

The Communication Puzzle: How can we make parents feel more connected to their child's classroom?

What are effective ways to provide ongoing parent communication
in order to connect parents to their child's classroom?

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Description of Teaching Context.....	3
Rationale.....	4
Literature and/or Experts.....	6
Wonderings and Sub-questions.....	9
Inquiry vs. Improvement Project.....	10
Inquiry Plan.....	10
Data Collection.....	12
Data Analysis.....	14
Claims.....	16
Conclusion.....	19
New Wonderings.....	21
References.....	22
Appendix A.....	23
Appendix B.....	24
Appendix C.....	25
Appendix D.....	26
Appendix E.....	27
Appendix F.....	28
Appendix G.....	29
Appendix H.....	30
Appendix I.....	31
Appendix J.....	32
Appendix K.....	33
Appendix L.....	34
Appendix M.....	35
Appendix N.....	42
Appendix O.....	43
Appendix P.....	44
Appendix Q.....	47
Appendix R.....	48

ABSTRACT

Creating a classroom community is an important part of each teacher's job. Connecting parents into this community is essential, but what is the best method to communicate with parents in order for them to feel connected to their child's classroom? Through implementing the communication methods of weekly news briefs and newsletters, as well as adding pictures to our classroom website on a daily basis, I studied the connection levels that the parents of my students felt with our classroom.

Description of Teaching Context

I am an intern in a fourth grade classroom at Boalsburg Elementary School in the State College Area School District. Boalsburg Elementary is one of ten elementary schools that filter into two middle schools and one high school. Boalsburg Elementary is a sister school to Panorama Village Elementary School. Panorama Village is an elementary school in the district that includes kindergarten through third grade. After third grade, those students are filtered into Boalsburg Elementary, which includes grades four and five.

My inquiry project focused on increasing home-school communication with the parents of my twenty-two fourth grade students at Boalsburg Elementary School. My class, which consists of twenty-two students, included twelve girls and ten boys. Twenty-one of my students are Caucasian and one student is African American. Although none of my students are in the English Language Learner program at Boalsburg Elementary, three of my students primarily speak Russian at home. All of my students live with either one or

both of their parents. Some students also have grandparents and/or their parent's significant other living with them.

There are a variety of careers within the group of parents of the students in my classroom. Some households have two parents who are working, and others have only one parent who works. Some parents are also students at Penn State University. Despite careers and schooling, the majority of my students' parents attended parent/teacher conferences in the fall. Although no parents come into our classroom to help out, about five parents signed up at the beginning of the year to send in snacks for classroom parties and special occasions.

After school, some of my students go straight home, while others go to after school care. About five students in my class go to the local YMCA after school program.

Rationale

As an intern in a fourth grade classroom, one of my top priorities for the school year was to maintain a community within my classroom. To do this, I started each school day by having a Morning Meeting with my students. During Morning Meetings, everyone was greeted, appointed students shared something, and each week I introduced a new character trait to my students. I thought my classroom community was going well until I realized that I was missing an essential part of it. I had not made any effort to include parents into the classroom community that I had worked so hard to establish.

I had met most of my students' parents during a Back to School night at the beginning of the school year, and then spoke to many of the parents at parent/teacher conferences in the fall. Those were the only times that I had any communication with my students' parents. I just assumed that the parents did not want to know what I had to say because I was just an intern, and not the primary teacher in the classroom.

Although I did not communicate with the parents very often, my mentor teacher frequently communicated with parents through e-mails. She also created a classroom website which included a calendar and a place to keep track of homework assignments. I noticed that when parents were in the school they would speak to my teacher, but they would just give me a smile and say "Hi!" I wanted more than that. I realized that I could not be upset that parents did not communicate with me because I had never opened the door for communication.

It was important for me to do my teacher inquiry on parent communication because it was something with which I did not have any experience. I did not want to enter my first year of teaching without having communicated with parents and not knowing where to even start. I wanted to do my inquiry on finding the most effective way to provide on-going communication with parents while connecting them to my classroom at the same time. I knew that I did not feel very connected to the parents of my students, so I could assume that they did not feel very connected to me either. I believed that in order to have a true classroom community all members of the classroom, including parents, had to be a part of the community.

How will this affect my teaching and future teaching?

I believe that parents are just as important as teachers in the teaching and learning process. I want parents to know what is going on in their child's classroom and I want them to feel comfortable to speak with me whenever they need to. Even though I want parents to be connected to my classroom, I know that life can get hectic and time is at a minimum for everyone. This inquiry will help me to see how I can effectively provide ongoing communication in order to help the parents feel more connected, without communicating too much or not enough. Testing out three methods of communication will help me to narrow down what media of communication is most effective for the parents of my students.

Knowing what works for my classroom this year will give me a place to start with communication when I am the sole teacher of a classroom. Although each parent is different and each year my classroom community will be different as well, I will have had experience with parent communication through my inquiry, which will help me to approach communication in the future.

Literature and/or Experts

“The more comprehensive and well planned the **partnership** between school and home, the higher the student achievement” (Henderson and Berla, 1995, p. 14-16).

The reason that parents and teachers communicate is because of the children with which they both have a connection. While teachers are the experts on curriculum and teaching practices, parents are the experts on their children. When parents and teachers see each other as partners, they are able to work together in order to establish the best ways possible to make the each student successful.

How can parents and teachers form a partnership? The first step is communication. According to an article by Kevin J. Swick (2003), “In relation to parent-teacher and family-school-community partnerships, communication is the critical factor” (p. 275). It is impossible to think that parents and teachers can work together without establishing a routine of ongoing communication.

