

A PLANNED APPROACH TO INCREASE FIRST GRADE PARENTS'  
KNOWLEDGE OF CURRICULAR OBJECTIVES

By

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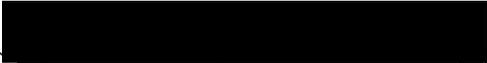
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CERTIFICATION OF PROJECT WORK

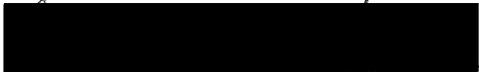
We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled, A Planned Approach to Increase First Grade Parents' Knowledge of Curricular Objectives, by Audra Danforth Student, Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, Curriculum and Instruction in Inclusive Classroom, is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.

  
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### **Abstract**

This empirical study investigated the use of a weekly planned approach to parent involvement with a focus on curriculum and weekly objectives in order to improve student achievement. The 15 participants were in first grade ranging from ages 6-7, from a small city school district in Western New York. The school is culturally diverse and has a free and reduced lunch rate of 80%. This study used a weekly newsletter, developed by the teacher and classroom students to help improve student grades through parental involvement. The empirical study collected data on student assessment results as well as through a parent survey. The limitations of this study were the amount of time allotted for the study, which was six weeks and the fact that some students were receiving Academic Intervention Services (AIS) which may have influenced the improved scores as opposed to the targeted increase in parental involvement. After research was conducted and collected, it was indicated that the students had improved test scores. The student's test scores showed that the newsletters were effective.

## Introduction

Parental involvement is a critical component of children's success in school. The sooner the parents become involved in their child's education, the more powerful the effects. The most effective form of parental involvement is direct involvement with their children on learning activities at home (Michigan, 2002).

There are many additional positive impacts of parental involvement. More than 86 % of the general public believes that support from parents is the most important way to improve schools (Michigan, 2002). Not only do schools want more parental involvement, parents do as well.

As a substitute teacher, I feel the current level of parental involvement in the schools I have worked in most is not adequate. I also believe that academic success in the early grades is significant because of the basic skills students are learning at this time. Many parents would like to become more involved in their child's success stories along with their teachers. Having parental involvement should encourage students to do their best. When some students go home on the weekends, or have weeklong breaks, they put everything they learned in school behind them. As a teacher, I want to establish a planned approach to actively engaging parents in their children's school work. Sending home weekly newsletters about curriculum objectives that will be taught in the upcoming week, is one way to encourage students to get a jump start on the material and hopefully in turn, improve academic success in all subject areas.

I conducted an empirical study in a first grade classroom on the effects of a planned approach to increase parental involvement on student achievement. In order to research this topic I sought approval to conduct the study in a first grade classroom in

western New York. From there I collected student's grades in reading and spelling in order to establish a baseline data. I then created a weekly informative newsletter based on all upcoming subjects for that week to be sent home every Monday to the student's parents.

This school the study was conducted in is culturally and linguistically diverse, therefore the letters were written in both English and in Spanish, the two most common languages spoken in the children's homes. After the intervention started, the student's grades were documented. This lasted six weeks. Family involvement was documented by whether or not the parent or guardian signed their student's newsletter slips or nightly take-home reading. The goal was for student's academic grades and parental involvement to both increase. When the project was complete, a survey was sent home to the parents in order to see if they found the weekly newsletter to be informative and helpful.

Each newsletter contained information about upcoming/ongoing material in, mathematics, science/social studies, English language arts (ELA), spelling and reading. The newsletter was informative and positive in order to encourage parental involvement and student academic achievement. It was the intent that these newsletters showed parents that the teacher wanted them to become more involved at home with their child's academic progress, and hopefully as a team, they could all help their child achieve.

This idea for a weekly newsletter came from my second student teaching placement at Highland Elementary School in Derby, New York. I was placed into a fourth grade classroom and every Friday, the teacher, Mrs. Jennifer Philarom, would send home a "Peek at the Weak" with her students. Students would gain a head start on

upcoming Spelling words, what multiplication table was next, etc. Mrs. Philarom worked to create professional relationships with the parents of her students as well develop their support and involvement with her students. After being a part of her classroom for eight weeks, I was intrigued with these weekly newsletters and hoped to use them in my classroom as well. I conducted research to answer the question; will the academic achievement of first grade students improve as a result of a planned approach to increase parental knowledge of weekly curriculum objectives and topics?

### **Literature Review**

Parental involvement (PI) is important for student academic success. This literature review will examine what parental involvement is, the barriers to PI and the relationship between home and school communications around curriculum. Furthermore, the literature review will examine how best to communicate with parents. Since the empirical study featured a newsletter, it was important to create a newsletter that was comprehensible to the parents and the students. The literature review will explore how to make objectives comprehensible as well as indicating the correct communication format such as: language, reading level and print vs. electronic vs. face to face.

### **Parental Involvement**

According to Mooney and Nugent (2008), parental involvement can simply be defined as support from parents at home and in school. However, Smit and Driessen (2007) note that parental involvement is a poorly defined term and can cover diverse activities, ranging from conscious involvement with children's learning and well-being at school to parents evenings organized by the school and formal participations in school boards and participation councils.

Parental involvement and interest have an important influence on children's educational outcomes. Cotton and Wiklund (1989) state that "the more intensively parents are involved in their children's learning; the more beneficial are the achievement effects. This holds true for all types of parent involvement in children's learning and for all types of ages of students." (p. 2)

Not only is PI beneficial to students but it is beneficial to their parents as well. When the parents have opportunities to participate in their children's education, the parents develop a positive attitude toward school. This in turn allows better communication and understanding of each other's roles between school-staff and parents (Mooney & Nugent, 2008).

According to Jenson (2007), knowing that parental involvement is important and putting that knowledge into practice is often difficult for teachers. Therefore, it is important for teachers and parents to work together as a team. According to Beck (2002) when parents and teachers team up, children receive a message of dual support and mutual respect between the home and school. Working together promotes a positive classroom climate for students and in turn can help teachers, parents, and students form professional relationships.

A survey was done in 2010 in New Zealand rural elementary schools. Hornby and Witte (2010) conducted interviews in 22 schools which focused on eleven aspects of PI:

Policy formation, acting as a resource, collaborating with teachers, sharing information on children, channels of communication, liaison with school staff, partner education, parent support, encouraging parents into school, involving diverse parents, and professional development for teachers. (p.771)

In New Zealand, PI is important, so important that it has become a priority for them to improve parent and family involvement in children's education. Hornby and Witte (2010) state that not only is PI a priority area, but improving the quality of teaching and increasing evidence-based practice is as well.

