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A Multi-Case Study of Electronic Communication Policy in Rural East Texas School Districts

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A MULTI-CASE STUDY OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY IN RURAL EAST TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICTS

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to conduct a policy analysis regarding electronic communication between educators and students in three rural East Texas school districts. The policy analysis for each district began with the initial implementation of teacher communication via electronic sources provided by the districts. The focus of the study was limited specifically to the policy regulating non-school related, electronic communication by educators with students. The challenge faced by school districts to embrace technology with one-to-one classrooms, virtual classrooms, constant connectivity, school texting applications, and open availability to teachers via email, complicates restrictions placed on non-school related communication. The need to protect educators and students with regard to such communication has caused school boards to review their current electronic communication policy thus narrowing the broad guidelines previously in place. The findings include educator perceptions and suggestions.

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"Never regard study as a duty but as an enviable opportunity to learn to know the liberating influence of beauty in the realm of the spirit for your own personal joy and to the profit of the community to which your later works belong" (Albert Einstein). I would like to express my gratitude for my professors, my family members, and my friends for their support throughout this journey. I am particularly grateful to the Educational Leadership Doctoral Selection Committee of Stephen F. Austin State University for selecting me for this program. This has been one of the richest, most fulfilling opportunities of my life. I would like to thank my family for their support and understanding as I went through this process. I wish to acknowledge the teachers I have had throughout all of the different phases of my education. You were the ones who built a solid foundation of learning, and challenged me to reach farther. I am extremely grateful for my church family who supported me with prayers, encouragement, and hope.

DEDICATION

To my mother, Mary Jane Echard Ferrill. Thank you for sharing your gift and love of writing and storytelling. To my late father, Jerry Franklin Ferrill. I know that you are proud of me. To my children: Stephanie, Virginia, Charles, and Rachel. Thank you for your undying love and support. I love you.

Mom

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CHAPTER I

Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Effective communication between teachers and students, as well as teachers and parents, is important in order to develop the functioning partnership desired for the educational success of a student. In the article, *The Parent-Teacher Partnership*, published through the Public Broadcasting Service, positive parent/teacher relationships are vital to the success of students. In the article, Diane Levin, professor of education at Wheelock College, provides this explanation.

> A positive parent-teacher relationship helps your child feel good about school and be successful in school. It demonstrates to your child that he can trust his teacher, because you do. This positive relationship makes a child feel like the important people in his life are working together. (The Parent-Teacher Partnership, 2012 para. 3)

Likewise, Susan Becker's quote in the same article, suggests that communication by both parties is very important (The Parent-Teacher Partnership, 2012, para. 4). However, communication was difficult in a fast-paced instant gratification society. Communication between educators and parents remained at the forefront of challenges for school districts.

The method of communication had moved from phone calls to parents, to electronic communication via teacher email messages. School-parent communication allowed families to become more involved with their students' school community as well as more comfortable interacting with the administrators and faculty. This relationship provided an avenue for families to approach the school community with concerns or questions regarding student needs (Epstein, 2001). By sharing information in a two-way discourse, partnerships between parents and school communities established a unified mission impacting the student's development (Epstein, 2001; Green et al., 2007; Hill & Taylor, 2004). Perceived as a convenient form of instant communication for classroom assignments, homework, and reminders, parents and educators alike relied on the simple and effective form of communication.

Some educators used a classroom texting application for smart phones (McCrea, 2013). These texts allowed educators to share information more spontaneously and more quickly with parents. However, when the students responded to the text regarding classes, tests, or assignments establishing a conversation with the educator, the possibility of unethical behavior on the part of the educator arose. Therefore, the basic communication between teachers and students developed into an ethical quandary played out in the educational system as Digital Natives (students who have grown up with technology) and Digital Immigrants (teachers who are learning to integrate technology into their curriculum) collided with common technology (Prensky, 2001). District administrators and policy developers attempted to incorporate the young teachers who have grown up with texting as their main form of communication. The issue with

texting, between educators and students, affected the campus climate and culture, parents, communities, administration, and policy writers.