In our fast paced world, we do not always have time to communicate as much as we would like to. Communication does not have to be time consuming or lengthy. In fact, Brenda Power (1999) wrote in an article in Instructor Magazine that “Brief, well-designed communications will be read by parents -there are few better vehicles for getting their attention” (p. 30). Just as teachers may not have the time at the end of the day to write out a lengthy letter, parents may not have the time to read it. Quick reminders can be helpful for parents to stay informed, even when they do not have a great amount of time to set aside for communicating with their child’s teacher.

While quick forms of communication get parents’ attention, it is essential that the information being sent to parents is personally relevant and connects parents to the

instruction going on within the classroom. Indiana University researcher, Carol Ames (1993), says that by including this type of information, “parents will become knowledgeable partners, gain confidence in the school, establish positive beliefs about their child as a learner, and foster an interest in their child’s learning and progress” (p. 3).

Including this type of information is also important for parents to be able to build trust with the teacher and the school. “Trust-building is essential to having authentic, meaningful, and growth-promoting communication” (Swick, 2003, p. 275). Without trust, there will be no connection between the parent and the school. Both parents and teachers spend great amounts of time with the children that connect them. It is important for the parents and teachers to establish trust through their partnership not only to have a parent to school connection, but to also have an impact on the children that connect them.

While students’ achievement has to do with much more than just parent involvement and communication, a parent’s connection to the school does play a part in student achievement. The National PTA (2000) stated that:

“The most accurate predictors of student achievement in school are not family income or social status, but the extent to which the family creates a home environment that encourages learning, communicates high yet reasonable expectations for the child’s achievement, and becomes involved in the child’s education at school” (p.11-12).

A teacher can help a home environment encourage learning by including information about the instruction going on in the classroom through his/her ongoing communication

with parents. Parents cannot always rely on their children to explain what is going on in school, and they should not have to rely on their children to do so. Ongoing parent-teacher communication will ensure that parents are well informed about what is happening in their child's classroom, as well as open up the opportunity for a parent-teacher partnership.

Wonderings and Sub-questions

Main Wondering:

What are effective ways to provide ongoing parent communication in order to connect parents to their child's classroom?

Sub-questions:

- How often do parents want to hear from teachers?
- Do parents prefer to be communicated with through online sources or paper sources?
- What kinds of classroom information would parents like to know about?
- Do parents want to receive newsletters or just telephone calls/e-mails?
- Do parents actually access our classroom website?
- Do the parents feel more connected to their child's classroom when they have ongoing communication with the teacher? If so, what types of communication do they appreciate receiving?
- Will parents access the classroom website more often if daily pictures are posted?
- Do parents' preferences of communication change once they have experienced different types of communication?

Inquiry vs. Improvement Project

I believe that my wonderings are a part of inquiry and not an improvement project because I do not know the answer to them. As a pre-service teacher, I have had limited interaction and communication with parents, so I am unsure of the most effective communication method to use with parents in order to help them feel connected. Since I have not had much experience with parent communication, I will not be improving anything that I have already begun. Although I recognize that my findings from my inquiry will not pertain to each group of parents that I communicate with in the future, I hope that my findings will show me what methods of communication work to make the parents of my students this year feel most connected to their child's classroom. I also hope that this inquiry will give me a place to start from when I begin to open up communication with parents in my future classrooms.

Inquiry Plan

To begin my inquiry, I sat down with my mentor and PDA and discussed possible methods of communication that I could attempt to use with the parents and developed a timeline of when I would begin each part of my inquiry. After determining which methods to use, I sent home a letter to the parents (Appendix A) explaining my teaching inquiry so that they would know what to expect from me in the next few months. In this letter, I explained what inquiry was and why I was doing my inquiry on parent communication. I told them which methods of communication I would be using and laid out a time frame for them. I also sent home my first survey to the parents when I sent home this letter (Appendix B).

During the following week, I received surveys back from the parents and reviewed them. I also began my first method of communication during this week. I sent out my first news brief to parents, which listed important dates (Appendix F). I wanted to begin my news brief first because the students had off for Spring Break the following week. I thought that the news brief would be a good way for the parents to remember important dates, such as the PSSA testing dates, over the week-long break.

When we began school after the break, I sent out my second news brief (Appendix G), along with the second survey to the parents (Appendix C). I also added a counter onto our classroom's website during this week. The counter tracked how many people viewed the website. Each night, I entered how many views total the website had and recorded it in an Excel spreadsheet (Appendix K).

The following week, I received the surveys back from parents and began comparing the results from my second survey to the results from the first survey. I also began my second method of communication. On Friday, March 30, I sent out the first newsletter to the parents (Appendix H). I used some of the feedback from the second survey to decide what kind of information to put in the newsletters. I sent out my second newsletter on April 5, 2007 (Appendix I).

After implementing my first two methods of communication, on April 8, 2007, I began the last phase of communication with the parents. I posted pictures from the school day

onto the classroom website after the school day was over (Appendix M). I also sent an e-mail to the eighteen parents that my mentor had e-mail addresses for, to remind them that pictures had been posted on the classroom website (Appendix J). I included a link within the e-mail for parents to be easily directed to the website. I added pictures four out of the five school days during that week.

On Friday, April 13, 2007 I sent home my final survey to the parents, along with a final letter of appreciation. Although I had not added pictures for two consecutive weeks at this point, I decided to send out the surveys because the parents had been able to access the communication for an entire school week (Appendix D). I continued to add pictures during the second week of this method's implementation.