The schools studied by Hornby and Witte varied in sizes from 11-351 pupils with a mean of 127 pupils. In these schools a structured interview schedule was employed to collect data on participants' views of eleven aspects of PI. The one hour interviews were conducted by Witte. According to Hornby and Witte (2010) the interviews included questions on four aspects of PI concerned with parents' potential contributions to the school, that is policy formation, acting as a resource, collaboration with teachers, and sharing information on children. There were also concerns with the needs of parents, specifically, the need for channels of communication, liaison with school staff, parent education and parent support. There were additional questions that focused on other related aspects of PI which were "encouraging parents into school, involving diverse parents, and professional development for teachers." (p.771) Hornby and Witte (2010)

Hornby and Witte (2010) found that all 22 schools participating in their study used a range of activities in which they involved parents. There were very few PI activities that all schools used and few types of PI that no schools were involved in. Many weaknesses were listed in their study and a few significant issues were that there was limited training for teachers on working with parents, limited ideas to include diverse parents, and minimal focus on parental support.

Schools in New Zealand, like in many other countries, are becoming more ethnically diverse. Many parents have English as a second language and come from

counties with traditional school systems in which PI is not emphasized; therefore, they often have low levels of involvement with their children's education (Hornby and Witte 2010).

This study has shown several weaknesses and implications for improving the practice of PI in rural elementary schools. Mooney and Nugent's study showed that:

The views of the principals, teachers and parents on PI need to be investigated, particularly what they appreciate, what is not useful and what they would like more of. The study has shown that these weaknesses and implications can cause barriers to parental involvement and should be further investigated. (p. N/A)

### **Barriers to Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement (PI) is crucial because according to Hornby and Lafaele (2011), parents' beliefs can also act as barriers to effective PI.

The way that parents view their role in their children's education is crucial. Parents who believe that their role is only to get children to school, which then takes over responsibility for their education, will not be willing to actively [involve] in either school-based or home-based PI. (p. 39)

According to Mooney and Nugent (2008), "school management generally is not enthusiastic about PI in management decision making, such as recruitment, selection of teaching materials or curriculum priorities or deciding on priorities for the school budget." (pg.7) This is why PI is important within the classroom. Another barrier to PI is the lack of self-esteem of the students' parents. Some parents have low confidence with their ability to help their children and are found more likely to avoid contact with

schools because of fear that such involvement will not bring positive outcomes for their children (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

According to Vellymalay (2010), students with high achievement in education generally come from parents who have further education, high income and good occupation status. Her research shows that parents' with more education are more concerned about their children's schooling because they give high importance to the education of their children through various practice of involvement (Vellymalay, 2010).

Hornby and Lafaele state that "family circumstances can be major barriers to PI." (p. 41) Single parents, young families or large families may find it more difficult to get involved in PI because of their caretaking responsibilities. Also, parents who are unemployed may have a hard time paying a babysitter, or having a car or gas in order to attend school meetings. If both parents are working, then there is less time available to for home-based and school-based PI. (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011)

Not only are there barriers at home with employment, but with class and culture gaps as well. In addition, language barriers play a role in PI. Hornby and Lafaele (2011), conclude that minorities are less involved, less represented, less informed and less likely to have access to resources. They are also more likely to have problems associated with language, transportation, communication and child care.

An effective way to break these barriers is to set mutual goals for PI at teacher-parent meetings. Hornby and Lafaele (2011), state that during parent-teacher meetings, teachers and parents have different agendas which can act as a barrier for PI. By discussing mutual goals and agendas for the meeting in advance, the relationship and gap between teachers and parents can be bridged in order to create positive and effective PI.

According to Nugent and Mooney (2008), better results seem to occur when parents are participating in learning and decision-making roles. There is evidence that the most effective PI efforts are those that offer parents a variety of roles, so that parents can choose from a range of activities which accommodate different schedules, preferences and capabilities (Nugent and Mooney, 2008).

Isenberg and Jalongo (1997) suggest that teachers lack the knowledge of how to work with families. This might be one of the barriers to creating healthy partnerships between home and school. Teachers are not prepared to work with families, nor are they prepared to design and implement effective methods to communicate with families of their students. According to Lazar, Broderick, Mastrilli and Slostad (1999), many teachers would like to create partnerships with parents but have not received adequate preparation to do so.

### **Home/School communication around curriculum**

According to Wanat (2010), research has documented the important role that parental involvement plays in a children's learning though it can be challenging for schools to establish appropriate relationships with parents. Wanat conducted a study in a K-12 public school district in the U.S. Twenty parents participated in semi-structured interviews to share their perceptions of ways in which their children's schools encouraged their involvement or created barriers that discouraged them from taking an active role through communication, volunteering, and other school-sponsored activities.

During Wanat's study, parent representatives sat on curriculum and textbook adoption committees, but participants disagreed on how they should contribute. The involved parents were uncertain about their role in curriculum decisions. It was noted

that parents should have a say in the curriculum, but how they should contribute remained in question. Some suggested that parents who were “expert parents” such as those who were teachers should contribute to the curriculum. Even though Wanat’s study shows that the committee was unaware of how parents should be involved in the curriculum decision process, parents can participate in their child’s at-home learning.

### **Classroom newsletters**

“An important concern for those educating teachers is to help teachers recognize the need for and importance of establishing parental involvement and to help them create avenues in which communication can occur.” (Jensen, 2007)

Jensen is referring to is the use of classroom newsletters in order to create a home-school connection. Jensen, a graduate professor at Hunter College, conducted a study where she asked 22 of her graduate students to send monthly newsletters home with their classroom students.

The study sought to answer the questions:

1. Can newsletters be used to help graduate students put into practice what they are learning in the classroom about home school connections?
2. Can newsletters be used to foster interactive communication?
3. How does the use of newsletters inform classroom practice for both the graduate students and the teacher educator? (Jensen 2007, p. 168)

Specifically, Jensen’s question about newsletters being used to foster interactive communication between home and school is relevant to the current study. In Jensen’s study, there were two guidelines for the newsletter. The graduate students were to include, but were not limited to, a description of the literacy events that were taking place

in their classrooms and to invite the parents to share the literacy events that were taking place in their homes. According to Jensen (2007):

At the end of the semester, participants were asked to reflect on their use of the newsletters, to critically examine the newsletters they created, and to discuss the impact, if any, it had on their relationships with parents and the education of their students. (p. 170)

Since each student was required to create two newsletters, there were a total of 44 newsletters analyzed. All but two newsletters were sent to parents of children in a self-contained classroom. The results of this study reflected positive and negative feedback. “Over 60% of the student’s newsletter allowed opportunity for the teacher, parent and child to communicate.” (Jensen, 2007) More results showed that “close to 20% of the students said the newsletter helped them to connect with parents and raised parental involvement in the classroom.” (Jensen, 2007)

However, the participants revealed that some newsletters remained in their students’ backpacks. The participants who had their students help create the newsletter as well as read the finished newsletter with their students, were more successful with parental involvement.

