming from when addressing a problem because sometimes their motives or objectives may not be understood by the parents. Teachers must also “move outside oneself” and look at the parent’s perspective as well (Sumsion, 1999, p.11). When a teacher first realized that a problem may occur, the teacher should act upon it and put an end to the problem immediately before it is able to escalate (Brooks, 2004). When addressing problems, Brooks (2004) points out that teachers should not use educational jargon because this may demean parent’s intelligence or cause greater confusion and the goal is for the parent and teacher to come to a solution, not to cause more problems.

Both parents and teachers when addressing a problem need to approach the problem with productive and positive communication, respect, grace, and good humor in order for the parent and teacher accomplish a solution and maintain a relationship (Katz & Others, 2000). Swick (1991) provides a problem-solving sequence that Galinsky implemented in 1988 with the aim for parents and teachers to use when addressing a problem. The problem-solving sequence lists six steps including stating what the problem is right up front, together coming up with multiple solutions listing the pros and cons of each solution, reaching an agreement on what solution will work best, discussing how the solutions will be implemented, and then agreeing to have another meeting in order to evaluate if the solutions are working (Swick, 1991).

If problems are addressed correctly, then the relationship between parents and teachers can grow (Swick, 1991). However, certain barriers may cause a hurdle for

parents and teachers to get over in order to see eye to eye, address the problem, and establish a relationship (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). One barrier that parents and teachers will encounter is the clashing of cultures and values amongst each of them (Keyes, 2000). Keyes (2000) points out that teachers may come from a different community than the one they teach in and therefore be faced with students and parents of a different socioeconomic class, race, or ethnic group. Voltz (1994) stresses that if the different cultures and values are not being confronted in a sensitive matter or taken in account, a relationship between the parent and teacher will not occur. The teacher must be knowledgeable on each one of their student's cultures and values so that a relationship can flourish with the parents (Voltz, 1994).

Voltz (1994) discusses time being a barrier that could cause a relationship to not happen. Some parents may work a lot, are single parents, or have too much on their plate that limits their time and energy to be involved and gain a relationship with the teacher (Becker & Epstein, 1982). Nonetheless, Greenwood and Hickman (1991, p.282) show a study done by Leitch and Tangri that found, "employed parents to be more involved than non-employed parents and that parents gave work and poor health as the two main reasons for not participating." Swick (1991) states that with different approaches and strategies used to provide for all various situations can alleviate the problem of families who say time is a factor. Through the help of the school, teachers, and community reaching out and providing services and support to these families time, poor health, and energy will not be a barrier for parents and teachers to establish a relationship (Swick, 1991).

Greenwood and Hickman (1991) propose that the attitudes and abilities of parents may cause another barrier for parents and teachers to establish a relationship. Parents may believe that they do not have the abilities, skills, or knowledge to help their child or volunteer in the classroom (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Other parents may have a problem communicating with their child's teacher and school due to them having their own negative experiences and memories from when they were in school (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). When teachers contact parents allow parents to see they are open and want to help parents be involved and provide parents with the knowledge and skills they need to help their students and be involved (Voltz, 1994). This teacher's approach will show parents a new light and perspective on schools and parents (Voltz, 1994).

Voltz (1994) explains that any problem or barrier can be lightened and unraveled by developing an atmosphere of trust and respect, making parent-teacher relationships truly collaborative, and being culturally sensitive. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) believe that barriers preventing parents and teachers to form relationships can be overcome with leadership in the school system and/or state levels doing something. When school leaders implement parent involvement programs and activities they allow parents to see that the school is welcoming and provide ways for them to get involved (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Greenwood and Hickman (1991) confirmed their statement with showing a report where once Tennessee mandated a parent involvement program, 43,000 hours of parent participation was produced in its first year. Brooks (2004, p.20) believes that "conflicts should be seen as opportunities for growth and change" and through parents and teachers working out conflicts allows them to advance

in their relationship along with benefiting the child/student in their shared goal for him or her to succeed.

Strategies and Approaches to Establishing a Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship

Brooks (2004, p.14) calls attention to the fact that “partnerships are one of life’s most challenging jobs,” but with certain strategies and approaches being implemented correctly parents and teachers can form a positive relationship. Swick (1991) emphasizes that establishing a positive parent-teacher relationship should occur with welcoming parent strategies. Brooks (2004) agrees with Swick (1991) and stresses that the establishment of the parent-teacher relationship should begin to form as early as possible. In August, teachers can send a letter to their upcoming students’ parents welcoming them to the forthcoming school year, showing excitement to get the chance to work with them and attach a copy of upcoming events, what to expect this year, and your classroom policies (Brooks, 2004). Sending a letter allows the parents to see that the teacher is inviting and open to them as well as giving the parents a chance to review the information before it is thoroughly explained to them at their first formal meeting with the teacher such as Back to School Night (Brooks, 2004).

Barge and Loges (2003) specify Epstein’s categories of parental involvement that promote a positive parent-teacher relationship. Epstein’s typology includes six different types which include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community (Barge and Loges, 2003). Greenwood and Hickman (1991) show that the school plays a major role with the parenting section of establishing and maintaining positive parent-teacher relationships. Approaches and

strategies that schools should implement include holding workshops about parents, child growth and development, or English as a Second Language (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991). Although this approach is driven by the school, the teacher can also carry out strategies to help parents that include sending home fliers to let parents know about the workshops school are holding and/or sending home any pamphlets or information the teacher comes across that deal with establishing home environments that support their children as students (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991; Barge and Loges, 2003). If there are certain concerns that teachers come across pertaining to parents not being able to provide the child with a proper home environment, the teacher should try to help the situation as best as possible as well as bringing it to the principal's attention who could then set up a workshop or activity to help (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991). Providing parents with workshops, activities, and information to help them provide a home environment that promotes learning allows for a positive interaction between the school, teachers, and parents (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991). Constant and positive interactions among the three parties is a definite way to establish and maintain a positive parent-teacher relationship (Swick, 1991).

The second type within Epstein's typology for establishing and maintaining positive parent-teacher relationships is communicating (Barge and Loges, 2003). Swick (1991) points out that parents and teachers both have very hectic, multifaceted, and vigorous lives and therefore a variety of different kinds of communication need to be implemented. Teachers need to communicate to parents about what is going on in the classroom and keeping the parent informed on their child's progress (Becker and Epstein, 1982). Communication methods that were listed throughout the literature included

conferences, written communication, telephone calls, “homework hot-lines”, and technology-based communication such as e-mail and class web pages (Katz & Others, 1996; Swick, 1991; Brooks, 2004; Becker and Epstein, 1982). Swick (1991) lists communication strategies that are a link between the teacher and parent. The strategies listed are weekly folders that hold the student’s work, weekly newsletters covering what they will be doing that week, “Parent-Grams” that are monthly reviewing concepts covered in class, posting a communication bulletin board, holding special events to discuss and share information with parents, and developing a “parent support newsletter” where parents can share specific matters or ideas with other parents (Swick, 1991). Becker and Epstein (1982) discuss a “buddy-book” where the teacher writes a comment in everyday about the child for the parent to see and the parent can write back in the book if they want as well. Brooks (2004) stresses that communication between parents and teachers should be frequent and not only when problems are occurring with the child. Schools should also be involved to set up training programs, events, and newsletters to help parents and teachers strengthen their partnership (Swick, 1991).

Katz and Others (1996, p.4) state, “The more involved parents are in what goes on in the classroom, the more likely they are to understand the teacher’s goals and practices.” Greenwood and Hickman (1991, p.284) believe incorporating parents into the classroom and giving parents opportunities to volunteer involved the teacher to “play a direct and central role” in promoting a positive parent-teacher relationship. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) discuss R.S. Soar and L. Kaplan’s five levels of Taxonomy of Classroom Activities that involve parents to volunteer. The first level is housekeeping where parent can organize, arrange furniture or monitor the day (Greenwood and

Hickman, 1991). The second level is entitled clerical where parent can help with lunch count, attendance, or any other secretarial task (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991). Materials is the third level where parents can create bulletin boards, make displays, and/or exhibit the class's work (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991). Instruction is the fourth level where parent can help teach or plan (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991). Olmstead (1991) gives an example of having parents implement instruction in the classroom where a parent who was a dentist came in the class and talked about dental hygiene. The fifth level consists of evaluation where parents can grade papers, make worksheets, or design a project (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991). Many parents are more than willing and want to volunteer, but they do not know how or in what ways they can (Katz and Others, 1996). When the teacher first contacts the parents (a good idea is to put into practice at Back to School Night) he/she should have a sign-up sheet where parents can sign up for how they would like to volunteer or be involved in the class (Katz and Others, 1996). The teacher should also provide the parents with suggestions or examples of different ways so they have an array of ideas (Katz and Others, 1996). Olmstead (1991) reported that at one school, Bank Street, a small percentage of parents volunteered, but once teachers reached out and provided ways for the parents to be involved, sixty percent of parents were volunteering. In another community that has 187 students, reported 220 volunteers giving 16,250 hours during one school year when volunteer opportunities were given (Olmstead, 1991).

