School media effectiveness and usefulness

THE INFLUENCE OF STUDENT GRADE LEVEL ON PARENT PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS AND USEFULNESS

BY

Jeanne M. Hinnenkamp

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The Educational Leadership Faculty
Northwest Missouri State University
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education and Human Services
Maryville, MO 64468

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School media effectiveness and usefulness

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. 4

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................ 4

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY .............................................. 5

Introduction

Background, Issues and Concerns

Practice Under Investigation

School Policy

Conceptual Underpinnings for the Study

Statement of the Problem

Purpose of Study

Research Questions

Null Hypotheses

Anticipated Benefits of Study

Definition of Terms

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE .................................... 9

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY ............. 13

Field Study Methods

Research Design

Study Group Description

Data Collection Methods and Instrumentation

Statistical Data Analysis

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA .............. 15

Presentation of the Data Analysis
School media effectiveness and usefulness

CHAPTER FIVE: OVERVIEW, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS…29

Discussion of Findings

Conclusions

Recommendations

REFERENCES…………………………………………………………………...30
School media effectiveness and usefulness

Abstract

The purpose of this data-driven study was to determine whether or not the grade level of the student affects the parent perception of the school media communication methods. The study group consisted of K-5th grade parents from a Midwest suburban school district. One elementary school was extensively studied using parent survey data. This comparative study, using data from parents of K-5 students, illustrated a trend analysis of parents of Kindergarten through second graders and third through fifth graders. Data was collected using a survey sent out to parents through email. The survey focused on communication from the office as well as communication from the classroom teacher. The methods of communication surveyed were emails, electronic newsletters, web pages and data binders. The analysis results indicated that there was not a significant difference in parent perception of school media methods based on their child’s grade level. Schools need to utilize a variety of communication methods, email, electronic newsletters and web pages, with their parents to ensure a positive parent perception of their school.

The first null hypothesis (H₀₁) was accepted in the elementary school being studied. There was not a significant difference in the perception of the parent based on grade level in the areas of email, electronic newsletters and data binders. The null hypothesis (H₀₁) was not accepted in the area of school webpage usage and utilization. There was a significant difference in the perception of Kindergarten through second grade parents compared to parents of third through fifth grade.

LIST OF TABLES
TABLE 1: Graph representation of Newsletters and emails from office are sent in a timely manner ..........page 16
TABLE 2: Graph representation of Newsletters and emails provided important information about dates and events ..........page 17
TABLE 3: Graph representation of *Emails from office provide parents information for them to be involved in school*…………page 18
TABLE 4: Graph representation of *Emails and newsletters from the office provide information about the school’s mission and vision*………page 19
TABLE 5: Graph representation of *I visit the school website often*………page 20
TABLE 6: Graph representation of *The school webpage is up to date*………page 21
TABLE 7: Graph representation of *My child’s teacher sends emails on a regular basis*………page 22
TABLE 8: Graph representation of *My child’s teacher sends the data binder home on a regular basis*……page 23
TABLE 9: Graph representation of *Student data binders provide me information about my child’s progress*…page 24
TABLE 10: Graph representation of *child is able to describe their progress in their data binder* ……page 25
TABLE 11: Graph representation of *Teacher’s newsletters provide me the information that helps me understand what my child is learning*……page 26
TABLE 12: Graph representation of *email and newsletters keep me informed of upcoming dates and events*…….page 27
TABLE 13: Graph representation of *Teacher newsletters provide me the information I need to support my child’s learning*……..page 28

*Introduction to the Study*

This study examined the perceptions of parents about the effectiveness and utilization of school communication methods and whether the grade level of their child proved classroom management training during school-wide staff development time and the impact on the number of written office referrals to the principal for K-5th grade students. Pertinent data were obtained from a parent survey.

This report contains the following elements: 1) Background, issues and concerns, 2) Practice under investigation, 3) School policy, 4) Conceptual underpinnings, 5) Statement of the problem, 6) Purpose of the study, 7) Research questions, 8) Null hypotheses, 9) Anticipated benefits of the study, 10) Review of literature, 11) Research methods, 12) Findings, 13) Conclusions, and 14) References.
School media effectiveness and usefulness

*Background, Issues and Concerns*

The school to home connection has been directly linked to the academic success of students. School faced the challenge of creating a positive school to home relationship that will bring parents in as active participants in their child’s educational journey. Many barriers are faced when initiating two-way communication. These barriers are coupled with changing demographics that place parents with economic demands that limit time that parents are available to come to school (Ferrara and Ferrara, 2006).