Some reasons why this study may have been more successful for some and not others could be the approach that the participants took. Isenberg and Jalongo (1997), claim that newsletters are an inadequate strategy for interpersonal communication because some of Jensen’s participants’ newsletters were a one-way process going from school to home. However, if parents are obligated to sign them and return by a specific

day, before the next newsletter comes out, then a two-way communication process from school-home will be bridged.

Some participants in Jensen's study had students help create the newsletter which showed signs of positive outcomes because according to Nail (2007), parents appreciate the communication from school and especially like having a schedule of upcoming events in a newsletter. She recommends that students have some say in the newsletter. This way the students are more likely to rush home and show their parents the newsletter that the class has created.

Newsletters are often used in classrooms as a link between the school and home. According to Jensen (2006), many parents don't have enough time to spend in classrooms; because of this the teacher can keep parents up to date with the classroom environment through a newsletter. A decade earlier, Berger (1996) had emphasized this approach by noting that the first step toward a successful partnership in communication and one way to establish a road to communication is through a classroom newsletter. Newsletters effectively promote home-school connections and cooperation from home (Berger 1996).

In a recent article, Wherry (2009), mentions simple tips for capturing parents' attention and communicating effectively in newsletters.

- ***Write strong, attention-getting headlines.*** In both print and online, the reader's eye goes first to the headline. The headline is your best and sometimes only, chance to deliver your message.
- ***Add an illustration or photo*** that clarifies or emphasizes your message.

- ***Include a sidebar or box*** near your main article, containing a related point or example. This could be a fact box, checklist, or short Q&A, or a timeline.
- ***Limit a newsletter to one sheet of paper.*** Using the front and back is OK, as is using a single folded sheet. Even an 11-by-17-inch sheet folded to make four pages can work.
- ***Use an attractive newsletter nameplate*** that reflects the professionalism of your school.
- ***Standardize newsletter design and stick with it.***
- ***Use plain language***, at a fourth-to sixth-grade reading level. Short words, short sentences, and short paragraphs are easier for everyone to read. (Wherry, 2009, pp.7)

These tips are important because the layout of newsletters should be appealing and comprehensible to all audiences. Students, parents and teachers should all be able to comprehend the newsletter easily.

### **Making objectives comprehensible.**

Not every student will come from the same socioeconomic status/background; therefore it is important to make learning objectives comprehensible to their parents. Katsilis and Rubinson's (1990) study indicated that socioeconomic status affects the educational success of children. Moreover, Ho Sui-Chu and Williams (1996) showed that the socioeconomic status of parents has a significant effect on the communication pattern between parents and children, parents and school, and various types of parental involvement in children's education. Between these two studies they were able to justify

that parent's level of education has a great influence on the involvement of parents in their children's education.

Therefore, making the objectives comprehensible to first graders will help their parents to understand the objectives of the newsletter as well. Reviewing the newsletter with students before it is sent out will help the parents to understand the objectives.

### **Communication format.**

In order to create an effective tool, listing weekly objectives and topics for parents, it is important to figure out the best way to communicate with the parents. A lack of mutual understanding has been found to be one of the greatest barriers to effective parental involvement of all types. Additionally, engagement with the school enhances the development of the parents' own resources and skills, with an impact on the academic, social and psychological development of their children. (Mooney and Nugent 2008)

According to Wherry (2009), one effective approach when trying to communicate to parents is, sending home frequent shorter notices rather than long monthly newsletters. He states that almost 80% of parents will spend less than 30 seconds "reading" items of interest.

According to Jensen (2007), the newsletter itself should use color to draw attention to important items on the newsletter.

### ***Language.***

According to Hornby and Lafaele (2011), a major factor in understanding the rhetoric-reality split is an examination of language used. When talking about parents and professionals the language itself defines one, professionals, as expert and the others,

parents, as non-experts. Instead, using the term “partnership” may help bridge the gap between the two titles. As professionals, we know the different jargon used with teaching, whereas the parents may be unfamiliar with certain terms. (Hornby and Lafaele 2011)

Jensen (2006) agrees that newsletter language is important and states that: Newsletters should be written in a warm, respectful and caring tone. They are well received if they are reader friendly and avoid educational jargon. Common language is easy to read and to understand. Having the newsletter available in languages other than English is a benefit to the teacher as well as to the family. A key component in creating a partnership between the home and school appears to be the sharing of information. This can be difficult with parents who do not read English as their first, or sometimes second, language. Some schools are fortunate in having a parent coordinator or parent advocate who can translate the newsletter or who knows of a community resource for having the newsletter translated into the primary language of the home. (p. 188-189)

This is why it is important for the student to participate in the creation of the newsletter as well as reading the newsletter and becoming familiar with it in order to translate it to the parents. The student may become excited to share the information at home because not only have they helped make the newsletter but because they know how to read what is on the newsletter. Also, this is why it is important that the newsletter is in both English and the parents’ native language, so that parents are not intimidated by the language of the newsletter.

***Reading level.***

According to Wherry (2009), newsletter language should be kept at a fourth to sixth-grade reading level, using short words, sentences, and paragraphs so that it is easier for all audiences to read.

It is difficult to know what each reading level the parent is on, so in order to level the playing field; it is a good approach to create a newsletter using help from the classroom students. According to Nail (2007), “student-created newsletters have proven to be powerful tools for teaching, learning, assessing, and reaching out to families at many grade levels.” (p. 40) Nail (2007) also says that the students are excited to share and discuss their newsletters with families and the parents appreciate the communication.

#### ***Print vs. electronic vs. face to face***

In a recent study conducted by Horny and Witte (2010), schools allowed parent education opportunities and in order to inform them, they used email, word of mouth at PTA meetings and newsletters. It is important to share information in multiple ways so that parents have an equal opportunity of receiving information. According to Tenekeci (2011, p. 300) “information and communication Technologies (ICTs) are believed to be an important set of tools for improving teaching and learning in education and their integration in school teaching has been championed in developed countries for at least two decades.”