The fourth type of strategies and approaches used in establishing and maintaining positive parent-teacher relationships as discussed by Epstein includes learning at home where parents assist their child with school related work at home (Barge and Loges,

2003). While this type of approach takes place at home, the teacher still plays a central role through planning, giving parents insight on what to do, monitoring, and executing the methods for the parents to understand (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991). A survey executed in 600 Maryland schools with 3,700 elementary teachers asked, found that a key parent involvement method was reading with their children (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991). Epstein and Becker (1982) described a method where teachers organize a program where students read at home for a minimum of ten minutes every night and the parents sign a slip acknowledging that their child read. Teachers can make flashcards in math or reading with the students, so they can practice them at home with their parents (Becker and Epstein, 1982). Swick (1991) notes that teachers should send home newsletters or activity pamphlets that include ideas of how parent can work with their child at home. Swick (1991) discusses the idea of having a lending library in the classroom that consists of materials, games, books, tapes, and other resources. The parents and students are then able to borrow the items in the lending library to use at home (Swick, 1991). By teachers providing resources and activities for parents to use with their children at home provide for an inviting atmosphere and a way to promote a sought after positive relationship with the parents (Swick, 1991).

The fifth type of parental involvement proposed by Epstein includes decision making where parents are given the opportunity to aid teachers and schools with decision on different aspects dealing with the school and classroom (Barge and Loges, 2003). Swick (1991, p. 113) states, "The security and effectiveness of teacher-parent partnerships require collaborative structures for making decisions." Teachers can ask for parents say through surveys, discussing certain matters or ideas with parents, and/or

setting up sessions where parents can express their concerns, input, or ideas (Swick, 1991). Voltz (1994) points out that parents can determine goals and objectives for their child with the teacher. Schools can play a role with decision making by setting up parent councils and groups where they discuss matters that will help the school be more responsive to its students, parents, and teachers (Scriven, 1975). Scriven (1975, p.55) states that:

Parents and teachers utilizing this system believe it fosters individualization of curriculum and instruction, provides a check against excessive demands on the child by either parents or teacher, increases the parents' feeling of responsibility toward their child's progress, and helps the school remain responsive to the community.

The sixth and last category in Epstein's typology includes collaborating with the community so that the community provides resources and services that correlate with the school to advance relationships between the school and teacher with the parents and students (Barge and Loges, 2003). Schurr (1993) shows that community leaders should implement a proclamation dealing with parent involvement in schools. Schools and communities can have a "Parent Appreciation Day" as well as promoting all citizens to help implement parent-school partnerships by keeping all paths open (Schurr, 1993). Swick (1991) believes that the community can play a part by implementing policies that support families and schools, educate citizens on the importance for having high quality schools, assessing ways to promote and support positive parent-teacher relationships, and encourage citizens to back and support school strategies that provide for parents and students.

Conclusion

Implementing the five types of approaches and strategies will allow for teachers and parents to help one another carry out their own roles in establishing and maintaining a positive relationship (Swick, 1991). Parents cannot expect teachers to accomplish their duties and responsibilities without their assistance and teachers cannot look at teaching their students by themselves without incorporating the parents (Swick, 1991). The strategies and approaches will only be effective if parents and teachers perform them together and view each other as a team to help the child/student succeed and grow in learning (Swick, 1991). Barriers or problems may arrive, but the only way to regain a positive parent-teacher relationship is to address them as soon as possible (Keyes, 2000). Through implementing strategies and approaches and overcoming barriers and problems parents and teachers can meet their common goal; for the child to gain a proper education in order to succeed in life (Kaplan, 1950).

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Context of the Study

The research that was conducted for this study was completed in the Middle Atlantic Region of the United States in a Southern New Jersey suburban town. The township includes one kindergarten school, six grade 1-5 elementary schools, three grade 6-8 middle schools, and one grade 9-12 high school. Consent forms were placed in all general and special education teachers' mailboxes at one of the elementary schools. The elementary school that was chosen for the study was based on where my pre-service student teaching placement was at the time of the study. The parents who received consent forms, set forth in Appendix A, were the parents of the students who were in my student teaching classroom. The classroom consisted of 20 third grade students; 10 female and 10 male.

The elementary school was recognized as both a Governor's School of Excellence and a Star School based upon New Jersey standards. Based upon facts that were displayed on the schools website, the school consists of 621 students; 85 percent White, 6 percent Asian, 6 percent Black, and 3 percent Hispanic. The language diversity in the school (first language spoken at home) includes 97 percent English, 1 percent Spanish and 1 percent Filipino, and 1 percent other.

In order to get a complete understanding of the town and the citizens that live in the town, the following economic and housing statistics are presented from the 2000 census. The town consists of 71.5 percent being in the labor force (63.9% United States average). The median family income in 1999 was 74,661 dollars (50,046 U.S. average) and the median household income in 1999 was 66,546 dollars (41,994 U.S. average). 2.5 percent of the population is below the poverty line (9.2% U.S. average).

Description of Research Paradigm

Throughout the study I will be looking to answer the question on how to establish and maintain positive parent-teacher relations along with what are the most effective and ineffective methods, strategies, and utilizations. This study will be conducted through using both quantitative and qualitative teacher research. Quantitative research that will be used will be done in a valid and reliable manner through using a suitable sample population, the statistics will be related to the research question, and all variables will be accounted for (Phillips and Carr, 2006). The qualitative research design will use a representation of several different types of data sources. The qualitative research will also prove to be trustworthy because it will have several different perspectives which come from the different data sources used. The research will include a concrete amount of background and circumstantial details. Data collection and explanation of data will be done in an organized and meaningful matter, and my own viewpoint or bias will be made clear as well as my reflections (Phillips and Carr, 2006).

Once the quantitative research is complete, the reader will be able to see the data that was collected in both a chart form and in narrative (qualitative) appearance. The qualitative research that will be examined will be done by looking through my own personal research paradigm and keeping in mind the following choices that were explained by Phillips and Carr (2006, p. 66): (a) “acknowledge the role of language in constructing and limiting our understanding” (b) “recognize the powerful influences of culture” (c) “see classrooms as places where meaning is actively constructed” and (d) “recognize the complexities of these classrooms as the element that brings surprise, joy, and heartache to those of us who teach.”

Explanation of Study

In my research I will examine what are the most effective methods, strategies and approaches that teachers use in order to establish and maintain a positive-parent teacher relationship. The methods, strategies, and approaches will be based on different categories that include whole class communication, individual class communication, time and effort, and the roles teachers and parents play. Through using the different data sources I will determine what the most valuable practices are in each category in order to establish and maintain a positive parent-teacher relationship so that the student/child best succeeds in his or her education.

The subjects that will be participating in the research are my cooperating teacher and other teachers in the school who are willing to participate. Other participants will include the parents of the children who are in my student teaching classroom. I will be interviewing five teachers and five parents and will be surveying ten parents and ten

teachers. Both the parents and teachers age range from 30-60 years old. Participants will be both male and female and will not be chosen on pre-selection. Participation will be based on completion of the consent form that is sent out to the teachers and parents. A letter and consent form will be given to every teacher at the school who has either an elementary or special education classroom. The teachers who complete the letter/consent form will then participate in the research. Every student in the classroom will receive a letter/consent form to take home to their parents. The parents of the subjects who complete the consent form will be required to fill out and complete a survey that will be based upon the research question at hand. Some subjects will then be interviewed. The consent form has a section where participants can choose to participate in the survey or the interview. Participants who volunteered for the interview will be the ones who are chosen to be interviewed. Throughout the time at the student teaching placement I will be observing and keeping track in a journal any parent-teacher interactions that occur. I will record what the interaction was that occurred and if it was effective or if it inhibited the parent-teacher relationship.