During the second week of this method's implementation I received the final surveys back from the parents. At this time, I compared the results for the third survey and then compared those results to the results of the first and second surveys.

Data Collection

Throughout my inquiry I collected data in two ways. One way, was through a series of three surveys, and the second way was by observing how many views our classroom website had each day.

I sent home the first survey to parents on February 27, 2007 (Appendix B). This survey was meant to collect baseline data for my inquiry, as well as to supply me with

information about how my students' parents felt about communication. In this survey I asked the parents if they had access to the Internet. This would help me understand how many parents would be able to access the classroom website when I implemented the website method of communication. In order to get an understanding for how my students' parents felt about communication, I asked them whether they would like to hear about their child, the whole class, or both, as well as how often they would like to have access to communication. I collected baseline data by asking the parents to rate their connection to the classroom (one being least connected, five being most connected) and to rate their preference of each method of communication that I would be implementing (one being the most preferred, three being the least preferred).

The second survey was sent out to the parents on April 5, 2007 (Appendix C). My purpose for this survey was to be able to compare how connected the parents felt after receiving two news briefs compared to how they had originally felt. I also wanted to hear what the parents thought about the news brief, as well as how often they access the classroom website, in order to prepare for the implementation of the website method of communication. I asked parents in this survey to rate how connected they felt to their child's classroom (one being least connected, five being most connected), and to also rate whether or not the news brief made them feel more connected to the classroom. In order to learn more about the parents' feelings toward the news brief, I also posed an open-ended question to them, asking what they liked/disliked about the method of communication.

I sent out the third survey to the parents on April 13, 2007 (Appendix D). I wanted this survey to be about all of the methods of communication, in order to obtain some culminating data. One question on this survey pertained only to the website. I asked the parents if they accessed the website more often when pictures were included. The remainder of the final survey focused on the inquiry as a whole. I once again asked the parents to rate how connected they felt to the classroom. In this survey, I also asked the parents which specific method of communication made them feel most connected and why. Just as I had asked the parents to rate their preferred method of communication on the first survey, I asked them to rate this once again on the final survey and to elaborate by explaining why they chose what they did as their most preferred.

Aside from surveys, I also collected data by tracking how many times our classroom website was viewed each day (Appendix L). Between the hours of 8:30pm and 9:30pm each weeknight, I entered how many total views the website had for the day into an Excel spreadsheet. I was able to compare how many times the website was viewed each day, and able to connect the number of views with what method of communication I was implementing (Appendix K).

Data Analysis

Surveys

In order to organize my data from my first survey, I wrote down each question and the answer choices. Then, I went through each survey from the parents and put a tally mark next to their answers. After all of the surveys were tallied, I found the percentages for

each answer and entered them into a Word document (Appendix Q). I used the same method to organize my data for my second and third surveys. I also recorded the answers to the open ended questions.

After finding percentages for each answer on the three surveys, I put the percentages for the connection ratings in a table, so that I would be able to easily compare how the connection levels changed over time (Appendix Q).

I also created two tables, which compared the percentage of parents who most preferred each method of communication as well as who least preferred each method from the first and final surveys. This allowed me to compare the two and see if there were any changes from the parents' initial thoughts to what they found they most preferred at the end of my inquiry.

In order to analyze the open ended responses in my final survey, I recorded them together in a word document with my final survey findings, in order to look for commonalities among them. I recorded responses for each method of communication in their own section, so that it would be easy for me to compare them (Appendix P).

Website View Counter

To analyze the data for the website views, I looked at the table that I had created, which listed how many total views the website had for each day. I listed on the table when a

new method of communication started, as well as when surveys were sent home, in order to see if there was a correlation between communication and website views.

Claims

I. In my 4th grade classroom, the parents prefer to communicate through a newsletter.

II. Although the parents of the students in my 4th grade classroom enjoy the class website, they need reminders to access it.

III. The parents of my 4th grade students like to have important reminders to post in their houses.

IV. The parents of my 4th grade students will access the classroom website more often if pictures of their children are included on the website.

V. Ongoing communication with the parents of my 4th grade students makes the parents feel more connected to our classroom.

I. In my 4th grade classroom, my students' parents feel most connected to their children's classroom by receiving a weekly newsletter.

- On the final survey, 63% of parents said that the newsletter made them feel most connected to their child's classroom (Appendix P).
- On both the first and last surveys, the majority of parents rated the weekly newsletter as their most preferred method of communication (Appendices N and P). On the first survey, 47 % of parents said they most preferred the newsletter, and on the final survey, 56% of parents said they most preferred the newsletter.

- Parents commented on why they felt so connected through the newsletter, saying:
 - “This I will always read.”
 - “Seemed to have the most information.”
 - “I could discuss with my child what he has been doing in the classroom.”
 - “Provided info that was more specific so I could ask my daughter questions.”
 - “Because it tells you what the whole class is doing.”

II. Although the parents of the students in my 4th grade classroom enjoy the class

website, they need reminders to access it.

- When I first began my inquiry, the classroom website had an average of 3.4 views per day. When my second survey was sent to the parents, which mentioned the website, the website had an average of 5.4 views per day. When I e-mailed the parents a link to the website, it had 22 views for the day and averaged 12.2 views for the remainder of my inquiry.
- Parents made the following comments in the open ended responses to the final survey:
 - “The link that you e-mailed encouraged me to go to the website.”
 - “I will not always check the website, but the website is great.”
 - “I may forget to check the website, but if there is a newsletter in the folder regularly, it’s very helpful to read and know what is going on.
 - “Website, I may not visit regularly, unless you e-mail me every so often.
- A parent e-mail that I received stated that she loved the photos that were on the website, but she just need to remember to keep looking (Appendix R).