Jensen (2006) believes that newsletters effectively and efficiently inform parents of the academic life of the classroom. Being able to describe what is going on in the classroom is a helpful tool to bridge gaps between home-school relationships. Jensen (2006) also believes that the first step in successful home-school partnership is communication. She states that, “It is the teacher who opens the door and initiates the

parent into the world of the classroom. A teacher-initiated newsletter invites communication, acknowledges family events and can invite an understanding of events in the classroom.” (p. 190)

### **Methodology**

Parental involvement plays an important role in children’s education. This study investigated improvement in student achievement as reflected by a concurrent improvement in grades of fifteen first grade students as a result of a planned approach to increase parental knowledge of weekly curriculum objectives and topics. In order to do this, a weekly newsletter was sent home every Monday and test scores of the students were collected and tracked each Friday.

### **Participants**

Fifteen first grade students and their parents were participants in this empirical study. The ages of the participants ranged from six to seven years of age. Out of those 15 participants, seven were male and eight were female. According to the NYS School Report Card (2010-2011), this elementary school contains 181 students. Out of these students, 80 % of them are eligible for free/reduced lunches and 18% of them are in the English as a Second Language (ESL) Program. The school is culturally diverse and made up of: 1% Native Americans, 7% Black/African Americans, 49% Hispanic/Latino, 1% Asian/Native Hawaiian, and 38% White. The average elementary class size in this district is 18 students. This particular classroom has 19 students. Out of those 19 students, 88% of them chose to participate in the study.

The district as a whole is made up of approximately 2,000 students. Specifically, 50% are white, 40% are Hispanic or Latino, 10% are Black or African American, 1%

American Indian/Alaska Native, 1% Asian/Native Hawaiian and 1% Multiracial. Out of these students, 70% of them are eligible for free/reduced lunch. Also, 15% of these students are limited English proficient.

The classroom that participated in the study had eight students qualified for Academic Intervention Services (AIS) with four students in math and four students in reading pull out services. In addition, four students are pulled out for ESL services.

Letters were sent home to parents about the study requesting their consent to collect data on their children's test scores. Students also gave their consent in order to participate in the study. (See appendix A for sample parent/student consent forms)

### **Setting**

The setting was in a small city school district in the state of New York. The students live in a school district with four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. There are many resources available to the diverse community, anywhere from discount to name-brand stores. The community experiences all four seasons and provides student activities throughout all. The community supports education by paying taxes, supporting extracurricular activities, providing a Boys & Girls Club, Before/After School Program etc.

More specifically, the elementary school that participated in the study has two kindergarten, two first, second and third grade classrooms, one fourth and one fifth grade classroom. The study took place in the fall of 2012. Spelling and reading test scores, as well as nightly reading logs were documented every Friday for six weeks. The study started on October 12, 2012 and ended on November 30, 2012. The week of November

19, 2012 was a two day school week for the students, and therefore a newsletter was not implemented during that time.

### **Design**

A newsletter which was identified as the “Peek at the Week” was designed, compiled, and sent home to the students’ parents and guardians every Monday (see Appendix B). This newsletter included information about upcoming classroom related topics and curriculum objectives. The newsletter addressed the following subjects: math, science/social studies, spelling, and reading. Though most subjects were included in the weekly newsletter, the study specifically looked at reading and spelling grades, and nightly reading logs. The two-sided 8 ½ x 11 inched newsletter was basic and appealing to the audience. Bright colors, large print (14 pt font) and corresponding pictures helped create an appealing newsletter. Students participated in the making of the newsletter so that they would be more eager to go home and share it with their parents.

### **Data collection**

Data was collected through the recording of assessment scores noted by the classroom teacher. Spelling and reading grades were collected every Friday throughout the study and then compared at the end of six weeks in order to show impact of the newsletter. Nightly reading logs were documented for six weeks as well. Also, the students’ nightly reading served to indicate parental involvement because parents were required to sign their student’s book after the student has read it aloud to the parent/guardian. The data was documented on a Microsoft Word table (see Appendix C).

Parental involvement is difficult to document, therefore a survey was given to the parents at the end of the study (see Appendix D). The survey sought to elicit parent’s

opinion on the newsletter. Parents were asked to tell what they liked best about the newsletter and if the newsletter was helpful. Also, the parents were asked if they would prefer an alternative method of communication.

### **Data analysis**

The student's spelling and reading grades during the first three Friday's were compared and analyzed with their grades after the newsletter had been implemented during the last three Friday's. The data showed if student grades had improved or not after the newsletter had been sent home. Also, the parent survey provided personal feedback and evidence of parental involvement.

The survey was analyzed and the parent's answers will help create adjustments for future newsletters. The responses were placed into negative and positive categories. Both types of responses were acknowledged. If parents responded with positive feedback such as "the newsletter worked well" "it was great!" "I liked it" then the newsletter will continued to be used in the future. However, the final decision will be made by the classroom teacher.

### **Limitations**

According to Vellymalay (2010), parents who are working-class may not have the time to become thoroughly involved in their child's life and help them read, or study for spelling because they are busy working and providing for their family.

Also, some students may receive Academic Intervention Services (AIS) and this may alter the data collection. Their grades may improve because of the extra help they are receiving. Therefore, their grade increase may not come from the newsletter, but from the academic services they are receiving.

The time allotted to conduct this study may limit the results. Six weeks may not be a sufficient amount of time to guarantee the best results. It is the beginning of the school year and parents may be on board and ready for their child's year of first grade to begin. Parental involvement may decline during the end of their child's school year; therefore, the amount of parental involvement may be affected by the time of the school year the study is being implemented.

### **Results**

The data from the empirical study was collected over a six week time frame. Data was collected in order to determine if a classroom newsletter would improve parental involvement as well as student academic success. The weekly newsletters were to be signed and returned the next day. The newsletter was implemented during week three, four and six. The data was analyzed in multiple ways in order to determine effectiveness of the newsletter. Results and effectiveness were based off of student's nightly reading and weekly spelling and reading test scores. Out of 19 students, 15 students' parents gave consent to participate in the study. All data results are based out of 15 students.