Another issue schools face is the explosion of technology and the instant availability of information and communication. Getting information to someone is literally in the palm of our hands. Schools are looking for what information is most important and what method is the best to deliver it.

By analyzing the perceptions of parents in the areas of school communication methods, administrator and teachers and see what methods are most used by parents. They will also be able to see what information parents find important. Schools will also need to look at their parents as demographic groups. Parents of younger students may have different needs than those of other students.

By evaluating parent perceptions, schools will then be able to look specifically at their methods and determine what is working and what needs to be revised. They will need to determine whether or not it is an information or format barrier. How parents receive the information and how it appears on a screen may deter their attention and eventually their participation.

*Practice Under Investigation*

Key personnel in the elementary school studied would like to continuously show improvement in the school media used to communicate effectively with their parents. Communication methods
School media effectiveness and usefulness

are evaluated and updated as technology changes in an effort to meet the needs of parents. Teachers and staff would like to know which communications methods are the most effective. By studying the utilization, usefulness and effectiveness of media methods, schools can form better relationships with parents and increase their involvement in the school.

*School Policy To Be Informed*

All statistical data and research will be presented to the elementary school studied. Final reports will be presented to the school improvement team as well as the principal and assistant principal of the building. This committee will evaluate the result to determine if any communication changes are needed.

*Conceptual Underpinnings*

Technology is changing each day, especially in the form of communication. Information is now instant and readily available when needed. Face to face communication is quickly being replaced with online chatting and texting via hand held devices. Schools now have to compete with this rapid changing communication frenzy. Society is now in information and communication overload and schools must find a way to have their information be just as important as an instant “tweet”. Not only are schools struggling with the best method of communication to use, but they are also searching for ways to make the information more useful and effective. Teachers rely on communication for due dates, reminders but most importantly a valuable tool to communicate to parents the learning that is happening in the classroom and how parents can become more involved with the learning at home. The front office and classrooms use many forms of media to communicate with parents: electronic newsletters, emails and webpages. In addition, the classrooms utilize data binders that track student progress in learning goals in all subject areas.
School media effectiveness and usefulness

*Statement of Problem*

Effective communication between home and school is one of the most important jobs a school can have. Parents who are informed about a school and the academic progress their child is making will support their school and become advocates in the community. Busy lifestyles and lack of information can lead to parents’ disengagement with a school. Sometimes even the best communication methods do not result in increased parent involvement with their child’s. With the added importance of increasing student achievement and tight budgets of school districts, the purchase and implementation of a new school-wide behavior management program is vital to the overall success of any educational organization. There is a lack of evidence showing the influence of staff development training on classroom management in the building in relation to the number of students referred for disruptive behavior to the principal. Also educators want to provide the most valuable use of classroom instruction time to all students in the classroom, thus behavior issues during a lesson interrupt all students learning and remove the behavior problem student from the classroom only to miss more valuable learning. The principal is also inundated with the number of students being referred, thus her time is consumed and her other duties are left unattended to during the school day.

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not the communication methods usefulness and effectiveness is affected by the grade level of the student. This study also looks at the variety of communication methods utilized by the school office and the classroom. The type and delivery of communication from the office and classroom may have an impact on parent involvement within the school. Two research questions will be answered from this study.

*Research Questions*
School media effectiveness and usefulness

RQ1- Is there a difference in the perception of the parent based on grade level in the areas of email, electronic newsletters and data binders?

RQ2— Is there a significant difference in the perception of parents of students in grades K-2 and parents of students in grades 3-5 based in the area of school webpage usage and utilization?

Anticipated Benefits of Study

The benefits of this study will apply to administrators, teachers and parents of school communities. This study provides an indication of how school communication methods affect the involvement of parents. One of the most important benefits of this study is to determine if the communication methods used are effective and increase parent participation. By determining the parent perceptions on school communication methods, school can develop and implement a variety of methods that would reach as many parents as possible and in turn increase their involvement in their child’s educational process. Schools districts may use this study to streamline their communication efforts from the district level that oversees many elementary school buildings.