III. The parents of my 4th grade students like to have important reminders to post in

their houses.

- In the open ended responses of my 2nd survey, 29% of parents commented that the news brief was good for reminders and that they liked to hang it on their refrigerator (Appendix O).

- In the open ended responses of my 3rd survey a parent commented (Appendix P):
 - “Reminders are helpful and good to know what he will be working on.”
 - I most prefer news briefs because they include, “Quick dates and important information that is postable on the fridge.”

IV. The parents of my 4th grade students will access the classroom website more often if pictures of their children are included on the website.

- When I first began my inquiry, the classroom website had an average of 3.4 views per day. When my second survey was sent to the parents, which mentioned the website, the website had an average of 5.4 views per day. Once pictures were added onto the website, it had an average of 12.2 views per day.
- On my final survey, 81% of parents said that they access the classroom website more often, now that there are pictures added (Appendix O).

V. Ongoing communication with the parents of my 4th grade students makes the parents feel more connected to our classroom.

- After completing my inquiry, 13% of parents felt most connected to the classroom, as opposed to only 0% of parents rating themselves as most connected in my baseline data (Appendix Q).
- After completing my inquiry, 89% of my parents felt a level 3 connection to my classroom or higher, as opposed to only 73% on the first survey (Appendix Q).
- After completing my inquiry, half of the parents reported feeling a level 4 or 5 connection to the classroom, as opposed to only 13% on the first survey (Appendix Q).

Conclusion

Although I know that the preferences of my students' parents will vary from year to year, my general claims will be helpful for me as a future teacher. This inquiry has brought to the forefront of my mind how important communicating with parents is. After completing this inquiry, I now know that I need to start communication early and continue to communicate regularly throughout the school year. This not only helps the parents to feel more connected to their child's classroom, but it will also create a comfortable communication between home and school.

At the start of this inquiry, I knew that communication was important but I was dreading the thought of spending all of my time creating elaborate websites and newsletters. I have learned that communication does not have to take a lot of time to create or to receive, and it can still be effective and meaningful. It took me about ten minutes at the end of each day to upload a few pictures to the classroom website and write a caption about the pictures for the day. The weekly newsletter took about 20 minutes to create. If I were to do both in the future, it would only take about an hour of my time per week to create meaningful forms of communication for the parents of my students.

Just as I do not want to spend all of my time focusing on parent communication, parents do not want to spend all day reading lengthy letters. Parents want to receive the most pertinent and specific information as quickly as possible. Learning this brought me a sigh of relief, knowing that although I need to supply the parents with important information, they do not want detailed reports each week.

Prior to this inquiry, I assumed that my students' parents knew how to contact me and knew that they could access classroom information on the classroom website. I have learned from this inquiry to not assume that my students' parents know everything. Just because something is mentioned at Back to School night at the beginning of the school year, it does not mean that the parents will remember it. They need reminders and they need the teacher to create a comfortable wave of communication so that they will feel comfortable contacting him/her to get information or talk about different situations.

I assumed that communicating with parents over the course of my inquiry would make them feel more connected to the classroom, but I did not realize how much more connected I would feel to the parents. It feels good knowing that the parents understand that I am an important part of their child's classroom and that they know what I am teaching their son or daughter. I was also surprised to see the number of e-mails that I received from parents, thanking me for the website pictures or asking me clarifying questions about projects. As an intern in the classroom, I never tried to communicate with my students' parents because I knew that my mentor did that. I am pleased by the feeling of pride that I have in myself, knowing that I have reached out to parents and that many of them have reached back to me.

New Wonderings

This teacher inquiry has created many new wonderings through my constant reflections. I communicated both daily and weekly in this inquiry, but I wonder how would parents' levels of connection to their child's classroom change depending on the frequency of communication? Also, how much information is too much? When does it get exhausting to check a website to look for classroom news and updates?

Our world has become increasingly technologically advanced, but does everyone appreciate that? I posted pictures to our classroom website daily as a method of communication, but would parents be interested in viewing more things such as homework assignments and classroom newsletters online?

Although these new wonderings pertain to furthering this inquiry, I also wonder how my students feel after this inquiry. Do the students feel more connected to the classroom? Are the students excited about the communication? Do the students access the website to see the classroom pictures? Is there more discussion about what is going on at school when there is ongoing communication? These are all great wonderings that I hope to find the answers to in the future.

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Appendix A

February 27, 2007

Dear Parents,

Many of you have already met me at either Back to School Night or at your child's conference this fall. My name is Tricia Kreseski and I am the intern in your child's classroom this year. As I am getting closer to graduation and the end of the school year with your child, I am realizing that I have not had much communication with you throughout my internship. I believe that parent communication is a vital part of each student's success, so I have chosen to do an inquiry project on this topic, which I will present at an Inquiry Conference in late April. In order to learn more about parent communication and which methods of communication are most effective, I will be trying a few different methods from now through June. I will also be asking you to answer three surveys throughout that time, so that I can get an idea of how you are feeling about the communication methods. The first survey is attached to this letter.

After collecting data from the first survey, I will begin trying different methods of communication. For the first two weeks of my inquiry I will be communicating through a news brief, which lists weekly reminders and upcoming events. Then, I will be communicating through a newsletter, highlighting what we are doing in the classroom, for two weeks. Finally, I will update our classroom website to include daily pictures of classroom activities for two weeks. After I have collected all of my data, I will continue with whichever method of communication that I find to be most effective.

