

The Diffusion of Communication Highways Connecting Parents and Schools

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Parental involvement has continually been an important piece in the development of student learning and success in school. The increasing availability and access to the Internet provides schools with an effective way to communicate with the community via school web pages. However, there is still a large void in reference to timely communication between schools and parents regarding personal information, such as grades, attendance, demographic information, discipline, and health issues. New software programs are now being made available to address this void and provide timely information through the use of technology--specifically, the Internet.

Parental involvement is not restricted to a physical presence in the building but includes involvement outside school and in the home. With the increase in single parent homes, working parents, and situations that prohibit many parents from frequently visiting the school building and talking one-on-one with teachers and principals, it has become increasingly difficult for parents to stay current with their child's progress in school. If information about student progress were provided to parents on a timely basis--in a format that was easy to understand and access--necessary interventions could be provided that would help students experience increased success in and out of the classroom. These strategies would increase the probability of improved student performance on assessments and standardized tests. Information about assignments, projects, upcoming events, and due dates would require students to be accountable for their progress and would provide information to parents and guardians about a student's development and growth in the classroom. This would discourage excuses and claims of miscommunication amongst the involved parties, promoting increased interaction and understanding of expectations.

Critical to the communication between schools and parents is the inherent meaning, or the subjective perception of the innovation of communicating about student progress via the Internet (Rogers, 1995). The diffusion of this type of communication system is an "authority innovation-decision" that is subscribed to and made available by individuals in the educational system that possess the technical expertise to realize the inherent value that such a system would be able to provide (Rogers, 1995).

A large school district in the central part of the United States--a district of approximately 87,000 students, attending 165 schools--agreed to pilot the NCS software product ParentCONNECTxp for the 2000-2001 school year. The pilot took place at a newer high school serving approximately 1,500 students in grades nine through twelve in the west corridor of the district. The pilot project followed the district-approved process, which included piloting the web-based program for one year at a district school. At the end of the year, a feasibility survey was conducted with the staff of the school, and a survey was conducted amongst participating parents and guardians. The data were analyzed, and the resulting report has been made accessible to all schools in the district. The challenge of this pilot was to convince the parental population of the advantages of this type of communication and the value that timely information could provide for them in their quest to be effective parents and provide an adequate support system for their students.

The results of the surveys were very positive, and suggestions were reflective and reasonable. Parents valued being able to access timely student data on-line and felt that it was a positive step in helping students avoid pitfalls and be successful in their academics. Parents who received e-mail notifications for unexcused student absences, felt that early intervention was critical and beneficial in addressing student attendance issues. A recommendation has been generated, addressing the possibility of implementing the product district-wide.

This poster session will illustrate the results of the feasibility study and the parent survey and will address the possibilities and the restraints that accompany the accessibility of student information via the Internet, as well as address issues directly related to the diffusion of the software product amongst parents. This session will also address the structure of the socio-economic system, communication channels, social order and their association with the "s" curve, as well as the implementation of a new innovation (Rogers, 1995). Also included in the session will be technical information about installation issues, security concerns, hardware requirements, and software performance. CD's will be available that contain a PowerPoint presentation illustrating points of interest for those who might be considering implementing such a program.

Rogers, E. M. (1995). *Diffusion of innovations*. New York: Free Press.