Review of Literature

The review of literature provides results of research studies reflecting the communication methods utilized by schools. The review also depicts theories and opinions of how communication methods affect the involvement of parents and the effects of school communication with the increased success of students. The information gathered consists of a variety of educational sources that present past, present, and future beliefs regarding school communication methods.

Today more than ever, parents are active participants in their child’s education. Students are more successful and happier when communication is established (Berger, 1996). By having
School media effectiveness and usefulness

more contact with parents, teachers learn more about students’ needs and home environment, which is information they can apply toward better meeting those needs.

There has been a shift from the “teacher knows best” and it is the schools responsibility to teach child and prepare them for the future. Parents are asking, “how can we help at home?” Many parents can see the discrepancy between their child’s achievement and that of other children.

Scott and Eber (2003) found that more attention has centered on collaboration at the school-wide level with a focus on involving parents and others in the community. While the need for parent involvement has change over the past few decades, the methods and information provided to parents may not have changed. Epstein (1995) explains, “parents must be knowledgeable about the process of learning and have confidence in their ability to contribute to their child’s success. Many parents are not knowledgeable and have little information about their child’s experiences. If parents are to become involved…teachers must employ strategies for communicating with parents as part of an overall program for involving parents” (p. 2). Schools are challenged with not only getting parents to become involved, but also providing them with the knowledge of the content and process of learning.

Parent involvement ranks high in the reasons students are successful in school.

Ferrara and Ferrara (2005) “Parent involvement promotes better student attendance…..higher parent and student satisfaction with school, less discipline reports and higher achievement in reading and math” (p. 77).

Schools need to recognize the direct correlation of this involvement and the success of their students. Unfortunately many schools function under the same philosophy of schools decades ago: the parents’ role is to discipline students when they misbehave at school. They believe schools have their role and the parent’s role is separate. Ferrara and Ferrara support this by
School media effectiveness and usefulness

stating, “These barriers to effective parent involvement have been credited to a school environment that does not value the view and participation of parents or to parent roles that go beyond the traditional roles of parent support in schools (p. 77). Parents now more than ever need to know the what, the content children are learning, and the how, the process of learning. The end goal is to create a collaborative relationship with parents and the community of the school. Working together to help students succeed is necessary and vital in the goal of students becoming 21st century thinkers and contributors. A collaborative relationship develops when there is a two-way exchange of information between home and school (Cox, 2005). Building relationships with parents must have the following characteristics according to Laluvein (2010), “sharing, honest, open relationships, open communication lines and mutual respect” (p. 195). She found that schools run into a dilemma when teacher fall back to parental compliance or a “teacher knows best” mindset.

Once the relationships have been established and parents are open to a two-way form of communication, schools must then look at how they are communicating with parents. While many parents feel communication is important, they may not feel they have the time to read information or become involved in dialogue about learning. The age of technology has open doors for schools that allow them to reach parents faster and more effectively.

“Whether communicating with parent and the public….administrators and teachers are beginning to leverage the interactive and multimedia features of social networks that have the added advantage of being widely and easily accessible-and free” (Schlachter, 2010). Parents are using this technology in their personal lives which enables them to also utilize it when communicated with schools. The speed of social networking gives parents the most up to
School media effectiveness and usefulness

date information in real time. Schools also benefit from the ability to get their message across to hundreds in a matter of seconds (Butler, 2010).

(Richardson, 2008) states that one principal “communicates daily with more than 5,000 parents, students and staff, which he posts everything from announcements, pictures and links to interesting videos.” Teachers are also increasing face time with parents. According to Richardson, blogs were not being read, but Facebook is so accessible, the information is right in your face. Parents no longer need to wait until Friday to look in students’ backpack to see what their child learned that week. Students are posting their daily work and learning goals.

Traditionally information from the week was sent home in a newsletter created by the teacher. This report type of communication was seen as one way from school to home and in many ways surface information for parents.