Background of the Problem

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when technology grew into the global phenomenon of today. The Information Age (Rouse, 2014, para. 1) began with an American mathematician. In 1949, while working at Bell Laboratories, Claude E. Shannon, published a paper that posited encoded information as ones and zeroes. "Known as the father of Information Theory, Shannon showed how all information media, from telephone signals to radio waves to television, could be transmitted without error using this single framework" (Rouse, 2014, para. 2). In 1969, the United States Department of Defense, known at that time as the Advanced Research Projects Agency, or ARPA, further developed the Internet by utilizing personal computers. The agency began with the interconnectivity of four computers enabling scientists to communicate and share their research and resources (Rouse, 2005, para. 1). Within ten years, the Digital Revolution was well on its way to becoming the global virtual community of today (Rouse, 2014, para. 3).

With the influx of technology integrated into the classroom, schools were in effect creating their own communities of social media. Students collaborated through email messages, shared documents, chat groups, and messaging. Social media offered the opportunity for the exchanging of ideas and information between participants. "The fundamental characteristic of social media is the creation of community: a fellowship and relationship with others who chare common attitudes, interests, and goals" (Maggiani,

2014, para. 9). The way that we connected to others had changed drastically. Maggiani identified those methods and elaborated on many of the commonly selected methods of electronic communication.

> Not too long ago, we communicated through the mail, on a land-line telephone, and in person. Today, we send text messages; leave voice messages; use instant messenger; send emails; talk through headphones, cell phones, and online video phones; and of course, interact through the Internet where a plethora of social media tools has redefined communication. (Maggiani, 2014, para. 1)

As access to the Internet was made available to schools through a network of computer systems known as the World Wide Web (World Wide Web Foundation, n.d.), administrators sought funding to build the necessary infrastructure. These systems supported district server systems, computer labs, and teacher computers in order to offer students the opportunity to become part of a global society (Kleiner, & Farris, 2002, p. 4). For example, students conducted research using the Library of Congress, studied astronomy from web portals provided by NASA, and observed cultures much different from their own.

The groundwork laid, districts sought to obtain government funding to build their networking capacity through T1/DSL lines via telephone line data transfer, and later on, through fiber optic lines (Kleiner & Farris, 2002, p. 4). The T1 "is a data transfer system that transfers digital signals at 1.544 megabits per second (quite a bit faster than a 56k modem" (Techterms.com/definition/T1, para. 1). "DSL . . . Digital Subscriber Line . . . is a communications medium used to transfer digital signals over standard telephone lines"

(Techterms.com/definition/dsl, para. 1). In 1994, the National Center for Education Statistics conducted a connectivity survey of public schools in the United States. At that time, only thirty-five percent of public schools had Internet access (Kleiner & Farris, 2002, p. 4). By the year 2001, the Education rate (E-rate) program increased access to the Internet for many school districts by providing discounted services, access, and hardware, which allowed schools to develop their local area networks (LANs), based on the income of the families served in their community and the extent to which the community was rural or urban. "As of February 28, 2001, $5.8 billion has been committed to E-rate applicants throughout the nation" (Bare & Meek, 1998, section 1, para. 3).

By the year 2000, fifty-four percent of U. S. public schools had reliable connectivity to the Internet available for students beyond the regular school day. "Secondary schools were more likely to make the Internet available to students outside of regular school hours than elementary schools (80 percent compared to 46 percent)" (Bare, and Meek, 1998, section 3, para. 1). According to a nationwide survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) published in 2002, ninety-nine percent of public schools had some form of connection to the Internet by 2001. District technology directors placed pertinent information on school websites. Much of the initial information available to parents and guardians consisted of schedules, school activities, and school-sponsored e-mail addresses for the faculty and administrators. In the survey conducted by the NCES in 2002, district administrators responded to questions regarding the availability of school-sponsored e-mail addresses for administrators, teachers, and

students (Kleiner & Farris, 2002, p. 5). In their findings, the NCES reported that ninety-five percent of the public schools that had Internet access reported that administrative staff had a school-sponsored e-mail address. Ninety-two percent (Kleiner & Farris, 2002, p. 8) of the schools had addresses available for teachers, while only sixteen percent made school-sponsored e-mail addresses available to their students. Other implications of the 2002 NCES study found that of the schools in which e-mail was available to students, staff, and teachers, ninety-two percent reported that all or most of the administrators utilized school-sponsored e-mail addresses, and eighty-nine percent indicated that most of the teachers had school-sponsored e-mail addresses. However, only thirty-four percent (Kleiner & Farris, 2002, p. 9) of the sixteen percent of schools providing e-mail addresses indicated that all or most of their students had access to a school-sponsored e-mail address.