Data Sources

The data sources that will be used in this study to make sure there is a complete data set will include observations, interviews, and surveys. The observations will be recorded in a secure journal kept by myself. Any parent-teacher interaction that is viewed during the research process will be fully documented within the journal. An example of an observation that I will take would be that a mother of a child wrote my cooperating teacher an e-mail regarding her child's low test score and was wondering

what her child was doing wrong. My cooperating teacher called the mother back to discuss the child's test score, offer her advice, and possible solutions they can come up with to better the child's test scores. This parent-teacher communication was initiated by the parent and was an effective method due to both sides being happy with their final solutions, there was positive communication, and both the parent and teacher were responsive in their roles. The observations will occur throughout an eight week period (February 5, 2007 to March 30, 2007) and observations will be jotted down in the journal immediately following the parent-teacher interaction. I will interview five teachers and parents to see their views and perspectives on parent-teacher relationships and what they feel are the best methods, strategies, and approaches that should be used (Interview Questions attached in Appendix G). The interview questions will also include methods, approaches, or strategies that they have been in contact with or used in the past that they have come to realize were ineffective to establish and maintain a relationship. The questions asked during the interview will be pre-designed questions as well as probative questions from what the interviewee has said. Interviews will be completed over the phone or in the teacher's classroom depending on the participants' preference. Surveys will be distributed to both parents and teachers that ask questions based on ranking different strategies from most effective to least effective as well as answering open ended questions (Survey instrument attached in Appendix B). The survey includes four different sections. The first section asks for demographic information as well as the type of classroom the teacher teaches and for the parents asks about their children within the school district as well as if their child received special accommodations. Section two provides several different strategies, methods, and approaches that were discussed in the

related literature and asks the parents and teachers to rate the methods based upon a scale (5 being most effective to 1 least effective). This section also contains an area where the person can write comments or suggestions about the different methods, approaches, and strategies as well as add their own method. Section three poses for the person filling out the survey to state the time spent in an average week on different parent-teacher interactions and what percentage are initiated by the parents as well as what percentage are initiated by the teachers. Section four contains seven different open ended questions that asks the surveyor to be more specific with their answers regarding the most successful method, methods that were found to be unsuccessful, when relationships are established, obstacles that they encounter, how they can better the situation, different roles they play in the relationship, and how they feel a relationship between parent-teacher can be more effective.

All data sources completed and submitted will be done anonymously. Names that are written down for observations and subjects who are interviewed will be given assigned numbers and letters to protect their identity and confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Once the data is collected from the observations, interviews, and surveys, the data will be sorted based upon the several different categories described previously. The categories included whole class communication, individual communication, time and effort, and the different roles parents and teachers play. Any additional data that was found during the study will be placed in a separate category. Each category will be analyzed to find any common themes based upon effectiveness, inadequateness, being

successful, unsuccessful, or any other common theme that may be found. The survey section that has the rating scale will be calculated based upon averages from both the parents and teachers. The findings will be placed in a chart to easily see the data. All participants will be referred to as their assigned numbers and letters. The information once analyzed by percentages, themes, and categories will then be ready to be discussed in chapters four and five for an in depth look on the findings and results.

CHAPTER IV

Summary of the Findings

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter presents the findings from the different data sources that were used to collect research in order to answer the research question of how to establish and maintain positive parent-teacher relationships along with the most effective and ineffective methods, strategies, and utilizations. First, the chapter discusses the responses that were drawn from the surveys given to ten teachers and ten parents. Second, I will explain the findings that were drawn from the five parent and five teacher interviews. Then, I will discuss a few parent-teacher interactions that I observed. The parent-teacher interactions will portray what the reason for contact was, the method or approach the teacher or parent used, and whether the outcome was effective or ineffective.

Surveys

The ten parents and ten teachers who gave their consent received a survey that they completed and returned to me. Once I had all of the surveys, I reviewed the findings and charted them into four tables; two tables that discuss the parents survey compiled data and two tables that review the teachers survey compiled data. The Parent and Teacher Survey Compiled Data, as seen in Appendices C and E, for the parent and teacher surveys illustrates the first four sections of the survey which include: 1) their

demographic information that contains their gender, number of children, marital status, and work status 2) their rating from one to five (least effective to most effective) on different whole class communication methods 3) their rating from one to five (least effective to most effective) on individual communication methods and 4) what methods they use on a weekly basis. The Parent and Teacher Survey Compiled Data also shows the parents average as well as the teachers average rating for each method in the whole class communication sections and each method in the individual communication section. The Parent and Teacher Survey Compiled Data Continued, are set forth in Appendices D and F, chart the total number of different types of communication used in an average week, what percentage of contact was initiated by the teacher, what percentage was initiated by the parent, the effort they put forth in parent-teacher relationships, and an explanation of their answers. In addition, the Parent and Teacher Survey Compiled Data Continued presents the parents average and teachers average for each type of interaction as well as the average percentage initiated by the parent and the teacher.

The Parent Survey Compiled Data illustrated in Appendix C shows seven females and three males were surveyed on their experience with parent-teacher relationships and the different methods, approaches, and strategies used for parent-teacher relationships. Out of the ten parents surveyed one parent has one child, three parents have two children, and six parents have three children. The marital status of the parents includes eight parents married, one parent divorced, and one parent that is widowed. The work schedule of the parents surveyed include four parents who work full time, three parents work part time, one parent is a student, one parent works from home, and one parent is a stay at home mother.

The whole class communication methods that the parents rated from most effective (five) to least effective (one) were the use of a homework planner, a homework planner with daily parent sign offs, web page, broadcast e-mails, newsletters, announcements, and group parent meetings. A homework planner was described as a planner that the student takes home which allows the parents to see what homework the teacher assigned to their child. The homework planner with daily parent sign offs is the same as the homework planner, but the parent signs off every night to acknowledge that they saw the planner. Both of the methods give the opportunity for parents or teachers to write notes in the planner for communication. A web page involves a teacher having a classroom site where he or she posts information about the class, homework, upcoming projects, events, helpful links and whatever else the teacher believes is important for their class. Broadcast e-mails are an e-mail that is sent to all of the parents. Teachers use newsletters to send home to parents, which allow the parents to see what their child is learning about, important information about the class, and any additional news the teacher wants to communicate to them. Announcements are quick notes sent home to the parents to inform the parents about something important and group parent meetings are meetings where the teacher meets with more than one child's parent. Once the rating scores for the different methods were charted, the parents average rating score for the methods were a 4.2 for homework planners, 4.7 for the homework planner with daily parent sign offs, a 4 for web page, a 1.44 for broadcast e-mails, a 5 for newsletters, a 3.7 for announcements, and a 1.25 for group parent meetings. The individual communication methods that the parents rated from most effective (five) to least effective (one) were personal notes, phone calls, in person conferences, student work returned to the parent

with teacher comments, and individual e-mails. The parents average scores for the individual communication methods were a 4.4 for personal notes, a 4.67 for phone calls, a 4.9 for in person conferences, a 4.1 for student work returned with teacher comments, and a 4.1 for individual e-mails. When asked on the survey what methods did their children's teachers use on a weekly basis out of the ten parents seven marked off homework planner, nine marked planner with daily parent sign offs, four checked web page, zero for broadcast e-mails, five for newsletters, four marked announcements, zero for group parent meetings, six for personal notes, five for phone calls, zero for in person conferences, six for student work returned with teacher comments, and five for individual e-mails.

On the Parent Survey Compiled Data Continued, set forth in Appendix D, parents gave averages and percentages on different interactions with their child's teacher based on an average week. The surveys illustrate in a usual week parents verified on average that they have two interactions with their child's teacher. On average the surveys showed, parents spend seven minutes with the teacher during face-to-face interactions with about forty-one percent of the interactions being initiated by the teacher. Time spent on phone calls on average is 10.15 minutes with 36.5 percent of the communication being initiated by the teacher and 6.05 minutes spent on written communication with about 39.5 percent being initiated by the teacher. Parents also showed that on average 7.7 minutes is spent on writing e-mails to the teacher in a common week. When asked how much effort the parents felt they put forth in making parent-teacher relationships two circled "not enough", one circled "a little effort", three circled "I try my best", two circled "a lot of effort", and two circled "all of my effort". On the surveys, each parent wrote a comment

relating to their answer about how much effort they put forth in making a parent-teacher relationship which can be seen in Appendix D.