### **Test and Quiz Averages**

Data was collected during week one in order to show individual scores as well as class averages. The data was then broken down into categories of spelling test scores, reading test scores and nightly take-home reading tallies. If a student received a 65% or better on the test, that score was considered passing. If a student received a 64% or below on the test, their score was considered failing. Students who were absent during or on the day of the exam did not have their scores calculated into the class's average score. After all the scores were logged in for the week, class averages were calculated and documented for reading and spelling scores.

**Week #1**

During week #1 of the study, the class average test scores for spelling was a 90%. Thirteen students passed while only two failed. The average test scores for reading was an 86%. Twelve students passed, two failed and one was absent for the exam. Thirteen parents signed their child's nightly take-home reading slip while one student only had three log-in's signed and another student only had two log-in's signed. This brought week one averages to 95%.

**Week #2**

The same data was collected over the next two weeks. During week two, 12 students passed the spelling test, while 3 students failed. The spelling test class average was 80%. Results for the reading test scores were 13 students passed while only 2 failed, which gave the class average an 81%. Nightly take-home reading averages before the newsletter was 90% for week 2.

**Week #3**

During week three, only nine students passed their spelling test, leaving six students failing. The class average was 72%. Twelve students passed their reading test while three students failed. This brought their class average for the week to 81%. During the nightly take-home reading, 10 students were able to receive all signatures for the week, while four students received two signatures, leaving one student to receive two. This brought week three averages to 90%.

**Week #4**

The newsletter was implemented during weeks four five and six and was sent home every Monday. The newsletter had a tear off sheet on the bottom, so parents could

write their initials and child's name. The paper was to be returned to the classroom teacher anytime throughout that week. Figures 4-6 show the results of spelling and reading test scores, nightly take-home readings, and whether or not the newsletter was returned with parent initials.

During week four, 14 students passed their spelling test. No students failed the test, but one student was absent. The class average was 93%. 14 students passed the reading test, and one failed. The student who was absent during the spelling test, returned later that day and when completed the reading exam, they had failed the test with a 30%. However, the class average was 90%. During the nightly take-home reading, 10 students had all 4/4 nights returned, while five students had 3/4. This brought the nightly take-home parental involvement to 93% for week 4. Out of 15 students, 12 parents signed and returned their newsletter slips leaving three students to not return a slip. The average returned slips was 80%.

#### **Week #5**

During week five, 12 students passed, one failed and two were absent during the spelling test. This brought the class average to 96%. The reading test results showed that 13 students passed, none failed and two were absent. The reading test class average was 92%. The two students who were absent for both tests were not calculated in the class's averages. The nightly take-home reading results had 12 parents with 4/4 signatures and three parents with 3/4 signatures. The averages for this week were 95%. The newsletter was similar to the previous week with 12 returned slips, and three unreturned slips. The average returned slips was 80%.

#### **Week #6**

The final week, week six, shows 13 students had passed, one failed and one was absent during their spelling test. This brought the class average to a 96%. Their reading test scores showed 14 passing grades, no failures and one absence. The class average for reading was 90%. Twelve student's parents signed 4/4 of their nightly take-home reading while three parents returned 3/4 of them. The average for week six was 97%. The last newsletter received 11 initialed slips and five unreturned slips. The average returned slips was 73%.

Collectively, figures 7 and 8 show the class averages of their spelling and reading test scores. The two charts comparatively show the classes reading and spelling class averages during weeks 1-6. During week one spelling and reading averages were 90% and 86% while week four the class averages were 93% and 90%. Spelling scores were a 3% gain while reading scores showed a 4% gain. Week two spelling scores compared to week 5 scores were 90% to 96% showing a 6% gain. In reading during week two and five, the class averages had a 2% gain (90% to 92%). Week three and spelling scores compared to week six scores were 72% to 96% showing a 24% gain. In reading during week three and six, the class averages went from 81% to 90%, showing a 9% gain. Overall, the class average showed improvements and gains across the board which proves the newsletter's effectiveness.

Figures 7 show spelling averages of individual students as well as class average. The data shows that before the newsletter, five students were failing with a grade of 64% or below, and after the newsletter was implemented only two students were failing. Eight students increased their spelling average after the newsletter was implemented while three students remained the same, and three students decreased in grade averages.

Ironically two of the students who decreased in averages submitted their newsletter slip every week, while one returned their newsletter slip 2/3 times.

Figure 8 shows reading averages for individual students as well as class averages. Out of 15 students, all but one student received a failing average before the newsletter (student 13). After the newsletter was implemented, only student 12 received a failing grade. However, student 12 was also absent 2/3 times during the reading tests. Six students increased their reading averages after the newsletter was implemented while, four students remained the same, and five students decreased scores. Even though those students decreased averages, 4/5 of them still received passing grades.

During week 1, 95% of parents signed their nightly reading, week 2 had 90% and week 3 had 90%. After the newsletter was implemented in week 4, 93% of parents signed their nightly reading, 95% during week 5 and 97% during week 6. Before the newsletter pm average, 92% of parents signed their child's nightly take-home reading over the three week period without the newsletter. After the newsletter was implemented, an average of 95% of parents signed, which shows a 3% increase. Lastly, the newsletters showed on average a 78% of parental participation throughout the study. All parents signed at least one newsletter slip during the study.

**FIGURE 7:** Figure 7 shows spelling averages for individual students as well as class averages before and after the newsletter was implemented.

Spelling Grades								
Student #	Week 1-3 w/o newsletter				Week 4-6 w/ newsletter			
1	105	100	100	102%	105	100	105	103%
2	60	70	45	58%	75	30	65	57%

3	95	85	85	88%	75	80	80	78%
4	40	70	75	62%	70	70	50	63%
5	100	80	60	80%	105	100	100	102%
6	105	105	105	105%	105	105	105	105%
7	80	40	45	55%	95	100	105	100%
8	90	50	40	60%	90	65	70	75%
9	85	105	100	97%	105	100	100	102%
10	100	70	80	83%	75	AB	80	78%
11	105	75	80	87%	85	105	90	93%
12	90	60	10	53%	AB	AB	AB	
13	80	90	50	73%	100	85	90	92%
14	105	105	95	102%	105	100	100	102%
15	105	105	105	105%	105	105	105	105%
Class Avg.	90%	80%	72%	Individual Avg.	93%	96%	96%	Individual Avg.

**FIGURE 8:** Figure 8 shows reading averages for individual students as well as class averages before and after the newsletter was implemented.

