

# Teacher Communication to Promote Parent Involvement

Margaret M. O'Connor-Campbell

University of Notre Dame and St. Andrew & St. Rita Catholic Academy

## BACKGROUND

This action research was conducted at St. Andrew and St. Rita Catholic Academy (SAR), an inner city school of 128 families. Students at SAR (n = 175) are African American (97%), of low socioeconomic status (72%), preschool to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Faculty (n = 11) and parents (n = 74) participated in the study including a parent focus group.

- SAR tuition is based upon family income.
- Mobility is a concern affecting families at all grade levels, but holding steady at 185 students.
- Comer and Hanes (1991) noted improved parent-staff relationships is a function of parental participation in school activities.

## CURRENT STUDY

**Purpose Statement:** The purpose of this action research project was to determine what types of teacher communications assist our teachers and families to become more involved in the children's education at SAR.

**Research Questions:**

- How do invitations from the school, child, and teacher relate to parental involvement?
- How frequently do teachers communicate with parents about being involved?
- What factors may motivate parents to become involved?

## METHOD

A 68 item questionnaire was distributed to 128 families in October, 2008 during parent/teacher conferences. Eleven teachers anonymously answered a 26 item questionnaire that same week. A parent focus group was conducted to obtain more detailed information concerning motivations of parents and existing parent-teacher communications.

## FINDINGS

### Parent Questionnaire

Common indicators in Table 6 showed that 59.2% (n = 45) of parents Agree that "teachers are interested and cooperative when discussing my child." Likewise, 47.4% (n = 36) of parents reported they Agree that "teachers keep me informed about my child's progress in school." Table 7 contained items concerning direct contact between teacher and parent. Interestingly, 54% (n = 41) of the parents responded that they Never had been asked by the teacher "to help out at school." When asked if their child's teacher "asked me to talk with my child about the school day," 47.4% (n = 36) of the parents responded Never. Another negative indicator was the responses to my child's teacher "asked me to attend a special event at school," in which 40.8% (n = 31) responded Never.

### Parent Focus Group

The first theme that emerged was consistency with teachers establishing routines in communicating with parents. "It is important that I stay on top of what she (her daughter) is doing. Even in first

grade she doesn't want me to find out all that's happening with her in the classroom. She only tells me half the story." A second theme was the convenience of communicating and the parents' responsibility to do their part in the process. "I can get information first hand and make any corrections on the spot and not have to wait until the next day."

### Teacher Questionnaire

100% of the teachers agree that they want and expect the parents to work on basic academic skills at home. The 14 involvement techniques to involve parents are known and understood by teachers and they think of these invitations for parents as "workable but have not tried this year," with the exception of activities that emphasize reading. 46% of teachers ranked "read to child or listen to their child read" as most satisfying a technique. Library visits ranked as "used a few times this year" with 55% of teachers using this technique and 46% loaned parents books.

Table 6.

Parents' Perception of General Invitations for Involvement from the School, Response Counts and Percentages

Item	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Teachers are interested and cooperative when discussing my child.	5.32	0.59	—	—	1 (1.3%)	2 (2.7%)	45 (59.2%)	28 (36.8%)
This school lets me know about meetings and special school events.	5.33	0.7	—	—	2 (2.7%)	4 (5.3%)	37 (48.7%)	33 (43.4%)
Teachers keep me informed about my child's progress in school.	5.2	0.73	—	—	1 (1.3%)	11 (14.5%)	36 (47.4%)	28 (36.8%)

Note: 1 = Disagree Very Strongly, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Disagree just a little, 4 = Agree just a little, 5 = Agree,

6 = Agree very strongly

Table 7.

Parents' Perceptions of Specific Invitations for Involvement from the Teacher, Response Counts and Percentages

"My child's teacher..."

Item	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
asked me to talk with my child about the school day.	2.96	2.19	36 (47.4%)	8 (10.5%)	2 (2.6%)	2 (2.6%)	9 (11.8%)	19 (25.0%)
asked me to attend a special event at school.	2.49	1.77	31 (40.8%)	19 (25.0%)	9 (11.8%)	2 (2.6%)	5 (6.6%)	10 (13.2%)
asked me to help out at school.	2.12	1.72	41 (54.0%)	20 (26.3%)	2 (2.6%)	—	4 (5.3%)	9 (11.8%)

Note: 1 = never, 2 = 1 or 2 times, 3 = 4 or 5 times, 4 = once a week, 5 = a few times a week, 6 = daily

## DISCUSSION AND EXTENSION

Dauber and Epstein (1991) found that encouraging involvement and teacher invitations were the biggest predictors of home school-based involvement in elementary and middle schools. Our findings show a discrepancy in invitations to the parents to be a part of the work at school. Parents consistently responded that in their role construct as parents, it is their responsibility to be involved and guide their child's education and their willingness to work for success was evident. The plan for improvement is:

- Professional development for teachers on creating routines that involve direct contact with parents on a frequent basis.
- Implement, collate and track a PTO talent survey in an effort to help the school invite parent participation.
- Create Outreach Center to provide parents with information about our community resources, school programs.