(Jensen, 2006) says “newsletters can be used to initiate interactive communication as they hold benefits to the teacher and parents. Teachers can proactively communicate information about the strategies being taught in the classroom….include samples of work, specific books used. Along with dates to remember, goals for math and social studies are included” (p. 186).

Providing parents on-line access to student data gives them the flexibility to look at the information when it meets their schedule (Furger, 2006).

Parents can see schools moving with technology. Butler 2010 adds, “Businesses and organizations and everything else have been moving in that direction, so our parents were expecting the same sort of response” (p. 41). Students are also becoming involved in the communication. Now that parents are informed, they can initiate conversations with their children about what and how they are learning. Over 90% of parents also agreed that home notes helped facilitate communication with their children about school. Parents who are involved tend
School media effectiveness and usefulness

to have a more positive view of teachers, which results in improved teacher morale (Adams, 1995).

While the majority of parents have moved to an electronic form of communication, many parents still need a traditional form of communication. Butler states, “Although the web is a powerful tool, traditional methods are still used, paper newsletters are still sent home” (p. 43). Don’t rely on a single method of communication; a variety of strategies will need to be used to meet the needs of particular families and their schedules. Research shows that home-school communication is greatly increased through personalized positive parent telephone contact between teachers and parents. A traditional personal phone call home can go a long way when building relationships with parents which will, in turn, open communication lines. This in turn will lead to everyone’s goal—student success.

Methodology

The following methods were used to investigate the research questions and null hypotheses as follows: 1) research design, 2) study group identification, 3) instrument and data collection, and 4) statistical analysis.

Research Questions

RQ1—Is there a difference in the perception of the parent based on grade level in the areas of email, electronic newsletters and data binders?

RQ2—Is there a significant difference in the perception of parents of students in grades K-2 and parents of students in grades 3-5 based in the area of school webpage usage and utilization?
School media effectiveness and usefulness

Null Hypotheses

H₀₁: The first null hypothesis states there is no significant difference in the perception of parents based on grade level in the areas of email, electronic newsletters and data binders.

H₀₂: The second null hypothesis states there is a significant difference in the perception of parents of students in grades K-2 and parents of students in grades 3-5 based in the area of school webpage usage and utilization.

Research Design

A survey research design was used to gather data for this research project. The null hypotheses were tested by a chi-square crosstab-contingency analysis used to determine significance at 0.25 Alpha level. The independent variable in this study is the survey results from the parents of K-5 of an elementary school. The dependent variables in this study are the school communication methods use. Survey data was collected from one hundred parents of an elementary school. Parents were asked to complete the survey on-line.

Study Population

The research sample group consisted of approximately 100 parents from an elementary school with a total population of approximately 575 Kindergarten through 5th grade students. The school is in a district that is considered a medium sized suburban community in a large mid-west city. The socio-economic status of the school ranges from middle to upper middle class. All statistics are based from the 2011-2012 school year.

Instrument and Data Collection

To collect data for the research project, surveys were sent to parents with permission from school administration. Surveys were sent out electronically and approximately 100 surveys were returned.
School media effectiveness and usefulness

Data Analysis

ASP: A Statistical Program (Blackford, 1999) was used to determine mean (m), standard deviation (Sd), chi-square value, degrees of freedom (df), and probability values (p-values). The Alpha level of significance was set in this study at 0.25 for all testing levels.
School media effectiveness and usefulness

Figure 1 analysis: Both parents of K-2 (green column 1) and 3-5 (blue column 2) parents feel that newsletters and emails from office are sent in a timely manner. There was not a significant difference (P-Value = .46). Electronic emails are sent from the office on a weekly basis. Parents who receive their emails on their phones are more likely to read communications from the office.

![Timeliness of Newsletters and Emails from Office](image)

Figure 1. Newsletters and emails from office are sent in a timely manner. P-Value was .46 and did not show significance.

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**CROSSTAB Grade Level BY Question:**

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</table>
School media effectiveness and usefulness

Figure 2 analysis: Both parents of K-2 (green column 1) and 3-5 (blue column 2) parents feel that newsletters and emails provide important information about dates and events. There was not a significant difference (P-Value = .67). Electronic emails are sent from the office on a weekly and biweekly basis. Parents who receive their emails on their phones are more likely to read communications from the office.