By 2001, eighty-five percent of public school staff used some type of broadband connection to gain internet access (Kleiner & Farris, 2002, p. 4). Generally, larger schools were more likely to have broadband access for their students. (Kleiner & Farris, 2002, p. 4). Smaller districts formed consortiums that gave them greater buying power. Due to funding, schools with a greater minority enrollment were more likely to have broadband access than other school. "Eighty-one percent of public schools with the lowest minority enrollment used broadband connections when connecting to the Internet, compared with ninety-three percent of schools with the highest minority enrollment" (Kleiner & Farris, 2002, p. 4).

With connectivity gaining ground, school personnel provided greater access to computers in the classroom. In 1998, the student to computer ratio was 12.1 to 1. By 2001, the student to computer ratio was 5.4 to 1 (Kleiner & Farris, 2002, p. 5). Computer labs allowed teachers to sign up for specific days and times for student access. The capacity for computing during the school day grew, and students had greater access to computing opportunities at school. However, by the year 2000, only twenty-one percent of children in the United States used the Internet at home. "In 2001, fifty-one percent of public schools with access to the Internet reported that they made computers with access to the Internet available to students outside of regular school hours" (Kleiner & Farris, 2002, p. 5).

With key components for Internet access and computer availability in place, student use of computers and mobile technology grew. However, with the new-found connectivity emerged the issue of what became known as the Digital Divide.

> The idea of the digital divide refers to the growing gap between the underprivileged members of society, especially the poor, rural, elderly , and handicapped portion of the population who do not have access to computers or the Internet; and the wealthy, middle-class, and young Americans living in urban and suburban areas who have access. .(Roberts, 1999, para. 3)

The novelty of computer stations in classrooms providing student access during school hours phased into the educational technology push of the one-to-one initiative as the drive grew to narrow the digital divide.

> In 2003-2004, it was estimated that four percent of the nation's school districts were implementing some form of 1:1 computing. In 2006, it was estimated that close to twenty-five percent of school districts were implementing some form of a 1:1 laptop program. (Bebell & Kay, 2010, p. 6)

With the addition of wireless devices, the Internet has pushed the Information Age further into the global society. "Humankind is now almost entirely connected, albeit with great level of inequality in bandwidth, efficiency, and price" (Castells, 2014, para. 1).

Problem Statement

The problem of this study focused on the historical progression of the implementation of school district policy and the development of specific guidelines regarding electronic communication between teachers and students. Understanding the evolution of policy in concert with advancement of communication technology in school districts is integral to formulating policies that address current and future decisions about how teachers and students communicate via social media and related digital technologies.

Commonly categorized in the policy of social media, teacher/student electronic communication continues to pose ethical issues for administrators and policy writers. According to a study published by the Pew Research Center (2012), texting dominates the overall communication choice. "When asked generally about how they communicate with people in their lives – not just about their friends, but about all kinds of people – teens point to text messaging as the dominant daily mode of communication" (Lenhart, 2012, p. 16). In the article *Communicating with Parents: Strategies for Teachers*, Susan Graham-Clay described several methods teachers utilize in order to communicate with

parents. "In these changing times, teachers must continue to develop and expand their skills in order to maximize effective communication with parents" (Graham-Clay, 2005, p. 1). Graham-Clay elaborated upon the methods currently utilized by teachers to maintain lines of communication with parents including traditional phone calls placed during their conference/planning period and by means of electronic communication (Graham-Clay, 2005). This acceptable electronic communication may take many forms such as emailing parents from their school account, utilizing a school-wide texting program, or individual classroom texting programs approved by the district. These messaging formats all have one thing in common: they do not originate from the teachers' personal email account or personal text messaging platforms, thus enabling educators to interact with students and their parents in an acceptable professional manner. It is within these communications that communicating for educational reasons often moves to communicating for personal reasons.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this descriptive multi-case study of electronic communication policy in three school districts' technology policy was to describe and examine the historical progression of the implementation of district policy developing specific guidelines regarding the electronic communication between teachers and students. In an attempt to understand the process by which new policies are developed and implemented, this study sought to answer four research questions:

1. What changes were made in the technology policy at school districts regarding educator/student electronic communication?