Ten teachers, seven female and three male, completed the same survey and the results were recorded in the same format on two different tables in Appendices E and F. The ten teachers who completed the surveys had teaching experience ranging from four to twenty-two years and taught in classrooms that ranged from grades one to four as well as two teachers having self-contained classrooms and one teacher who has a basic skills classroom. The average teacher rating for the different whole class communication methods shown a 3.4 for the homework planner, a 4.5 for the homework planner with daily parent sign offs, a 3.8 for web pages, a 1.7 for broadcast e-mails, a 4.4 for newsletters, a 3.3 for announcements, and a 1.5 for group parent meetings. The average teacher rating for the different individual communication methods shown a 4.6 for personal notes, a 4.7 for phone calls, a 5 for in person conferences, a 2.5 for student work returned to parent with teacher comments, and a 4.5 for individual e-mails. On an average week out of the ten teachers surveyed, seven use the homework planner, eight use the homework planner with daily parent sign offs, five use a web page, zero use broadcast e-mails, three use newsletters, six use announcements, zero use group parent meetings, seven use personal notes, eight use phone calls, two use in person conferences, four use student work returned with teacher comments, and eight use individual e-mails. Teachers noted that in an average week they have in total about 4.3 individual parent-teacher interactions. In an average week, teachers spend about 13.35 minutes by way of face-to-face interaction with 62.5 percent being initiated by the parents, 20.1 minutes on phone calls with 59.5 percent being initiated by the parents, and 19.05 minutes on written

communication with 64 percent being initiated by the parents. The teachers surveyed also wrote they spend on average 18.4 minutes sending e-mails to parents in a usual week. When asked what kind of effort the teachers make for parent-teacher relationships seven circled "I try my best" and three circled "a lot of effort". Most of the teachers wrote comments at the end of this section regarding their effort put forth, their feelings, and how they go about having parent-teacher relationships which can be found in Appendix F.

Interviews

Five parents and five teachers were interviewed using the same questions, located in Appendix G, on the topic of parent-teacher relationships. The parents interviewed had one, two, or three children with three of them working full-time and two working part-time. Out of the five parents interviewed, three were married, two were divorced, three were female, and two were male. The teachers who were interviewed had 5-20 years teaching experience and taught grades two, three, four, five, and a self-contained classroom. Out of the five teachers interviewed, four were female and one was male.

After interviewing the parents and teachers, I charted the most significant responses to the questions on tables which are set forth in Appendices H and I. The parents felt that a parent-teacher relationship is one where there is constant communication with keeping the child's best interest in mind. Parents hold the teachers to high expectations wanting the teacher to treat all of the children fairly, provide their children with all of the knowledge and skills needed, and to make sure their children succeed to the best of their abilities. The majority of the parents first establish

relationships with the teachers during Back to School Night where they are able to learn about the teacher, see their expectations, and how they run their classroom. Other parents have established relationships prior to school via phone or e-mail to introduce themselves to the teacher. Once the relationship is established, parents try their best to maintain the relationship by being available to the teacher and contacting them through leaving phone message, e-mails, or sending notes. Some of the parents stated that they are extremely busy and it is hard to be involved in the classroom. Another parent mentioned that the only time she is in contact with the teacher is when she has to plan a class party or event and feels that she does not want to bother the teacher any other time because she knows that she is busy. Parents feel that time is a big obstacle as well as sometimes seeing eye to eye on different situations with their child. To overcome obstacles, parents feel that newsletters are a quick way to let them know what is going on in the classroom and how they can assist their child. Other ways to overcome obstacles, is using e-mail or notes to communicate back and forth and trying to be good listeners in order to compromise. When it comes to different roles parents play in the classroom they mentioned be active listeners, caregivers, and play whatever role the teacher needs them to play. Two parents felt that there is not enough communication or conversation with the teacher because there child is not a troublemaker and receives good grades. However, they would still like to hear how their child is improving and what more they could do to help. Two parents also felt that they only hear from their child when they have something negative to say about their child. They wished they heard from the teacher concerning positive comments as well. Their biggest suggestions for creating and maintaining parent-teacher relationships and having a “sense of community” is to have multiple communication

methods, to report to the parent with both positive and negative comments, and for both parties to be open to ideas, be flexible, and keep each other informed.

The teachers who were interviewed felt that a parent-teacher relationship means communicating with parents to keep them informed, respecting one another, and working together to help the child succeed. The different expectations teachers hold the parents to include aiding them at home with their work and being supportive of the teacher. Four teachers said that the best way to establish a relationship with the parents is at Back to School Night. Back to School Night gives them the opportunity to introduce themselves to the parents, show them the classroom, and state their expectations for the upcoming school year. The teachers then like to have individual conferences with each parent to get to know them better. One teacher likes to send out a summer newsletter welcoming the parents and children back to school if they get their class list early enough. Once the relationship is established, teachers try their best to maintain the relationship by sending out newsletters to inform the parents of what is going on in their child's classroom, responding to parents comments, questions, or concerns as soon as possible, and one teacher tries to get the parents involved as much as possible. Obstacles that the teachers come across when trying to have a relationship with parents include not having enough time, parents not having enough time, some parents being difficult or giving excuses for their child, or parents having bad past experiences with teachers. In order to overcome obstacles, teachers try their best to keep the parents informed and updated with their child's education and to always try to keep communication lines open. One teacher said that she likes to get to know her students' parents by having open conversations with them, gaining their respect, and allowing them to feel comfortable to come to her about

anything. All five teachers believed that their role was to be a listener, teacher, advisor, guidance counselor, and giver. One teacher believed that they must play the role of a realistic teacher who is honest with the parent, but is honest in a caring and supportive way. Teachers stated that they do have constant communication with the parents, and most of it is due to parents calling, writing notes, or e-mailing them often. Most of the phone calls, e-mails, and notes sent to parents are concerning their child's schoolwork, grades, or behavior problems. Teachers biggest suggestions for creating and maintaining parent-teacher relationships and having a "sense of community" is to listen to the parents concerns, respond to parents as soon as possible, have consistent communication with them, and always have a positive outlook when involving and communicating with parents.

Observations

Throughout my student teaching placement, I recorded in a journal any parent-teacher interaction I observed. In the journal, I documented the type of interaction that occurred, the reason for the interaction, and whether the outcome was effective or not. All of the interactions that were observed occurred with my cooperating teacher and parents of the students in her class. I observed phone calls, e-mails, newsletters, in person conferences, personal notes, student work returned with teacher comments, a Powergrade web page, and homework planners with daily parent sign offs.

About eighty percent of the time when contact or interaction was made between the parent and teacher it was initiated by the parent about a grade, schoolwork, or problem the child was complaining about. The other twenty percent of the time the

teacher initiated the contact whether it was sending out a newsletter, setting up the end of the year in-person conferences, sending announcements regarding upcoming tests, or making phone calls regarding a concern about one of her students. I observed that personal notes, e-mails, or notes in the homework planner, although quick and easy, sometimes were misconstrued. For example, the teacher sent home a note to a parent stating, "Susie (pseudonym used) had a not so good day today." The parent responded in a very negative matter because the note was put in a negative tone. The parent was unhappy that the teacher did not clarify, was not specific, and upset that she only receives negative notes about her child. Notes, e-mails, and notes in the homework planner can be effective based on the circumstance and if the content in the methods are specific and have a complete explanation. Many notes that were sent dealt with children leaving early or needing a missed assignment. These types of notes were effective and were perfect for these quick purposes.

Powergrade was a web page where the teachers posted the students grades on their different assignments and parents were able to check the site whenever they wanted. Many parents responded in an effective manner because they liked that they had the opportunity to always know how their child was doing in different subjects and what they needed improvement on. The newsletters that were sent out to parents were also an effective way to communicate to the parents. The newsletters allowed parents to see what their child was learning, links to helpful websites, upcoming classroom events, and how the parent can help the child at home. Although time consuming, in person conferences and phone calls seemed to be the most effective. Both of these methods allowed parents to understand one another without misinterpretations as well as allowed

parents to talk about all concerns, questions, and other issues. Through phone calls and in person conferences parents and teachers were able to come to understandings and have a personal communication approach. In one in person conference, I observed the parent and teacher talking about how the child was having problems with multiplying two digit numbers. The parent told the teacher that she did not understand the method that was taught to the child, so she was unable to help him. The in person conference allowed the teacher to show the parent examples of the math problems and gave the parent a complete understanding of how to solve the math problems. The parent was so thankful for the teacher meeting with her and the outcome of the conference was successful.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter will draw a conclusion to the research question of how to establish and maintain positive parent-teacher relationship along with the most effective and ineffective methods, approaches, and utilizations. The chapter will first discuss the different trends that were found throughout the study. The chapter will then relate the results of the study to the literature discussed in Chapter II. Subsequently, conclusions will be made on how to use the results and findings of the study in the classroom. Answers to the research question are made as well as how you can take the results of this study and further the research on positive parent-teacher relationships.