Thank you so much for your support throughout my inquiry project!

Sincerely,

Tricia Kreseski

Appendix B

Parent Communication Survey 1 of 3

***Please return this survey to Miss K. by Friday, March 2nd!!!**

Please circle one choice for each question below.

1.) Do you have the access to the internet at home?

YES

NO

2.) How often would you like to have access to communication?

DAILY

WEEKLY

MONTHLY

AT CONFERENCES

3.) Would you prefer to hear about what the whole class is doing, what just your child is doing, or both?

WHOLE CLASS

MY CHILD

BOTH

4.) How connected do you feel to what is going on in your child's classroom?
(Rate 1 through 5, 5 being the most connected, 1 being the least connected)

1

2

3

4

5

5.) Rate in order of preference, #1 being most preferred, for each communication method below.

___ News Brief (Weekly list of upcoming events and important dates)

___ Newsletter (Weekly letter about what the students have been doing in the classroom.)

___ Website Update (View daily photos of activities and lessons being done in the classroom.)

Appendix C

Parent Communication Survey 2 of 3

*Please return this survey to Miss K. by Tuesday, March 27

Please circle one choice for each question below.

1.) How connected do you currently feel to what is going on in your child's classroom? (Rate 1 through 5, 5 being the most connected, 1 being the least connected)

1 2 3 4 5

2.) Does receiving a weekly news brief make you feel more connected to your child's classroom?

1 2 3 4 5

3.) How often do you access the classroom website?

Daily 1-3 times per week Occasionally Never

****The following questions are open ended.**

3.) What do you like/dislike about the weekly news brief as a form of communication?

4.) Is there a method of communication other than news brief, newsletter, or website update that you would prefer?

Appendix D

Parent Communication Survey 3 of 3

*Please return this survey to Miss K. by Tuesday, April 17

1.) How connected do you currently feel to what is going on in your child's classroom? (Rate 1 through 5, 5 being the most connected, 1 being the least connected)

1 2 3 4 5

2.) Which method of communication has made you feel most connected to your child's classroom?

News Brief

Newsletter

Pictures on Website

3.) Why did this method of communication make you feel most connected?

4.) Do you access the classroom website more often, now that there are pictures to view?

Yes

No

5.) Please rate the methods of communication by your preference (1 meaning you most preferred it, 3 meaning you least preferred it)

___News Brief

___Newsletter

___Pictures on Website

6.) Why do you most prefer that method of communication?

Appendix E

April 13, 2007

Dear Parents,

Thank you so much for your participation in my inquiry project. Your feedback through the surveys that you have completed, have helped me in many ways. Through this inquiry, I have been able to learn a lot about our classroom and communication with my students' parents this year, and I hope to be able to use what I have learned through this inquiry in my future years as a teacher.

After analyzing the final survey, I will try to see what the most effective way of providing on-going parent communication in order to help you feel more connected to your child's classroom is. I will be presenting my findings at an Inquiry Conference on Saturday, April 28. Although my inquiry project will have ended, my communication will not. I will continue communicating through the most effective means possible for the remainder of the school year. I will keep you posted on my findings and with what method of communication I will continue to use.

Once again, I thank you for all of your patience and feedback as I have been conducting my inquiry research. I look forward to meeting with you during conferences on April 26 & 27!

Sincerely,

Tricia Kreseski

Room 24 News Brief March 8, 2007

March 9: No School

March 12-16: No School--Spring Break

March 19-23: We will be starting our new Science and Social Studies units! Our new science unit is Energy and Electricity. Our new Social Studies unit is Festival of the Arts!

**The students will also be taking the PSSA tests during the week of March 19-23.

Room 24 News Brief March 23, 2007

March 29: 9:35am-12:45pm
Field Trip to State College Area High
School to see Seussical the Musical!
**Remember your bagged lunch!

March 30: 9:30am-11:00am
Field Trip to Eisenhower Auditorium on
the Penn State University campus!

April 6: No School

ENERGY: What is it?

This week we jumped right into our new science unit, Energy & Electricity! On Tuesday & Wednesday we thought about what we already knew about energy and developed an understanding for the definition of energy. We learned that energy is the ability to do work. On Thursday, we discussed potential and kinetic energy and worked in groups to find examples of these types of energy in our Exploring Energy books.

What is coming up in science?
At the end of next week we will be starting the design technology part of our unit. The students of room 24 are very creative, so I think they will have a great time working in groups to design machines that do specific tasks!

Festival of the Arts!

We began our new social studies unit, Festival of the Arts, last week. After discussing what we thought art was, we realized that art is a broad term that includes so many things! During our unit we will follow a timeline from the time of Cave Paintings up until today. We will study painters, sculptors, musicians, composers, and do our own projects on our favorite authors!

On Monday, we learned about Cave Paintings with Mrs. Hipp and on Tuesday Miss K. taught us about Hieroglyphics. We saw the alphabet written in hieroglyphics (an Egyptian form of writing) and wrote our names using them!

SEUSSICAL THE MUSICAL!

On Thursday morning, we went to State High to watch the high school students in their production of Seussical the Musical! The musical was fantastic and everyone enjoyed it very much! The students of room 24 were so well behaved and they represented Boalsburg Elementary very well. The stars of the play actually came into our classroom last month for

Dr. Seuss's birthday and read some Dr. Seuss books to us! It was exciting to get to watch them perform the musical after we had met them!