Figure 2. Newsletters and emails provided important information about dates and events. P-Value was .67 and did not show significance.
School media effectiveness and usefulness

Figure 3 analysis: Both parents of K-2 (green column 1) and 3-5 (blue column 2) parents feel that newsletters and emails from office provide information for them to be involved with the school. There was not significant difference (P-Value = .64). Many emails are reminders for parents of events that occur on the day they are sent.

Figure 3. Emails from office provide parents information for them to be involved in school. P-Value was .64 and did not show significance.

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CHI SQUARE[3]:  1.65477  P-VALUE:  0.647036
CROMER'S V:  0.127999  GAMMA: -0.0599002
LAMBDA:  0.0227273  INVERSE:  0
SOMER'S d: -0.0287081  INVERSE: -0.0293998
GOODMAN/KRUSKAL TAU:  0.00220006  INVERSE:  0.0163838
KENDALL'S TAU:  a = -0.0142574, b = -0.0290519, c = -0.0282325

CROSSTAB Vgradelevel BY Question4:Enteranans

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School media effectiveness and usefulness

Figure 4 analysis: Parents of 3-5 (blue column 2) students feel that newsletters and emails do not provide information about the school’s mission and vision. Whereas, parents of K-2 students do feel the newsletters provide information about the mission and vision. There was significant difference (P-Value = .09). As students advance in grade levels, the parents of those students begin to look more closely at the building as a whole and not just their child’s teacher. They also have more knowledge about the building.

Figure 4. Emails and newsletters from the office provide information about the school’s mission and vision. The P-Value is .09 which shows significant difference.
School media effectiveness and usefulness

Figure 5 analysis: Parents of K-2 students did not feel they visited the school website often. Parents of 3-5 students did visit the website often. There was significant difference (P-Value = .15). Parents who are familiar with the building and staff are more comfortable using the website as a source of information. Parents of K-2 students are newer to the building and are more likely to prefer personal communication.

![Figure 5: I visit the school website often.](image)

This table looks at how often parents of K-2 and 3-5 students visit the school website. The P-Value was .15 which showed a significant difference.

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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOMER'S d: -0.171053  INVERSE: -0.111748</td>
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<tr>
<td>GOODMAN/KRUSKAL TAU: 0.0192159  INVERSE: 0.065551</td>
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School media effectiveness and usefulness

Figure 6 analysis: Parents of K-2 students feel the information on the school website is somewhat useful, while parents of 3-5 students feel the information is useful. There was significant difference (P-Value = .19). Previous figure 5 shown parents of 3-5 visited the website more often. This would support this data of the usefulness of the site.

![Graph showing school webpage analysis](image)

Figure 6. The school webpage is up to date. The P-Value was .19 which showed a significant difference.
School media effectiveness and usefulness

Figure 7 analysis: Both parents of K-2 (green column 1) and 3-5 (blue column 2) parents feel that emails from their child’s teacher are sent in a timely manner. There was not a significant difference (P-Value = .39). Teacher email is an effective method of communication between school and home.

Figure 7: *My child’s teacher sends emails on a regular basis.* The P-Value = 0.39 which did not show significant difference.

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CHI SQUARE(4): 4.07557  P-VALUE: 0.395075
CRAMER'S V: 0.200879  GAMMA: -0.343189
LAMBDA: 0  INVERSE: 0
SOMER'S d: -0.129585  INVERSE: -0.166071
GOODMAN/KRUSKAL TAU: 0.0130177  INVERSE: 0.0403522
KENDALL'S TAU: a = -0.0643564, b = -0.146698, c = -0.127438

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School media effectiveness and usefulness

Figure 8 analysis: Both parents of K-2 (green column 1) and 3-5 (blue column 2) parents feel that classroom teachers send the data binders home on a regular basis. There was not a significant difference (P-Value = .39). Data binders are a tangible form of communication that the teachers use to show progress on specific learning goals.

![Bar chart showing data binders](image)

Figure 8: *My child’s teacher sends the data binder home on a regular basis.* The P-Value = 0.39, which does not show a significant difference.
School media effectiveness and usefulness

Figure 9 analysis: Both parents of K-2 (green column 1) and 3-5 (blue column 2) parents feel that the data binders provide information about their child’s progress. There was not a significant difference (P-Value = .46). The data binders provide specific information on a student’s progress.