Trends in the Results

After completing, charting, and reviewing the results found throughout the three data sources some trends came to the surface on the topic of parent-teacher relationships. Both parents and teachers agree that establishing and maintaining a positive parent-teacher relationship is imperative. The surveys and interviews both showed that only successful outcomes could come out of a positive relationship. Parents and teachers both agreed that when parents and teachers work together and develop respect and understanding for one another, together they can make a difference in the child's

education. Nonetheless, parents and teachers both showed that maintaining a positive parent-teacher relationship is not an easy task. The relationship takes work and effort from both sides. The teacher and parent must be flexible, open minded, and have communication lines open. There are many ways to communicate; some methods or approaches are more effective than others. The most effective ways to communicate for individual communication are through phone calls or in person conferences and the most effective methods for whole class communication methods are through newsletters. Although some methods or approaches are quick and easy, they may leave the parent or teacher confused or with a misunderstanding. The misunderstanding may lead to a distrust or setback in the relationship. Parents also stressed that a better relationship can be maintained when teachers contact the parents with positive feedback rather than just negative. Finally, the results showed that the parent initiated many of the interactions between the teacher and parent.

Relations to Literature

Many of the results that were found throughout the study have a relation to the literature that was discussed in chapter two. All of the literature showed the importance of developing a positive parent-teacher relationship. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) state when time and effort is put forth to form a parent-teacher relationship then positive outcomes will occur. Parents and teachers both stressed their feelings on the importance of parent-teacher relationships. Parents and teachers emphasized that when both parties focus on the best interest of the child and work together to communicate in any possible way then the child will fully benefit.

Chapter II discussed literature that deals with the teachers and parents roles and significant attributes in forming a positive parent-teacher relationship. Swick (1991) states that the teacher must play three major roles in the parent-teacher relationship which include support, education, and guidance. Throughout the surveys and interviews all of the teachers stated that the roles they play are guidance, listener, advisor, teacher, and supporter. The roles that the teachers said they played match with Swick's findings. Swick (1991) stressed that with each role the teacher must show sensitivity, flexibility, reliability, and accessibility. The findings showed that the teachers agree with his statements and believe that flexibility and accessibility are key ingredients in making a parent-teacher relationship work. The results found that teachers must be flexible with their schedule and communication methods as well as being accessible by having all communication lines open. Swick (1991) also notes that like teachers, parents have roles they play that include learning, supporting, doing, and participatory decision making. The results of the study agree with Swick (1991) when the parents stated that their roles are to be supportive of the teacher and their child and help their child in any means possible with their work at home.

The literature quoted Susan Becker (2006, p.1) that, "The parents need information about what and how their child is learning, and the teacher needs important feedback from the parent about the child's academic and social development." The parents in the findings support this idea through stressing in the surveys and interviews that they encourage feedback from their child's teacher regarding their child's strengths

and weaknesses. The teachers also showed that feedback from parents allow them to get a better understanding of their students.

Keyes (2000) in the literature points out that when trying to establish and maintain positive parent-teacher relationships there will be obstacles the teacher and parent will encounter that they must address, so a positive parent-teacher relationship once again can take its place. The results showed that some of the obstacles the parents and teachers encounter include time, parents having bad experiences with teachers themselves, not seeing eye to eye, and parents who are pushy. The teachers and parents address the obstacles by using multiple ways to communicate with parents, informing parents of important information, accommodating parents in any way possible, trying to compromise, and allowing parents to feel comfortable and at ease when the teachers are talking to them.

The final literature that relates directly to the findings of the study is Swick (1991) who points out that parents and teachers both have hectic, multifaceted, and vigorous lives and therefore a variety of different kinds of communication need to be implemented. Although different methods in the study were found to be more effective than others, teachers in the study showed that they use numerous amounts of ways to communicate with parents; both whole class communication methods and individual communication methods. Teachers who were surveyed and interviewed explained that they use homework planners, homework planners with daily parent sign offs, newsletters, announcements, web pages, e-mails, personal notes, parent meetings, phone calls, and student work returned with teacher comments. Teachers stressed that they used as many

methods of communication as possible in order to make it easier for parents to communicate with them and form a parent-teacher relationship.

Use of Study in the Classroom and Answer to Research Question

Studying the research question of how to establish positive parent-teacher relationships and looking at the findings and results, demonstrates what methods worked, which methods were ineffective, and what the best ways to overcome obstacles are. After understanding and reviewing the findings and results I would use the information several different ways in the classroom. First of all, you have to establish the relationship before you can maintain it as well as making the relationship a positive one. The method that was found most effective in establishing a relationship is sending out a Welcome Back to School Newsletter if you are able to receive your class list early enough. In this newsletter, you should make sure you show the parents that you are looking forward to the upcoming school year in addition to working as a team with the parents. If you are unable to receive a class list before the school year, then the best way to establish a parent-teacher relationship is Back to School Night. On that night, make sure you welcome the parents with a smile and show excitement. Remember first impressions are extremely important. This is your time to let the parents know your expectations and how you will do everything possible to make sure their child succeeds. It is also imperative to let the parents know all the ways you can be contacted and how you plan on communicating with them. Let the parents share with you any initial concerns or questions they may have and make sure you obtain their contact information.

Once you have established the relationship, the next step in the classroom is to maintain the parent-teacher relationship. The findings show that it is important to keep all lines of communication open when maintaining the relationship and make sure you keep an open mind and are flexible. The more methods and approaches you use to communicate with the parents, the better chance you are to be successful and parents will respond in a positive manner. Parents felt that the most effective and helpful methods were the newsletters and homework planner with daily parent sign off as whole class communication methods and in person conferences and phone calls for individual communication methods. When using newsletters, teachers should use them as often as possible to make sure the parents constantly are updated and informed about what is going on in the classroom. Newsletters should include upcoming events, what the children are learning throughout the subjects, how parents can help their child, and any helpful website links they can use. All communication should be frequent and consistent, so the parents are constantly informed and do not just think you are contacting them because of a problem.

The research and findings show that when establishing and maintaining parent-teacher relationships obstacles may surface, like with any other relationship. These obstacles that you may face include time conflicts, agreement clashes, parents who have had negative past experiences with teachers, and/or uncooperative parents. If and when you come across an obstacle, you must address the problem as soon as possible. By doing so, the problem will not escalate and you can look for a solution in order for a positive parent-teacher relationship to take its place once again. Time conflicts can be solved by having various ways of communication and parent involvement. Through

several communication methods, the parent will have different ways to contact and communicate with you as the teacher and vice versa. When a disagreement between you and the parent occurs, make sure that you first listen to the parents concerns and point of view. Then let the parent know how you feel and what your stance is on the situation. These types of obstacles should be settled over the phone or through an in person conference so there is no misconceptions. Remember your roles as a teacher to be an advisor, guidance counselor, listener, and teacher. Together try to come to a solution that you can both agree on or try to give the parent a better insight on what is best for their child's success and education. This study showed that another obstacle you may face is a parent who has had negative experiences with teachers in the past or when they were younger. If this is the case, trust and respect are the big issues at hand. As teachers we must show the parent that our main goal is for their child to succeed and that they can count on us for that to happen. Sharing with the parent your support and compassion will allow them to open up to you as well as trust you. Once trust and respect are established, a positive parent-teacher relationship can blossom.

When I began my research I set out to answer the question of how do you establish and maintain a positive parent-teacher relationship along with what are the most effective and ineffective methods, approaches, and utilizations. The results and findings to answer this question have shown that it is imperative to establish a relationship with the parents at the very beginning of the school year either through a newsletter before school starts or through back to school night. The methods that were proven to be the most effective are newsletters, phone calls, and in person conferences. Consistent and frequent communication is key. This study has shown that when using effective methods

a positive parent-teacher relationship can be established, maintained, and together you can then reach your common goal; for the child to succeed and perform to the best of his or her abilities.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study and research was done in a single placement in a Southern New Jersey suburban town. Therefore, to get a better understanding of effective and ineffective methods the next approach should be to do the same exact study but in a different placement. Once the findings and results of the new placement were found, comparisons and contrasts should be made. As a result of comparing and contrasting the two placements, more in depth research and findings will be made about establishing and maintaining positive parent-teacher relationships as well as the most effective and ineffective methods, approaches, and utilizations.

