
An Evaluation Of A Class Web Site (CWS) Tool To Increase Parental Involvement In Student Academic Life

**by Victor Aluise
Teachers College, Columbia University &
ETS, New Product Development**

**NECC
July 7, 2006**

Study Overview

Study Purpose:

To identify teacher and parent “usage scenarios” that coincide with reports of increased parental awareness or involvement as a result of CWS tool usage

Research Problem:

- Parental involvement (PI) in child and adolescent education has been empirically shown to generally benefit children’s learning and school success
- Much depends on attitudes and behaviors of schools, teachers, and parents
- Various technologies have been used to facilitate parental involvement (telecom, email messaging systems, Web sites)
- Lack of research on usage patterns and perceived effectiveness of using Web Sites to facilitate school-home connections

Central Research Question

“What are the use conditions of a Class Web Site (CWS) tool by teachers and parents that coincide with reports by either or both parties of increased parental awareness or involvement?”

Sub questions:

Sub question 1. What are the **profiles and usage-scenarios of *teachers*** who consider the CWS tool an effective means of increasing parental involvement? What factors helped or hindered teachers in becoming active users?

Sub question 2. What are the **profiles and usage-scenarios of *parents*** who consider the CWS tool an effective means of increasing parental involvement? What factors helped or hindered parents in becoming active users?

Sub question 3. How did teachers expect the CWS tool might facilitate greater parental involvement, and were such **teacher expectations fulfilled** as a result of tool usage?

Methodology

Type of Research:

Statistical study research design was employed using online surveys

- Study I: range of PreK-12 teacher-users.
 - Total of 15,647 teachers contacted
 - Respondents = 746, from 50 States plus PR
 - Teacher profiles, usage/behavior patterns, factors at work, perceptions of increased PI
- Study II: random sample of parent-users
 - Total of 3,712 parents contacted
 - Respondents = 123, from across country
 - Parent profiles, usage/behavior patterns, factors at work, expectations for increased PI, reports of increased PI
- Study III: follow-up on teacher-users
 - Clarifying PI behaviors, teacher expectations for increased PI, fulfillment of teacher expectations

Data Analysis

- **Analysis I: Teacher Usage and Perceptions of Increased PI**
 - Using data from Study I
 - Teacher traits and external factors associated with active usage and reports of effective usage and increased parental awareness and involvement
 - Frequency tabulations (i.e., Chi-Square tests); significance level of .05
- **Analysis II: Parent Usage and Reports of Increased PI**
 - Using data from Study II
 - Parent traits and external factors associated with active usage and reports of effective usage and increased awareness and involvement
 - Frequency tabulations (i.e., Chi-Square tests); significance level of .05
- **Analysis III: Teacher Expectations for Increasing PI Via CWS Usage, and the Fulfillment of Expectations:**
 - Using data from Study III.
 - Teacher expectations, and reports of parent and student behaviors that fulfilled or dashed expectations
 - Frequency tabulations (i.e., Chi-Square tests); significance level of .05
- Results of Studies I, II, and III were compared to determine if teachers and parents had similar expectations and usage scenarios regarding CWS usage

Results: Teacher Usage & Perceptions of PI

- Majority of teachers reported tool was effective in increasing parental *awareness* of class requirements and activities, regardless activity level.
- However teachers were less convinced that CWS usage actually increased parental *involvement*. (Consequence of “home-transmission” model?)
- Teacher usage goals differed by grade level.
 - Grade 4-8 teachers -- to consistently communicate homework requirements to parents – seemed to match the involvement goals of Grade 4-8 parents.
 - PreK-3 teachers – to help parents feel more connected to and aware of class activities – did not seem to match the involvement goals of PreK-3 parents.
 - PreK-3 teachers did not perceive parents to be active visitors of their CWS, possibly weakening the parent-teacher feedback loop and contributing to teacher reports of lesser involvement.

Results: Teacher Usage & Perceptions of PI

- Teacher tool usage differed by grade level.
 - Grade 4-8 teachers were most active, posting *homework* assignments on a daily to weekly basis.
 - PreK-3 teachers were less active, posting *class announcements* on a weekly to monthly basis.
- The most active teachers (across grade levels) used the tool to communicate “*assessment critical*” information like homework and progress reports on a daily to weekly basis
- Majority of teachers (across grade levels) reported that CWS tool was a more effective means of school-home communication than alternative methods, such as send-home letters.
 - Grade 4-8 teachers were in stronger agreement, compared to PreK-3 teachers.

Results: Factors Influencing Teacher Usage

- Teachers who started using the CWS tool because parents requested a more consistent communication method were among the most active updaters.
- Teachers who used the tool from school (rather than home) were more active, updating their CWS on a daily basis.
- Daily and weekly teacher-users had a history of using the Internet for communication and online professional development.
- Surprisingly, analysis revealed that years of teaching service, technology profile, and teaching approach did not make a significant difference in activity level.
- Ease of CWS set-up and usage was not a major factor in teacher activity rate.