Figure 9: *Student data binders provide me information about my child’s progress.* The P-Value = 0.87 which did not show significant difference.

```
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GOODMAN/KRUSKAL TAU:  0.00204493  INVERSE:  0.0121342
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School media effectiveness and usefulness

Figure 10 analysis: Both parents of K-2 (green column 1) and 3-5 (blue column 2) parents feel that their child is able to describe their progress in the data binders. There was not a significant difference (P-Value = .61). Students keep their data binders and are responsible for updating the information on a weekly basis.

Figure 10: My child is able to describe their progress in their data binder. The P-Value = 0.61 which did not show significant difference.

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<td>KENDALL'S TAU: a = 0.0324752, b = 0.057755, c = 0.0643074</td>
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School media effectiveness and usefulness

Figure 11 analysis: Both parents of K-2 (green column 1) and 3-5 (blue column 2) parents feel that teacher’s newsletters provide them information that helps them understand what their child is learning. There was not a significant difference (P-Value = .52). Teacher newsletters are sent on a weekly basis and provide specific information in each subject area.

Figure 11: Teacher’s newsletters provide me the information that helps me understand what my child is learning. The P-Value 0.52, which does not show significant difference.
School media effectiveness and usefulness

Figure 12 analysis: Both parents of K-2 (green column 1) and 3-5 (blue column 2) parents feel that newsletters and emails from office are sent in a timely manner. There was not a significant difference (P-Value = .46). Electronic emails are sent from the office on a weekly basis. Parents who receive their emails on their phones are more likely to read communications from the office.

Figure 12: Teacher email and newsletters keep me informed of upcoming dates and events. The P-Value = 0.60, which did not show significant difference.

CROSSTAB Gradelevel BY Question14:Enteranan

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School media effectiveness and usefulness

Figure 13 analysis: Both parents of K-2 (green column 1) and 3-5 (blue column 2) parents feel that teacher newsletters provide them the information they need to support their child’s learning. There was not a significant difference (P-Value = .37). Parent newsletters provide information on how parents can support their child’s learning at home.

Figure 13: Teacher newsletters provide me the information I need to support my child’s learning.

The P-Value = 0.37, which did not show significant difference.

CROSSTAB Vgradelevel BY Question15:Enteranan

CHI SQUARE(4): 4.22795  P-VALUE: 0.376035
CRAMER'S V: 0.204599  GAMMA: -0.364754
LAMBDA: 0  INVERSE: 0
SOMER'S d: -0.141946  INVERSE: -0.177026
GOODMAN/KRUSKAL TAU: 0.0174925  INVERSE: 0.0418609
KENDALL'S TAU: a = -0.070495, b = -0.158519, c = -0.139594

CROSSTAB Vgradelevel BY Question15:Enteranan

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School media effectiveness and usefulness

Conclusions and Recommendations

According to the findings, parents of both K-2 and 3-5 students have positive perceptions of the communication methods of email, electronic newsletter and data binders. Null hypothesis one (H₀₁) for this study stated there is no significant difference between the perception of parents of K-2 students and 3-5 students in the area of email, electronic newsletter and data binders. Null hypothesis two (H₀₂) stated there was significant difference between significant difference in the perception of parents of students in grades K-2 and parents of students in grades 3-5 based in the area of school webpage usage and utilization.

Parents of K-2 students feel the information on the school website is somewhat useful, while parents of 3-5 students feel the information is useful. There was significant difference (P-Value = .19). Previous figure 5 shown parents of 3-5 visited the website more often. This would support this data of the usefulness of the site. Parents’ level of comfort with the school and its system would support the rejection of the null hypothesis.

Schools will need to continually evaluate their communication methods and stay current with the changes in technology and family lifestyles. They will need to balance the “what”, information that needs to be communicated with the “how”, what methods best meet the needs of families.
School media effectiveness and usefulness

References


Butler, K. (2010). Tweeting Your Own Horn. District Administration, 46(2), 41-44.


How Well Does This Web Site Work. (2009). District Administration, 45(7), 44.