Reading Grades								
Student #	Week 1-3 w/o newsletter				Week 4-6 w/ newsletter			
1	100	100	90	97%	100	80	90	90%
2	AB	100	80	90%	80	90	80	83%
3	100	100	90	97%	100	100	90	97%
4	80	80	90	83%	100	80	70	83%
5	60	100	50	70%	90	100	100	97%

<b>6</b>	100	100	100	<b>100%</b>	100	100	80	<b>93%</b>
<b>7</b>	80	80	80	<b>80%</b>	100	100	90	<b>97%</b>
<b>8</b>	80	80	70	<b>77%</b>	80	70	80	<b>77%</b>
<b>9</b>	100	80	100	<b>93%</b>	100	90	100	<b>97%</b>
<b>10</b>	100	<b>60</b>	100	<b>87%</b>	90	<b>AB</b>	90	<b>90%</b>
<b>11</b>	80	100	80	<b>87%</b>	100	100	100	<b>100%</b>
<b>12</b>	80	100	<b>40</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50%</b>	80	90	100	<b>90%</b>
<b>14</b>	100	100	100	<b>100%</b>	100	100	100	<b>100%</b>
<b>15</b>	100	100	90	<b>97%</b>	100	90	100	<b>97%</b>
Class Avg.	86%	90%	81%	Individual avg.	90%	92%	90%	Individual avg.

**FIGURE 9:** Figure 9 shows nightly take-home reading class averages. The newsletter slips show individual and class averages.

Nightly Take-Home Reading							Newsletter Slips			
Student #	Week 1-3 w/o newsletter			Week 4-6 w/ newsletter			Returned slips: Y= Yes N= No			Individual Avg.
<b>1</b>	4	4	4	4	4	4	Y	<b>N</b>	Y	67%
<b>2</b>	2	4	4	4	3	4	<b>N</b>	Y	Y	67%
<b>3</b>	4	4	4	4	4	4	Y	Y	Y	100%
<b>4</b>	4	4	4	4	4	4	Y	Y	Y	100%

5	4	3	3	3	4	4	Y	Y	Y	100%
6	4	4	4	4	4	4	Y	Y	Y	100%
7	4	2	3	4	4	4	Y	Y	Y	100%
8	4	3	3	3	4	3	Y	Y	Y	100%
9	4	4	4	4	4	4	Y	Y	Y	100%
10	4	3	3	4	3	4	N	Y	N	33%
11	4	4	4	4	4	4	Y	Y	Y	100%
12	4	4	4	3	3	3	Y	N	N	33%
13	3	3	2	3	4	4	N	Y	N	33%
14	4	4	4	4	4	4	Y	Y	Y	100%
15	4	4	4	4	4	4	Y	N	N	33%
Class Avg.	57/60 95%	54/60 90%	54/60 90%	56/60 93%	57/60 95%	58/60 97%	12/15 80%	12/15 80%	11/15 73%	
Possible 60 points per week										

### Discussion

After the study was complete and the data was analyzed, it was apparent that the newsletter was effective. Class averages improved in both reading and spelling. The newsletter appears to be a great way to tie student-parent-teacher relationships together. Most students were eager to show their parents/guardians the newsletters each week.

### Effectiveness of Newsletter

To reiterate Jensen's view, she believes that newsletters effectively and efficiently inform parents of the academic life of the classroom. Being able to describe what is

going on in the classroom is a helpful tool to bridge gaps between home-school relationships. Jensen (2006) also believes that the first step in successful home-school partnership is communication. She states that, "It is the teacher who opens the door and initiates the parent into the world of the classroom. A teacher-initiated newsletter invites communication, acknowledges family events and can invite an understanding of events in the classroom." (p. 190) I believe that the newsletter did just that. It was effective in terms of raising student grades as well as creating a two way communication between parents and teachers.

Each week the students were able to participate in the creation of the newsletter. Specifically, the students helped pick out the graphics as well as the extra learning tips to do at home. The students were eager to share the newsletter each week with their parents/guardians.

According to Nail (2007) it is imperative for students to help create the newsletter, which indeed it was. Students were excited to bring home the newsletter and show their parents what they had "created." Though the students did not pick out what they were learning that week, they were able to help choose extra activities to do at home in order to continue learning in their home environment with their parents.

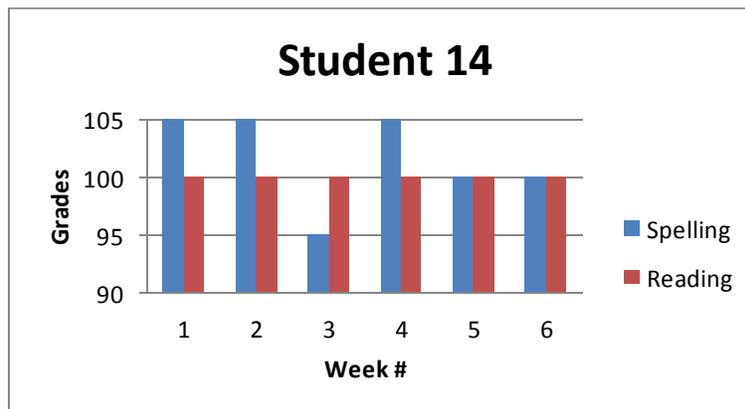
The data was analyzed as a whole class and then averages were taken. During week 1 spelling and reading averages were 90% and 86% while week 4 the class averages were 93% and 90%. Spelling scores were a 3% gain while reading scores showed a 4% gain. Week 2 spelling scores compared to week 5 scores were 90% to 96% showing a 6% gain. In reading during week 2 and 5, the class averages had a 2% gain (90% to 92%). Week 3 and spelling scores compared to week 6 scores were 72% to 96%

showing a 24% gain. In reading during week 3 and 6, the class averages went from 81% to 90%, showing a 9% gain. Overall, the class average showed improvements and gains across the board which indicates the newsletter's effectiveness. On the contrary, some students showed little to no improvements.

### No Improvements

Specifically, student #14 showed minimal improvements. The student's average reading score throughout the six weeks remained at 100%. The student's average spelling grade before the newsletter was a 102%. After the newsletter the student's average in spelling was 102%, which showed no signs of change throughout the study. Also, the student's parent returned the newsletter slips 3/3 times. Student 14 also had 100% signature returns for nightly take-home readings. Student 14 was consistent throughout the study.