Results: Parent Usage & Perceptions

- Majority of parents indicated that using the CWS tool increased *both* their awareness of class requirements and involvement in class or school activities.
- PreK-8 parents reported visiting the CWS on a weekly to monthly basis – more frequently than teachers reported updating their sites.
- Parent usage did not divide along grade levels as clearly as teacher usage.
 - PreK-3 and 4-8 parents alike found it most helpful to view homework assignments.
 - PreK-3 and 4-8 parents wanted more frequent and personalized communication with teachers about class requirements and student performance via the CWS tool.
- Parents across grade levels reported that using the CWS tool was a more effective means of communication than alternate methods.
 - Grade 4-8 parents were in stronger agreement, compared to PreK-3 parents.
- Parents who started using the tool because they wanted to connect with school were in stronger agreement that CWS usage lead to increased PA and PI.

Results: Teacher & Parent Expectations Differed

- Teachers and parents seem to have different *expectations for the type of parental involvement* that should result from using the CWS tool.
- Teacher expectations differed by grade level
 - PreK-3 teachers wanted parents to feel more *connected* to their classroom and become more aware of class requirements, which involved reading with their child at home.
 - Grade 4-8 teachers wanted parents to become more aware of class requirements and actually *help students* become better prepared for class.
- Teachers did not expect increases in class/school visits or volunteerism.
- Parents wanted to actively check homework assignments but did not effectively use this information to help students become better prepared for class.
 - A common complaint among parents was that teachers were not updating their CWS frequently enough with helpful information. This was particularly true for PreK-3 parents who tended to want teachers to regularly post homework assignments, instead of general class announcements.
- Differences in goals between PreK-3 teachers and parents probably lead to dissatisfaction in both groups regarding CWS usage to effectively increase parental involvement.
 - Sizable number of PreK-3 teachers reported that their expectations for increased parental awareness were not met.

Study Limitations

- Inherent limitations of a quantitative study
- Study design with commercial entity – not “purely” for educational research purposes
- Respondents were teachers and parents who were already engaged in using Web technology to improve parent-teacher communication and increase parent involvement.
- Could not match specific teachers to their parents. Teachers and parents treated as two separate groups; could not directly correlate results.
- Viewpoint of administrators was not represented. It is unclear how school and district administrators encouraged or discouraged CWS usage. Was it because of concerns over security of online communications, student privacy, technology platforms, or parental involvement policies?

Implications for CWS Tool Enhancements

- Invest in features that:
 - Enable communication of formative assessments to drive usage/visits
 - Enable PreK-3 teachers to better communicate student progress to parents; current CWS features are insufficient for primary classrooms
 - Remind / drive teachers to update Class Web Page content
 - Remind / drive parents to view Class Web Pages – when teachers update pages with new info
 - Enable parents to receive more personalized interaction with the teacher (as accomplished via face-to-face meeting and phone calls)
- Ensure 100% uptime availability of CWS tool to retain teachers without strong initial commitment

Implications for Future Research

- Further exploration of the discontinuity of goals and expectations between parents and teachers concerning increased parental involvement.
- Types of parent-teacher communications and *supports* for parents required to shift to a curriculum enrichment or partnership model.
- How interactive media and technology can be used to move toward a curriculum enrichment or partnership model.
- How interactive technology can be used to establish an open, two-way dialog with families while also keeping the management of parent-teacher communications and supports manageable.
- How technology might impact parent role construct and sense of efficacy in helping children with schoolwork.

Appendix

Guiding Hypotheses

“Cycle of Parent-Teacher Usage”

The more teachers updated their Class Web Site (CWS) -- and perceived that parents were actively visiting the site -- the more teachers would continue updating the site.

Cycle of “teacher updating → leading-to-parent-feedback → leading-to-teacher-updating” would ultimately result in perceptions shared by both teachers and parents that the CWS was enhancing or extending parental involvement in student academic life.

If teachers did not update their CWS ***frequently enough*** with information of ***relevance*** to parents, then the cycle would weaken or break. Conversely if teachers perceived that parents were not visiting the CWS, then the cycle would weaken or break.

Guiding Hypotheses (cont'd)

Hypotheses relating to teacher usage:

- New teachers (within 1-5 years of teaching) would be more active users
- Grade 3-6 teachers would be more active users than PreK-2 teachers because of homework load, and grade 7-8 teachers would find the CWS tool too limited in functionality to be useful
- Technology-savvy teachers and those with a more innovative teaching approach would be more active than traditional teachers
- Time-savings would be the primary factor compelling active teacher usage
- Teachers whose schools or districts recommended or required usage of the CWS tool would be more active users.

Guiding Hypotheses (cont'd)

Hypotheses relating to parent visitation:

- Parents of students in grades 3-6 would be more active visitors because of homework load
- Parents who found relevant information on the CWS would be more active visitors
- Technology-savvy parents would be more comfortable using online technology and therefore the CWS tool
- Time-savings would be the primary factor compelling parents to actively use the CWS tool
- Parents would access the CWS from work (rather than home) because of speedier Internet connections
- Students at home would *initiate* CWS visits, logging on and showing parents the CWS