I have learned from this study the importance of the home-school connection. Since this study showed the significance of positive parent-teacher relationships and the most effective and ineffective methods used to establish and maintain relationships, I believe that this research can be used as a springboard to move outside of just the classroom. Through this research study you can now look at how the school as a whole can form relationships with the parents and community. If positive outcomes come from having good parent-teacher relationships, then the effects of having a positive relationship between the school and parents will be even greater.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Parent and Teacher Consent Form

Dear Parent or Guardian (Teacher),

I am a graduate student in the Collaborative Education (Co-Teach) Department at Rowan University. I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. David Hespe as part of my master's thesis concerning parent-teacher relationships. I am requesting your permission and consent to participate in this study. The goal of the study is to determine the best methods, strategies, and approaches in establishing and maintaining positive parent-teacher relationships.

To gather data I will be distributing surveys, conducting interviews, and recording observations. I would like to know your thoughts and opinions, as a parent (teacher), on your experience with teacher (parent) relationships. All participation is voluntary and all participants' names will be kept confidential. To preserve your confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used.

Your decision whether or not to participate in filling out a survey, being interviewed, or both will have no effect on your child (not placed in teachers consent form). If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at (908) 265-5263 or Dr. David Hespe at (856) 256-4702. You can also e-mail me at Cwiaka80@students.rowan.edu. I thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Tracy Cwiakala

Please indicate whether or not you wish to participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement or statements below and return this to your child's teacher (Return to me in Room 9).

_____ I would like to help out and participate in completing a survey on establishing and maintaining positive parent-teacher relationships.

_____ I would like to help out and participate in conducting an interview on establishing and maintaining positive parent-teacher relationships.

I can be reached at _____ . Best time to call is _____.

_____ I would not like to participate in either the interview or survey on establishing and maintaining parent-teacher relationships.

Parent/Guardian (Teacher) Signature

Date

APPENDIX B
Survey Instrument

Survey was created using Clipper, J.A. (2004). *Parent-Teacher Communication Methods: Which ones do Teachers Utilize, and Why?*. Master Thesis of Science in Teaching. Rowan University, pp. 37-40. The survey also includes original questions that were created by the researcher.

Please fill out the following survey to the best of your ability. Be as honest and thorough as possible. Thank you very much for your cooperation and participation!!

Section One: Demographic Information

(Teacher Part)

1. _____ Township School District
_____ School

2. Description of Class(es) Taught (Please indicate number of students, age, grade, gender, and any special needs):

3. Total Teaching Experience: _____

4. Gender: Male _____ Female _____

(Parent Part)

1. _____ Township School District
_____ School

2. Children (Please indicate number of children, age, grade, gender, and any special needs):

3. Your Gender: Male _____ Female _____

4. Work: Full-Time _____ Part-Time _____ Student _____
Other _____

5. Marital Status: _____

6. Primary Language Spoke at Home: _____

Section Two: Please rate the following communication methods from 1 (least effective) to 5 (most effective)

Whole Class Communication Methods

	Least Effective			Most Effective	
_____ Homework Planner	1	2	3	4	5
_____ Planner w/ daily parent sign-off	1	2	3	4	5
_____ Web Page	1	2	3	4	5
_____ Broadcast E-mails	1	2	3	4	5
_____ Newsletters	1	2	3	4	5
_____ Announcements	1	2	3	4	5
_____ Group Parent Meetings	1	2	3	4	5
_____ Other (Please Specify)	1	2	3	4	5

Comments (Any suggestions or ideas that have worked in your experience):

Individual Student Communication Methods

	Least Effective			Most Effective	
_____ Personal Notes	1	2	3	4	5
_____ Phone Calls	1	2	3	4	5
_____ In person conferences	1	2	3	4	5
_____ Student work returned w/ teacher comments	1	2	3	4	5
_____ Individual E-Mails	1	2	3	4	5
_____ Other (Please Specify)	1	2	3	4	5

Comments (Any suggestions or ideas that have worked in your experience):

What Method(s) of parental communication do you use on a weekly basis? (Check all that apply)

- _____ **Homework Planner**
 - _____ **Planner with daily parent sign-off**
 - _____ **Web page**
 - _____ **Broadcast E-mails**
 - _____ **Newsletters**
 - _____ **Announcements**
 - _____ **Group Parent Meetings**
 - _____ **Personal Notes**
 - _____ **Phone calls**
 - _____ **In person conferences**
 - _____ **Student work returned with teacher comments**
 - _____ **Individual E-mails**
 - _____ **Other (Please Specify)**
-

Section Three: In an average week:

What is the total number of individual parent-teacher interaction you have?

0 – 1 2 -3 4 -5 6 – 7 8+

How much time do you spend speaking with the teacher (parents) during face-to-face interactions?

0 – 10 minutes 11 – 20 minutes 21- 30 minutes 31 – 40 minutes 41+ minutes

% initiated by teacher (parents) _____

How much time do you spend on the phone per week conducting teacher (parent) phone calls?

0 – 10 minutes 11 – 20 minutes 21- 30 minutes 31 – 40 minutes 41+ minutes

% initiated by teacher (parents) _____

How much time do you spend on written communication with teachers (parents)?

0 – 10 minutes 11 – 20 minutes 21- 30 minutes 31 – 40 minutes 41+ minutes

% initiated by teacher (parents) _____

How much time do you spend preparing e-mail communications?

0 – 10 minutes 11 – 20 minutes 21- 30 minutes 31 – 40 minutes 41+ minutes

How much effort do you put in getting to know and having a relationship with your child's teacher (students' parents)? (Circle One)

Not Enough A little Effort I try my best A lot of Effort All of my Effort

Explain your answer:

Section Four: Please be as specific and thorough as possible when completing the following questions

1. Name and explain the parent-teacher communication methods you have found most successful in your experience. If you have a specific form that you use, it would be appreciated if you would attach it to your returned survey.
2. Name and explain any methods, approaches, or strategies that you have found to be unsuccessful and not effective from your experience.
3. When and how do you first begin to establish a relationship with your child's teacher (students' parents)? (Example: Before school year starts, back to school night) Any additional information will be appreciated.
4. What do you feel is the biggest obstacle to overcome in establishing and maintaining positive parent-teacher relationships?

**APPENDIX C
Parent Survey Compiled Data**

Demographic Description					Whole Class Communication Methods							Individual Communication Methods				
Parent Number	Gender	Children	Marital Status	Work	Homework Planner	Planner with Daily Parent Sign Off	Web Page	Broadcast E-mails	Newsletters	Announcements	Group Parent Meetings	Personal Notes	Phone Calls	In Person Conferences	Student Work Returned With Teacher Comments	Individual E-Mails
1	Male	3	Married	Full Time	4	5	5	1	5	3	1	5	4	5	4	3
2	Female	2	Married	Part Time	5	5	5	2	5	5	1	5	5	5	4	4
3	Female	2	Married	From Home	4	5	5	1	5	4	1	5	N/A	4	5	5
4	Female	3	Married	Full Time	3	4	4	1	5	3	1	3	5	5	3	5
5	Female	3	Married	Part Time	5	5	1	2	5	4	N/A	4	4	5	4	3
6	Female	3 (All are hearing impaired)	Married	Mom	3	4	3	2	N/A	4	2	4	5	5	5	5
7	Female	3	Married	Student	5	5	5	N/A	5	5	N/A	5	5	5	5	5
8	Female	3	Married	Part Time	5	5	4	2	5	3	2	4	5	5	4	5
9	Male	2	Divorced	Full Time	4	5	3	1	5	3	1	5	5	5	3	3
10	Male	1	Widow	Full Time	4	4	5	1	5	3	1	4	4	5	4	3
AVERAGE:					4.2	4.7	4	1.44	5	3.7	1.25	4.4	4.67	4.9	4.1	4.1
Demographic Description					Methods Used on a Weekly Basis											
Parent Number	Gender	Children	Marital Status	Work	Homework Planner	Planner with Daily Parent Sign Off	Web Page	Broadcast E-mails	Newsletters	Announcements	Group Parent Meetings	Personal Notes	Phone Calls	In Person Conferences	Student Work Returned With Teacher Comments	Individual E-Mails
1	Male	3	Married	Full Time	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
2	Female	2	Married	Part Time	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓			
3	Female	2	Married	From Home		✓			✓	✓					✓	
4	Female	3	Married	Full Time		✓							✓			✓
5	Female	3	Married	Part Time	✓	✓	✓									
6	Female	3 (All are hearing impaired)	Married	Mom		✓						✓	✓		✓	✓
7	Female	3	Married	Student	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓	
8	Female	3	Married	Part Time	✓	✓						✓	✓			✓
9	Male	2	Divorced	Full Time	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓			✓	
10	Male	1	Widow	Full Time	✓	✓						✓			✓	✓