**FIGURE 9: Student 14**

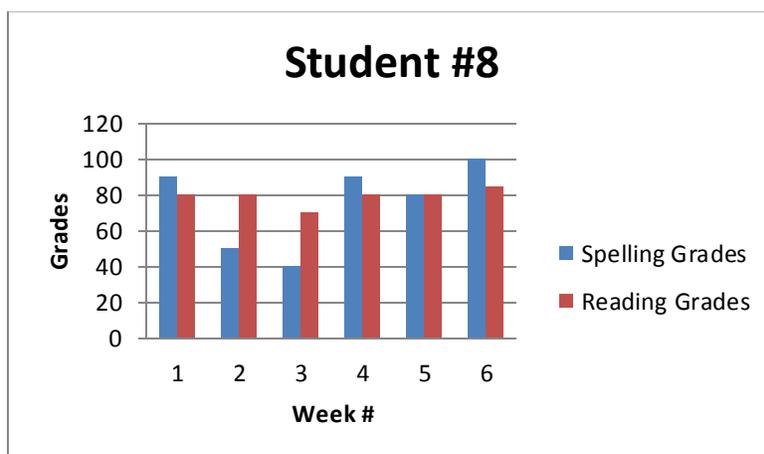


### Improvements

Student #8 showed significant signs of improvement in both spelling and reading. This student went from a 60% spelling average to a 90% spelling average, showing a 30% average increase. Student 8 had a 77% reading average and at the end of six weeks

this student had an 82% average in reading. This student's gain was 7%. This student also speaks English as a second language, and therefore receives ESL services daily. These factors did not affect the student's academic improvements in the study. Student #8's parents also returned the newsletter slips every week, which showed 100% parental involvement for this student.

**FIGURE 10: Student 8**



### Parent Survey

A survey was sent home on Monday, December 3, 2012. The survey was to be returned the following Friday, December 7. Fifteen surveys were sent home and nine surveys were returned by Friday. When asked how effective the parents thought the newsletter was, all gave it a 5/5. When asked if they preferred a different means of communication in the classroom, 5/5 responded no. One responded with “the newsletter was fun to read with my child!” When asked what they like best about the newsletter, most responded with “it was nice to know what is going on throughout out the week.” One responded that they “hung it on their fridge all week long.”

According to the responses, the newsletters seemed to satisfy most parents. Out of the parents who responded no negative responses were found.

### **Impact of Student Absences**

Student #12 was absent for his spelling test 3/3 times during the newsletter. This particular student had no recorded grade, and furthermore, there was no documentation as to him making up the missed exams or not. This student received a 53% before the newsletter, and did not receive a grade at all after the newsletter due to absences. His averages did not affect the class averages. Student #12 had a 73% average in reading, and after the newsletter he had a 30%. Though he missed all of his spelling tests during the study, he was present for 1/3 reading tests. This student's parental involvement for the nightly take-home readings was 100%. After the newsletter was implemented, the parent's parental involvement was 75%. Though the parental involvement decreased by 25%, the student's absence may have affected the parental involvement. As far as the newsletter slips, the parent only returned the slips 1/3 times. The student's absences and lack of parental involvement may have affected the student's grades during the study. Even though the student was absent during the spelling and reading tests, the student's parents had all week to return the slips, giving them a fair chance to participate. It was not documented whether or not the student missed more than the recorded test days.

### **Implications**

During week 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, the students had a substitute teacher. The general education teacher was out on maternity leave. The regular teacher returning to the classroom may have affected student grades; however no serious changes in class or individual averages were seen.

If I had to do the study again I would change the length of the study. Instead of six weeks, I would use the newsletter for the rest of the school year. The newsletter

seemed to create an impact on a majority of the participants and parents. Though the newsletter showed improvements in individual and class averages, the regular teacher has chosen not to continue to use the newsletter. The general education teacher is still becoming familiar with NYS's Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR). However, the newsletter would be a great addition to the new APPR requirements. The newsletter helps tie, parental involvement, student academic success as well as building teacher-student-parent professional relationships.

Another thing I would do differently is not only compare reading, spelling and nightly take-home reading scores, but includes the rest of elementary subjects such as mathematics, social studies, ELA and science. Though the newsletter included what the students would be learning in those subjects, that data was not collected.

Something that impressed the general teacher and me was student #4. The student's average spelling score was 62% before the newsletter and 63% after the newsletter, showing a 1% gain but still a failing average. The student's average in reading showed no gains and remained an 83%. The student's parental involvement in nightly take-home reading and newsletter slips returned was 100%. Even though the student did not show significant signs of improvement after the newsletter was implemented, the student's parent's involvement remained consistent. During the newsletter study, this student experienced a tragic loss. His house caught on fire and burnt down. Even though this horrific experience was happening at home, it did not affect his grades or his parental involvement.

During week three, there were no extra copies of the newsletters made. A student asked me for an extra copy of the newsletter because her parents are divorced and she

wanted to take one home to her mom and her dad. I hadn't thought of that during the study, and I was impressed that the student wanted to take two homes. This proved to me that the student's took the newsletter seriously and wanted to share it with both parents. I made an additional copy and made extra copies for each remaining weeks.

In conclusion, the data shows that a majority of the student's improved in both reading and spelling. Though the increase was small, parental involvement still showed a positive impact on the students' their nightly take-home reading as well. Though the permanent teacher is not planning to use the newsletters in the classroom right away, some students have been asking when they could start working on the next newsletter.

## Appendix

## Appendix A: Parent/Student Consent Form



Dear Parent/Guardian,

Starting October 12, 2012 until November 20, 2012, I will be conducting research in your child's classroom for a Thesis project for SUNY Fredonia. The purpose of this study is to investigate if using a planned approach to parental involvement will impact student grades.

- Every Monday I will be sending home a Newsletter, which will be called a "Peek at the Week."
- This newsletter will include **spelling, reading, math, social studies/science** objectives for the upcoming week. The newsletter will be sent home on Monday so that you may review with your child upcoming topics in the classroom for that week. For example, on the newsletter you will find a list of the upcoming spelling list. Each week you will find "tips" on how to review the spelling words in different/fun ways at home with your child. . **Specifically, I will be reviewing your child's spelling and reading test scores.**
- The bottom of the newsletter will have a **tear off sheet** where you will write your initials indicating if you helped study or read with your child. This is to be returned by Friday.
- Specifically, I will be collected data of your child's **spelling and reading scores, nightly reading, and newsletter tear off sheet.**
- At the end of this time, I will provide an anonymous survey for you to fill out indicating your response to the use of the newsletter as a means of communicating with parents. You may return this or not.
- This study will run four weeks.