The musical fit right in with our Festival of the Arts unit! On Friday we went to Eisenhower Auditorium, on the Penn State campus, to see Be-Bop!

Dates for your Calendar:

Friday, April 6
No School

Tuesday, April 17
Band & Orchestra
Concert 7:30pm

Wednesday, April 18
E. B Lewis visits our school!

Monday, April 9
Spring Pictures

April 23-29
Turn TV off Week!

April 26 & 27
Conferences

Appendix I
Thursday, April 5

Dates for your Calendar:

Friday, April 6
No School

Tuesday, April 17
Band & Orchestra
Concert 7:30pm

Wednesday, April 18
E. B Lewis visits
our school!

Monday, April 9
Spring Pictures

April 23-29
Turn TV off
Week!

April 26 & 27
Conferences

Potential & Kinetic Energy

Potential and kinetic energy has been our focus in science this week. The students did experiments on Tuesday where they were able to observe potential and kinetic energy. After doing the experiments, the students were able to cross of some of the questions that they had originally been wondering at the start of the unit.

Next week the students will begin building machines that require potential and kinetic energy. Miss K. and Mrs. Hipp will be busy taking a lot of pictures to include in the students' podcasts. The students will begin creating their podcasts after they finish building their machines.

Festival of the Arts!

We had such a great time exploring art this week! On Tuesday, we discovered the Middle Ages as we learned about stained glass and created our own stained glass windows. During Wednesday's lesson, we entered the Renaissance time period as we learned about Leonardo Da Vinci. We learned that he was not only a painter, but he was also a sculptor, musician, town planner, scientist, and an inventor. After viewing examples of Da Vinci's drawings of machines, the students examined some simple machines and drew them, emphasizing the details that make the machines work. This will help the students think about how their machines will work, as they begin planning their machines for science.

A Few Reminders from Miss K.

I hope that you have enjoyed reading the newsletters that I have sent home over the past two weeks. On Monday, I will begin posting daily pictures on our classroom website. My hope is that these pictures will give you a window to view what goes on in our classroom each day. I will also send an e-mail to everyone that gave their address to Mrs. Hipp, on Monday, with a link that will take you directly to our classroom website.

Please remember to pack an old shirt for your child to put on whenever he/she is painting during our Festival of the Arts unit.

If you have not already sent in a permission slip for your child to be mentioned/shown in the podcasts that he/she will be involved in creating for science, please send it in ASAP.

Thank you so much!!

Appendix J

From: pjk200@psu.edu
Subject: Pictures on Mrs. Hipp's Website!!
Date: April 9, 2007 3:23:11 PM EDT
To: Undisclosed Recipients

Hello families of room 24!!

As promised, I've begun adding daily pictures to our classroom website. Pictures are up today from our Festival of the Arts lesson on Michelangelo. I will be adding pictures after school each day, so keep checking the website!

To get to the classroom website, click on the link below. To view the pictures, click on the Pictures tab on the left side of the page.

<http://www.scasd.org/2497%5F12592514522/site/default.asp>

I hope that everyone enjoys the new addition to our website! If you have any questions feel free to e-mail me at pjk200@psu.edu!

Have a great afternoon!

Tricia Kreseski (Miss K.)

Appendix K

Web Counter Data Collection

Date	Views	Miscellaneous Notes
Thurs March 8	5	News Brief #1 Sent home
Sun March 18	12	
Monday March 19	13	
Tuesday March 20	14	
Thursday March 22	20	
Fri March 23	22	Sent home Survey #2 and 2nd news brief
Tue March 27	35	
Wed March 28	38	
Thurs March 29	50	
Fri March 30	55	1st Newsletter Sent home
Sat March 31	56	
Mon Apr 2	58	
Tues Apr 3	62	
Wed Apr 4	65	2nd Newsletter sent home (4/5)
Sat Apr 7	67	
Mon Apr 9	68-72 (me)	E-mail sent to parents with link to website
Mon Apr 9	94	Pictures added to Website
Tues Apr 10	108	Pictures added to website
Wed Apr 11	118	Pictures added to website
Thrus Apr 12	128	
Fri Apr 13	144	Pictures added to website & last survey sent home
Sun Apr 15	149	
Mon Apr 15	156	
Tues April 16	168	
Wednesday April 17	191	Poetry added to website by mentor
Thurs April 18	203	
Fri April 19	206	

Appendix L
Counter on Classroom Website

The screenshot shows a web browser window with a dark red header for "Boalsburg Elementary School". Below the header is a navigation menu with links for Home, Academics, Our School, Staff, and Calendar. A banner image shows a group of students in a classroom. The main heading reads "Mrs. Hipp, 4th Grade". A breadcrumb trail indicates the path: Home > Staff > Mrs. Hipp, 4th Grade. On the left side, there is a sidebar menu with a "Welcome to Room 24!" section and a list of links: Meet Mrs. Hipp, Pictures, Website Links, Progress Report Profile Key, Astronomy Resources, Assignments, Units, Specials Schedule, and Calendar. The main content area features a "Hit Counter" consisting of six red apple-shaped buttons displaying the numbers 0, 0, 0, 1, 4, and 6, which together represent the number 000146. The text "Hit Counter" is positioned below the buttons.

DISTRICT Select a School...