APPENDIX D Parent Survey Compiled Data Continued										
Parent Number	Total Number of Individual Parent-Teacher Interaction	Face-to-Face Interactions (in minutes)	% Initiated by the Teacher	Time Spent on Phone Calls (in minutes)	% Initiated by the Teacher	Time Spent on Written Communication (in minutes)	% Initiated by the Teacher	Time Spent E-Mailing Teacher (in minutes)	Effort to Make Parent-Teacher Relationship	Answer Explained
1	0-1	0-10	0	0-10	0	0-10	0	0-10	A lot of Effort	"I like to keep lines of communications open at all times."
2	0-1	0-10	5	0-10	0	0-10	5	0-10	A little Effort	"I work at home with our landscaping business, so I have very little time. I wish I could be a room mom, but I am stressed out enough."
3	0-1	0-10	25	0-10	25	0-10	50	0-10	I try my best	"Fortunately, my child has not required much parent/teacher discussion. I have not been able to volunteer as classroom mom because of a younger child at home."
4	2-3	21-30	100	0-10	50	0-10	50	0-10	I try my best	"It is all according to the teacher. Some are more receptive than others. It also has to do with personalities- I may have more in common with some teachers than others."
5	0-1	0-10	50	0-10	50	0-10	50	0-10	Not Enough	"Other than Back to School Night and the first and only parent-teacher conference, there really isn't other opportunities to spend with the teacher."
6	4-5	0-10	10	21-30	10	0-10	50	0-10	All of my Effort	"Since my children are special needs, it is vital that I know their teachers expectations and they are aware of mine. I have had all positive experiences with all my children teachers thus far."
7	2-3	0-10	100	0-10	50	0-10	50	0-10	Not Enough	"I am busy with nursing school and three children. I wish I could volunteer a little more."
8	0-1	0-10	60	0-10	70	0-10	50	0-10	I try my best	"Like to get to know teacher however do not want to bother the teacher unless it is important."
9	2-3	0-10	20	11-20	60	0-10	60	21-30	A lot of Effort	"I feel it is important that the teacher and parent are on the same wave length and the teacher lets me know what is going on in the classroom."
10	4-5	0-10	40	21-30	50	11-20	30	11-20	All of my Effort	"Since I am the only parent and he is my only child I want to make sure that I am involved as much as possible to make sure my child receives the best education."
All responses were based in an average week										
AVERAGE:	2	7	41	10.15	38.5	6.05	39.5	7.7		

APPENDIX E Teacher Survey Compiled Data															
Demographic Description				Whole Class Communication Methods							Individual Communication Methods				
Teacher Number	Gender	Teaching Experience (In years)	Classroom Type	Homework Planner	Planner w/ Daily Parent Sign Off	Web Page	Broadcast E-mail	Newsletters	Announcements	Group Parent Meetings	Personal Notes	Phone Calls	In Person Conferences	Student Work Returned w/ Comments	Individual E-Mails
1	Female	4	Self-Contained	4	4	3	2	5	3	1	5	4	5	1	5
2	Female	18	Basic Skills	3	5	3	1	4	3	1	5	5	5	2	4
3	Female	18	Grade 3	3	4	3	2	5	3	2	5	5	5	3	5
4	Female	18	Grade 3	3	4	4	2	5	3	1	5	5	5	3	5
5	Male	7	Grade 2	2	4	3	2	4	3	1	3	5	5	2	3
6	Female	15	Grade 3	4	5	4	1	4	4	1	5	4	5	2	5
7	Female	22	Grade 5	4	5	4	2	4	3	2	4	5	5	3	5
8	Female	19	Self-Contained	5	5	5	2	4	4	2	5	5	5	3	4
9	Male	10	Grade 4	3	4	4	2	4	4	2	5	5	5	3	4
10	Male	5	Grade 1	3	5	5	1	5	3	2	4	4	5	3	5
AVERAGE:				3.4	4.5	3.8	1.7	4.4	3.3	1.5	4.6	4.7	5	2.5	4.5
Demographic Description				Methods Used on a Weekly Basis											
Teacher Number	Gender	Teaching Experience (In years)	Classroom Type	Homework Planner	Planner w/ Daily Parent Sign Offs	Web Page	Broadcast E-Mails	Newsletters	Announcements	Group Parent Meetings	Personal Notes	Phone Calls	In Person Conferences	Student Work Returned w/ Teacher Comments	Individual E-Mails
1	Female	4	Self-Contained		✓	✓		✓			✓			✓	
2	Female	18	Basic Skills	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
3	Female	18	Grade 3	✓		✓			✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
4	Female	18	Grade 3	✓	✓							✓		✓	✓
5	Male	7	Grade 2		✓	✓									
6	Female	15	Grade 3		✓			✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
7	Female	22	Grade 5	✓								✓			✓
8	Female	19	Self-Contained	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Male	10	Grade 4	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓			✓
10	Male	5	Grade 1	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓			✓

APPENDIX F
Teacher Survey Compiled Data Continued

Teacher Number	Total Number of Individual Parent-Teacher Interaction	Face-to-Face Interactions (in minutes)	% Initiated by the Parent	Time Spent on Phone Calls (in minutes)	% Initiated by the Parent	Time Spent on Written Communication (in minutes)	% Initiated by the Parent	Time Spent Sending E-Mails to Parents (in minutes)	Effort to Make Parent-Teacher Relationship	Answer Explained
1	8+	21-30	75	41+	50	41+	50	11-20	I try my best	"Some parents choose to or have more opportunities to participate in their Child's education. I put forth a lot of effort for those parents who return contact and read info. For those who do not I continue to write, call and especially provide for the student but you can't win every battle."
2	4-5	11-20	10	11-20	20	0-10	60	0-10	I try my best	
3	2-3	11-20	50	11-20	50	11-20	50	31-40	I try my best	"Some parents are more open to a close relationship with their child's teacher. Others prefer the no news is good news approach; they only want to know if a problem arises."
4	2-3	0-10	75	31-40	75	21-30	75	11-20	A lot of Effort	"I send home a monthly newsletter, each month I update my web page. I answer all phone calls within 24 hours. I make phone calls/write notes when they are warranted and I respond to e-mails ASAP."
5	4-5	11-20	50	21-30	50	11-20	50	0-10	I try my best	"Students with concerns in class I will get to know the parents pretty well. The better they are with their work the harder it is to continually contact them because there is not much to constantly relay to them."
6	2-3	11-20	75	0-10	75	11-20	75	11-20	I try my best	"I try to get back to them as soon as a concern or issue arises. I also try to be friendly and give in to their needs so that we have a good relationship."
7	4-5	0-10	95	0-10	95	0-10	95	11-20	I try my best	
8	2-3	11-20	60	11-20	70	11-20	50	21-30	A lot of Effort	"Teachers and parents (and students) must work as a team. Although 5th graders are growing in independence, a lot of time and effort is put forth to establish open and honest channels of communication that will last throughout the year."
9	4-5	11-20	60	11-20	60	11-20	60	11-20	I try my best	"It is important to be in contact with parents. However, it is hard to try to communicate with all parents on a frequent basis. You tend to have more of a relationship with parents whose child is having trouble in school."
10	6-7	0-10	75	31-40	50	31-40	75	31-40	A lot of Effort	"It is extremely imperative to have constant communication with parents. I put a lot of effort to make sure I get back to parents concerns, comments, or questions as soon as possible."
All answers were based in an average week										
AVERAGE:	4.3	13.35	62.5	20.1	59.5	19.05	64	18.4		

APPENDIX G
Interview Questions

Question 1:

What does a parent-teacher relationship mean to you?

Question 2:

What kind of expectations do you hold the parents (teacher) to?

Question 3:

How and when do you personally establish a relationship with your students parents (child's teacher)?

Question 4:

What do you do to maintain the relationship with the parents (teacher)?

Question 5:

What do you feel is the biggest obstacle in establishing/maintaining a positive relationship with the parents (teacher)?

Question 6:

How do you try and overcome these obstacles?

Question 7:

What kind of roles do you play in establishing and maintaining a positive parent-teacher relationship?

Question 8:

How often are you in contact with the parents (teacher)?

Question 9:

What is the main reason for contact?