Your involvement may help your child gain academic success within the classroom. Your child's name will be kept **confidential** at all times and will **not** be disclosed in any matter. Your child's grades are the only piece of data that is to be documented and they will not be linked to your child's name. Your child's *name* will be assigned a *number* in order to keep confidentiality. Your child's participation is voluntary and your child may withdraw at any time without penalty. The choices to participate or not in this study will not negatively affect your child's grades or status in the class. All information will be destroyed upon receiving my Masters Degree.

Please know there are no anticipated risks involved in this study and you may withdraw your student, without penalty, at any time throughout the study.

Thank you,

Audra Frazier

If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me or the following professionals from SUNY Fredonia.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Email</b>	<b>Phone Number</b>
Audra Frazier	Master's Thesis Student	danf5545@fredonia.edu	716-499-2918
Dr. Janeil Rey	Master's Thesis Project Advisor	janeil.rey@fredonia.edu	673-4650
Maggie Bryan-Peterson	Human Subjects Administrator and Director	petersmb@fredonia.edu	673-3528

YES, \_\_\_\_\_ grades may be documented for Thesis Research.  
(Student Name)

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

NO, \_\_\_\_\_ grades may not be documented for Thesis Research.  
(Student Name)

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Student,

Starting [insert start date] to [insert end date], I, Mrs. Frazier will be conducting research in your class for a month. Every Monday, Mrs. Dolce and I, will send home a newsletter to your parents. The newsletter will show them what we will be learning in the upcoming week. Don't worry, we will **not** show your name at any time during this study. No one will know what grade you received. All we are trying to do is see if your grades will improve with the help of your parents.

If you agree to participate in the study, I will record your spelling and reading scores, newsletter returns and nightly reading every week. I will compare your old test scores you received before the newsletter with the new test scores at the end of four weeks.

Please let us know if you would like to participate or not by signing below. If you don't want to participate your grades will not be affected or altered and you can stop at any time. If you decide to stop participating please let Mrs. Dolce or Mrs. Frazier know. Please know that there are no anticipated risks involved in this study!

Mrs. Frazier

YES! I would like to participate in Mrs. Frazier's study.




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NO! I would not like to participate in Mrs. Frazier's study.




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# Mrs. Dolce's Peek at the Week

Week of November 5- November 9 2012



## Spelling:

Please study these words:

### Short "u" sound:

us  
bus  
bug  
rug  
mug  
must  
with  
then  
she  
use

**\*\*Tip\*\*** See how many of these spelling words your child can spell to you.

**Test on Friday**

## Reading:

This week's focus skill is: **Cause & Effect**



### Sight Words:

gives	people
he	says
night	out
your	when

Allow the child to read to someone and then write your initials on the book.

**\*\*Tip\*\*** Have your child read the sight words to you.

Happy Birthday  
this month:  
November 1- Devin

Turn over 

**Tear this box off and return to school.**

✓ I reviewed the newsletter with my student.....Initial Here \_\_\_\_\_

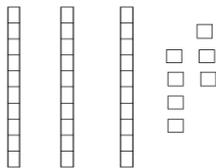
Student Name \_\_\_\_\_



**Math:** This week we are practicing counting to **120!**

Also, we are continuing to count in groups of tens and ones.

Example:



Tens: 3      Ones: 7

Answer:   37  

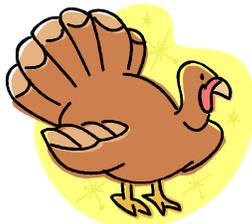
**\*\*Tip\*\*** *Have your child count from 1 to 120 by 5's or/and 10's*

**\*\*\*TEST ON THURSDAY\*\*\***

### **Dates to Remember:**

**NO school** on November 12<sup>th</sup> in honor of Veteran's Day!

**NO school** on November 21,22,23... Thanksgiving Break!



### **Social Studies/Science:**

We are reviewing our **leaders** and talking about the **election!**

Our PBIS word is **\*Citizenship\***

**\*Tip\*** *Ask your child if they can name a leader that we talked about!*

### **School 5**

#### **Mini Marauder Events:**

Report Cards..... November 9.....**Please sign and return**  
 Parent/Teacher Conferences.....November 14.....**6 pm-8 pm (School 5)**  
 Field Trip to Fredonia State.....November 27

## Appendix C: Data Collection Charts

Spelling Grades								
Student #	Week 1-3 w/o newsletter				Week 4-6 w/ newsletter			
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
11								
12								
13								
14								
15								
Class Avg. Avg.				Individual Avg.				Individual Avg.

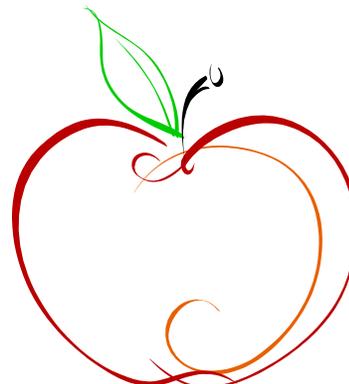
Reading Grades								
Student #	Week 1-3 w/o newsletter				Week 4-6 w/ newsletter			
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
11								
12								
13								
14								
15								
Class Avg.				Individual avg.				Individual avg.

Nightly Take-Home Reading						Newsletter Slips				
Student #	Week 1-3 w/o newsletter			Week 4-6 w/ newsletter			Returned slips: Y= Yes N= No			Individual Avg.
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										
11										
12										
13										
14										
15										
Class Avg.										
Possible 60 points per week										

## Appendix D: Parent Survey

**Parental Involvement Survey**  
**Dunkirk School District**

**M***rs. Bautista's first grade class would like to improve parental involvement! Parental involvement may help your student perform better in school! Please fill out this survey and ask your child to return it to his or her teacher by December 7, 2012*



1. From **what** sources do you get most of your information about school? (Check one)

- |   |                                  |                                   |                                   |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Principal newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Children | <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Principal            |                                  |                                   |                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take-home folder     | <input type="checkbox"/> E-Mail  | <input type="checkbox"/> TV       | <input type="checkbox"/> Website  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher newsletter   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other   |                                   |                                   |

2. **How** would you like to be informed about what your child is learning in classroom?

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom newsletter (paper) | <input type="checkbox"/> Text        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take-home folder             | <input type="checkbox"/> E-Mail      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Phone Call                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

3. What did you like best about the weekly newsletter?

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4. Was the weekly newsletter helpful to you and your child?

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME! ☺**

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