Boalsburg Elementary School

Home Academics Our School Staff Calendar



Mrs. Hipp, 4th Grade

Home > Staff > Mrs. Hipp, 4th Grade

Mrs. Hipp, 4th Grade

▶ **Welcome to Room 24!**

- ▶ Meet Mrs. Hipp
- ▶ Pictures
- ▶ Website Links
- ▶ Progress Report Profile Key
- ▶ Astronomy Resources
- ▶ Assignments
- ▶ Units
- ▶ Specials Schedule
- ▶ Calendar

0 0 0 1 4 6

Hit Counter

Appendix M
Picture Section of Classroom Website

Thursday, April 19- Design Technology

During science today, the students continued to work on building their machines.

Most of the groups are finishing up their projects and tweaking some of the problems that they have run into. The amazingly creative students of room 24 are doing a fantastic job "thinking outside the box" to build their machines!



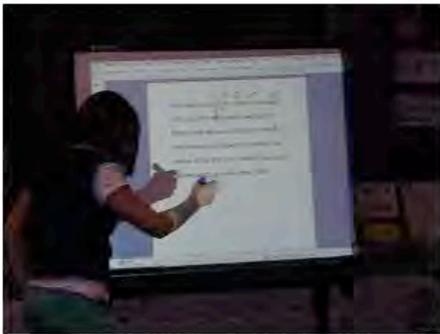
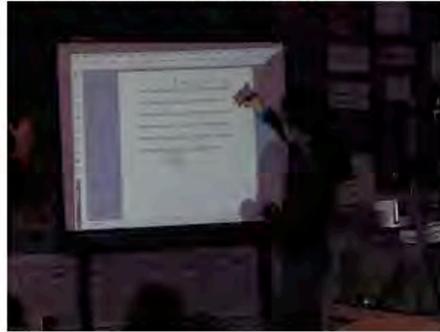
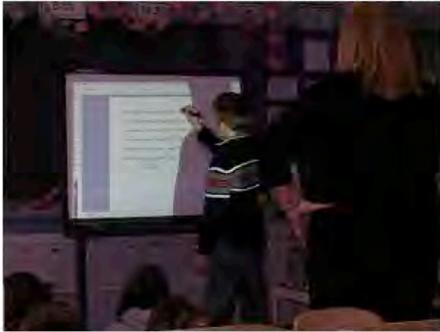
Wednesday, April 18- E.B. Lewis

Illustrator, E.B. Lewis, visited our school and spoke to the students about how he became an illustrator. He also shared some of his paintings with us. We even got to see the proofs for his new book!



Tuesday, April 17-Spelling

During our spelling lesson today, we used a SmartBoard to edit a passage. The SmartBoard is a piece of technology that will act as the computer screen once it is attached to a computer. This technology is great because it allows the students to be interactive with their learning. The students were able to use special sensor markers to write on the SmartBoard, and edit as a class this morning.



Friday, April 13- Scholastic News

Friday afternoon, our class sits together and reads the Scholastic News magazine. This week we read about a fungus growing on frogs that is killing them. Also, we learned that the grizzly bear has come off of the endangered species list at Yellowstone National Park!



In math today we began discussing probability. After talking about what the probability would be of flipping a coin and landing with the heads side up vs. the tails side up, the students tested it out by flipping a penny 100 times and recording their flips.



During today's Science lesson, the students continued to plan and build their machines! Their ideas are all VERY IMPRESSIVE!!

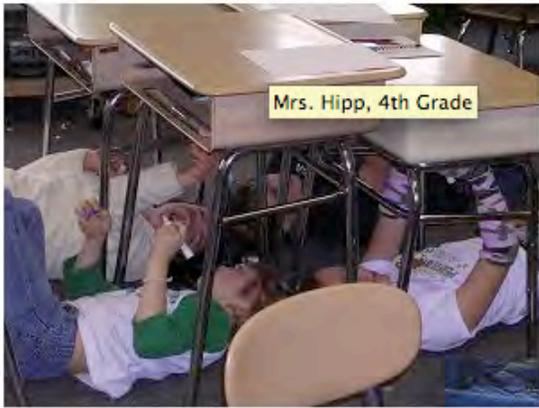




Miss K. read us a book about Michelangelo!

After learning about Michelangelo, the students created their own ceiling drawings. After about 3 minutes of drawing on their backs, the students quickly understood why it took Michelangelo 4 years to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel! Below are pictures of our class creating their ceiling drawings,





Appendix N

Survey #1 Results

1.) Do you have Internet access at home?

YES- **100%** (15/15)

NO- **0%** (0/15)

2.) How often do you want access to communication?

DAILY- **13%** (2/15)

WEEKLY- **73%** (11/15)

MONTHLY- **6%** (1/15)

CONFERENCES- **0%** (0/15)

NO ANSWER- **6%** (1/15)

3.) What would you like to hear about?

WHOLE CLASS- **6%** (1/15)

YOUR CHILD- **6%** (1/15)

BOTH- **87%** (13/15)

4.) How connected to your feel to your child's classroom?

1 (least connected)- **0%** (0/15)

2- **27%** (4/15)

3- **60%** (9/15)

4- **13%** (2/15)

5- **0%** (0/15)

Preferences:

1st Preference:

Newsletter- **47%** (7/15)

Website- **40%** (6/15)

News Brief- **13%** (2/15)

2nd Preference:

News Brief- **47%** (7/15)

Website- **27%** (4/15)

Newsletter- **13%** (2/15)

No Answer- **13%** (2/15)

3rd Preference:

Website- **33%** (5/15)

Newsletter- **27%** (4/15)

News Brief- **27%** (4/15)

No Answer- **13%** (2/15)

Appendix O

Survey #2 Results

1.) How connected to you feel to your child's classroom?