Question 10:

What would your biggest suggestion be in forming and maintaining positive parent-teacher relationships?

Question 11:

How do you think a "sense of community" for parent-teacher relationships can best be encouraged in the classroom or at home?

***** Questions are used for the tables in Appendix H and I *****

**APPENDIX H
Parent Interview Responses**

Parent Letter	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6
A	"...a relationship that keeps the child's best interests in hand."	"...teacher should teach to the best of his or her abilities to make sure the children receive the best education."	"...when I attend back to school night. Back to School night is a great opportunity to see where the teacher is coming from."	"...it is hard with my schedule, but I will write the teacher a note or e-mail if I need to reach her."	"...time, there never seems like there is enough in the day. I wish I could be more involved."	"...E-mail is an easy way to have quick responses."
B	"...open communication to know both the positives and negatives."	"...to treat all the students with the same fairness."	"...usually Back to School Night. Some teachers have sent out newsletters in the Summer."	"...depends on the teacher and if they make themselves easily available to communicate with."	"...both parties need to be active participants in communicating with one another."	"...I try to be the best active participant and allow for communication to occur."
C	"I usually do not have much of a relationship per say, usually because my child performs well and the teacher is to busy with other problems."	"...the teacher does her job, responds to all students with equal fairness, and provide the students with the needed knowledge and skills."	"...the best chance to first meet the teacher is Back to School Night. Some teachers I have known from my other children having them."	"...I try to help out if the teacher has holiday parties or events. I like to be involved if the teacher allows for involvement."	"...I feel that the teacher has so many bigger concerns and problems to deal with that my concerns or problems may be just bothering them."	"I may write a note in my child's planner if it is necessary, if not I do not bother."
D	"...it is important to me because my child has a learning disability."	"...make sure that the children succeed and perform to the best of their abilities."	"...I usually talk to them before school starts via e-mail or phone."	"I give the teacher my contact info. and make myself available when it comes to my children's education."	"...sometimes being on the same level as the teacher. Their may be times when you bump heads or do not see completely eye to eye."	"I make sure to voice my concerns and allow for the teacher to give me his or her advice and see where we can compromise."
E	"...like any relationship one where there is communication."	"...provide his or her students with the skills and knowledge they need to know."	"...Back to School Night or the initial parent-teacher conference."	"I am very busy, but I respond to the teacher ASAP when they need to speak with me."	"...I feel that time is a big obstacle. Both parents and teachers are busy and to find time is a hard task."	"like with anything else you have to try to find ways to better the situation, when teachers are active communicators it makes it a bit easier."

Parent Letter	Question 7	Question 8	Question 9	Question 10	Question 11
A	"...the caring parent who wants the best for their child."	"Not as often as I would like to be."	"When there is contact, its about grades or behavior."	"...have multiple ways to communicate and allow for involvement."	"...both make themselves easy to talk to."
B	"...a listener, easy to talk to...make sure teachers want to have communications w/ me."	"Whenever contact is necessary...it varies...on average maybe once a week."	"Grades, problems between children, need make-up work when sick, lost work."	"...make sure all lines of communication are open and multiple ways to communicate are available."	"...when all lines of communication are open and both parties play active participants."
C	"I make myself available and help in the classroom whenever needed."	"Whenever we talk about room mom stuff, so maybe every other month."	"Parties, planning, room mom activities."	"...to keep parents informed about what is going on in the classroom."	"Teachers and parents work together to provide the best for the children."
D	"I play the role of a caring parent who wants to do all I can do to make sure my child is successful."	"At least 2-3 times a week. There is constant communication back and forth."	"...to keep me updated with my child's progress & to make sure accommodations are being effective."	"Both parties should keep an open mind and allow for flexibility. When parents and teachers work together a lot can be achieved."	"Teachers and parents are able to keep an open mind, be flexible, allow for multiple ways to communicate, and respond to one another in a caring manner."
E	"I play so many roles in the day you tend to believe you have super powers...I let the teacher do her job and play a role when she needs me."	"Teachers send out newsletters and post on WebPages to keep me informed which helps me communicate w/ the teacher."	"Grades, to inform me of any problems or concerns, how I may be able to help, or positive news."	"It is nice when you hear from the teacher both positive and negative comments, just not always bad."	"The teacher initiates a welcoming classroom and allows for different means of communication to allow for working mothers to help out."

APPENDIX I
Teacher Interview Responses

Teacher Letter	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6
A	"...means one where there is communication and understanding on both sides."	"...the parent should be open to advice and help with the child's homework."	"Back to school night is usually the first opportunity to talk with the parents."	"I send out monthly newsletters informing the parents of recent classroom information."	"Time...there never seems to be enough whether it be my time or parents time."	"I try to do my best to keep the parents updated through newsletters or notes and try to accommodate as best as possible."
B	"...means you inform your parents of what is happening in the classroom."	"I expect the parent to support my teaching and help the child with his/her work at home."	"If I get my class list early enough I try and send out a welcome back to school newsletter."	"Whenever we start a new unit in a subject I send home extra ways they might be able to assist their child."	"Some parents tend to disagree with your advice or ways and you have to try and get them to understand."	"Explain to parents your ideas and advice. Listen to their opinion and try to compromise to come to the best solution."
C	"...means there is a common understanding and respect for one another's role in and out of the classroom."	"...the parent to be of any assistance to the child at home with work and to be involved with the child's class."	"Back to school night or the initial first parent-teacher conference is when I first talk with parents."	"When a parent leaves a message for me I respond to them ASAP whether through e-mail, note, or phone call."	"Some parents are over protective of their children or give excuses for their children instead of trying to come up with a solution."	"Make sure you have documents to back up what you are saying and try your best to work with the parent so the child succeeds."
D	"...means there is open communication between both parties."	"...parents need to work with the child at home and aid in his/her success."	"I like to introduce myself and get to know the parents in a group first at Back to school night and then individually with conferences."	"I try to get my parents involved in whatever way I can."	"Parents may be difficult, not want to be involved, or cannot find the time to establish and maintain a parent-teacher relationship."	"Try to have the most communication methods available for parents and I like to keep the parents informed through my website and newsletters."
E	"...parents and teachers work together for the child's best interest."	"The parent needs to be supportive and understanding."	"Back to school night is when I establish the relationship."	"I always keep communication lines open and respond to parents ASAP."	"When parents have had negative past experiences or bad experiences themselves with teacher's as a child. It is hard then to try and rebuild trust."	"I try and gain the parents respect and trust through having open conversations with them and get to know about them."

Teacher Letter	Question 7	Question 8	Question 9	Question 10	Question 11
A	"I tend to be a guidance counselor, advisor, teacher, and friend. I try to build trust and respect from the parent."	"Whenever I feel it is necessary or whenever a parent has a question, concern, or comment."	"...a concern or question the parent has for me."	"...have consistent contact with the parents whether it be through individual communication methods or whole class methods."	"Be welcoming and with consistent contact the parent will not feel discouraged to come to you."
B	"...a realistic teacher who communicates in a kind manner, but tells the parents how it is so they understand and see my point of view."	"In an average week I would say that I communicate with at least 2 parents a day."	"...the parent has a question about a grade received or work sent home."	"...use numerous types of communication methods as well as different ways to keep the parents informed about what is going on in the class."	"...through keeping the parents constantly informed and letting them know that you care about their child's success."
C	"Counselor and advisor... I try to be caring and play any role that is in the best need for the child."	"My communication lines are always open and I inform the parents on information in numerous ways."	"...regarding a problem in the classroom or behavior problem with a child."	"...to always keep communication lines open and return e-mails, notes, or phone calls as soon as possible."	"...allow parents to feel that your best interest is for their child to succeed."
D	"I listen, give, care, advise, carefully give recommendations, follow through consistently, and honestly informs."	"As often as possible. I try to inform parents of positive feedback, not just talk to them when I have something negative to say."	"...usually in contact because of a concern or because the parent wants to talk about his or her child."	"...do not just contact parents when you have negative comments or conversation, contact them about positive things as well."	"...always have a positive outlook and allow parents to be involved as much as possible...create a safe and comfortable learning community."
E	"I play the role of teacher, advisor, counselor, and caregiver. I also listen and accommodate as best as possible."	"In an average week about 5-10 times."	"In contact to talk about how a child is achieving, improving, or what we can do to help the child improve."	"To try and reach out to the parents and let them understand where you are coming from and listen to their concerns as well."	"...when you get to know the parent and the child's home life you can make better connections and the relationship stronger."