- 1 (least connected)- **5%** (1/15)
- 2- **5%** (1/15)
- 3- **18%** (3/17)
- 4- **71%** (12/17)
- 5- **0%** (0/17)

2.) Does receiving a news brief make you feel more connected?

- YES- **94%** (16/17)
- NO- **6%** (1/17)

3.) How often do you access the classroom website?

- DAILY- **0%** (0/17)
- 1-3 times/week- **0%** (0/17)
- OCCASSIONALLY- **71%** (12/17)
- NEVER- **29%** (5/17)

4.) What do you like/dislike about news brief?

- Like that there is not a lot to read- **5%** (1/17)
- Good for reminders- **18%** (3/17)
- Can put on fridge- **12%** (2/17)
- You should do a monthly news brief- **5%** (1/17)
- My child is excited about it- **5%** (1/17)
- It is convenient- **5%** (1/17)
- No answer- **53%** (9/17)

5.) Is there another method of communication, besides the website, newsletter or news brief, that you would prefer?

- No- **59%** (10/17)
- E-mail- **18%** (3/17)
- No Answer- **24%** (4/17)

Appendix P

Survey #3 Results

1.) How connected do you feel to your child's classroom?

- 1 (least connected)- 6% (1/16)
- 2- 6% (1/16)
- 3- 38% (6/16)
- 4- 38% (6/16)
- 5- 13% (2/16)

2.) Which method of communication has made you feel most connected to your child's classroom?

- News Brief- 13% (2/16)
- Newsletter- 63% (10/16)
- Website- 13% (2/16)
- Newsletter & Website (Parent Wrote this in)- 6% (1/16)
- No Answer- 6% (1/16)

3.) Why did that method of communication make you feel most connected?

News Brief:

- It is the easiest
- Because it is weekly, brief, and to the point.

Newsletter:

- This I will always read. I will not always check the website. But the website is great.
- Seemed to have the most information.
- I may forget to check the website, but if there is a newsletter in the folder regularly, it's very helpful to read and know what is going on.
- I could discuss with my child what he has been doing in the classroom. Reminders are helpful and good to know what he will be working on.
- Providing info more specific so I could ask my daughter questions. She usually provides little details.
- Because it tells you what the whole class is doing.

Website:

- I enjoy seeing the children in the classroom setting.

No Answer: 38% (6/16)

4.) Do you access the website more often with the pictures added?

- YES- 81% (13/16)
- NO- 13% (2/16)
- No Answer- 6% (1/16)

Added parent comments:

*The link that you e-mailed encouraged me to go to the website- **1 parent**

*No, but I should.-**1 parent**

5.) What is your most preferred method of communication?

1st Preference:

Newsletter- **56%** (9/16)

News Brief- **25%** (4/16)

Website- **13%** (2/16)

No Answer- **6%** (1/16)

2nd Preference:

Website- **44%** (7/16)

News Brief- **25%** (4/16)

Newsletter- **6%** (1/16)

No Answer- **25%** (4/16)

3rd Preference:

News Brief- **31%** (5/16)

Website- **25%** (4/16)

Newsletter- **19%** (3/16)

No Answer- **25%** (4/16)

6.) Why did you prefer your #1 rated method?

Newsletter:

*I will always see this. News Brief was not worth putting together. Website I may not visit regularly unless you e-mail me every so often.

*I think it provides the most detail.

*I can see it and it is in my face.

*Opens up communication with child. Although I love the pictures, there is more information in the newsletter.

*It was easily accessible and helpful.

*Because of the info that is in it.

News Brief:

*Quick dates and important information that is postable on the fridge.

*It's the easiest for me.

*Get more info, then provide pictures. I like the pictures to help me understand what I need.

Website:

*Opens up discussion about what is going on at school with child.

No Answer: 31% (5/16)

**Parent who rated themselves at a level 1 connection did not fill in any other info on the survey—but she added this comment at the bottom:

*Best method of communication would be to send parents website link or newsletter attached as a PDF file.

Appendix Q

Connection Levels Throughout My Inquiry

	Survey #1	Survey #2	Survey #3
1	0%	5%	6%
2	27%	5%	6%
3	60%	18%	38%
4	13%	71%	38%
5	0%	0%	13%

Most Preferred Method of Communication: Baseline vs. Final Data

	Survey #1	Survey #3
Newsletter	47%	56%
News Brief	13%	25%
Website	40%	13%
No Answer	0%	6%

Least Preferred Method of Communication: Baseline vs. Final Data

	Survey #1	Survey #3
Newsletter	27%	19%
News Brief	27%	31%
Website	33%	25%
No Answer	13%	25%

Appendix R

Parent E-mail: NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED!!

Hi Miss K.,

Thanks so much for drawing my attention to the photos. I needed the diversion here at work!! I love the photo of A. Last night, he talked quite a bit about what he learned from E.B. Lewis. I think it was great that he could come as a speaker.

I love the photos. It does help me to feel better connected to what's going on in the classroom. I just have to remember to keep looking!

Thanks for all you do.
Mrs. X

At 03:25 PM 4/19/2007, you wrote:

Hi Mrs. X!

I just wanted to let you know that I put a picture of A on the website from an assembly that we had yesterday. The illustrator E.B. Lewis came to visit and A seemed to be completely consumed by this illustrator. He was just soaking up each word that E.B. Lewis said. I was able to capture a picture of A during the assembly and I thought I'd let you know that it is up on the website, in case you would like to see it!

Have a great afternoon!

Tricia Kreseski (Miss K.)