2. How have changes impacted technology policy?
3. How have addendums impacted the technology policy's progression?
4. How has the change in the technology policy impacted non-school related educator/student electronic communication?

Significance of the Study

Change is inevitable. Changes in transportation, health care, social policies, industry, and education form the structure for organized functions in society. Lucie Cerna (2013) noted, "The topic of policy change is a widely researched area in public policy and political science. In fields such as education policy, however, there is often an un-theoretical approach to what works" (Cerna, 2013, p. 3). This study adds to the growing body of literature regarding the review and analysis of a theoretical approach regarding policy change in the area of K-12 education. This research seeks to provide the perspective of educators, administrators, and school board members who are responsible for the development and implementation of educational policies. The research focuses specifically on the development of electronic communication and social media policies and the regulation of that policy in three East Texas school districts.

Technology is utilized by educators each day in classrooms around the world. "The pace at which technology evolves in our modern information-driven world can seem nothing short of overwhelming. The way we communicate, interact, and understand the world around us seems to change moment to moment" (Borges, n.d., para. 1). Educators remain hesitant of the integration and utilization of transformative technology in the classroom. "The integration of technology ensures that all students, no

matter their abilities, strengths or needs, will be able to participate in and have an active role in their academic lives" (Borges, n.d., para. 1). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) compiled the most comprehensive list of how teachers utilize technology in their classrooms. According to the NCES, ninety-seven percent of the teachers in the United States have one or more computers in their classroom for use every day. Fifty-four percent have computers available via carts to bring into the classroom. The most commonly used devices are digital cameras, interactive whiteboards, and LCD (liquid crystal display) or DLP (digital light processing) projectors (Gray, Thomas, and Lewis, 2010, p. 3).

However, the policies guiding the acceptable use of that technology are often outdated (Shinder, 2006, para.1). Understanding not only the historical progression of the electronic communication policy between school employees and students, but also the social aspect of the use of texting and instant messaging in students' lives, guides policy makers to be proactive rather than strictly reactive when it comes to reviewing and amending policy. School boards and administrators must be vigilant in maintaining a technology policy that is relevant and current to technology trends. Providing policy regarding electronic communications permitted between educators and students offers a checkpoint for educators who send electronic communications to students. This multi-case study of three rural school districts in Northeast Texas examined the progression of the districts' electronic communication policy..

Definition of Terms

The following conceptual terms are relevant to this study and provide an awareness of the language germane to the study.

Short Message Service (SMS).

Commonly referred to as text messaging, SMS is a service for sending short messages of up to 160 characters to mobile devices, including cellular phones, smartphones, and Personal Digital Assistants (Rouse, n.d., para. 1). Although the SMS is similar to the older paging system, the mobile phone does not have to be turned on or within a specified range. There are a number of ways that an SMS can be sent to digital phones.

- One digital phone to another
- Web-based applications within a Web browser
- From instant messaging clients like ICQ
- VoIP applications like Skype
- Unified communications applications

Developed in 1984 by Friedhelm Hillebrand, Bernand Ghillebaert, and Oculy Silaban for the Franco-German GSM cooperation, the first SMS was sent over the United Kingdom's Vodaphone GSM network on December 3, 1992. In 2003, roughly 4.1 trillion SMS texts were transmitted ("MMS vs SMS", 2013, para. 4).

Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS).

According to the Oxford dictionary online, MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service) is "a system that enables mobile phones to send and receive color pictures and

sound clips as well as text messages" (Oxfordictionaries.com, n.d., para. 1). MMS works with the Map internet protocol and provides a more homogenous integrating with different platforms. Although SMS is popular, the advent of the MMS allowed the transmission of messages containing text, pictures, videos, and audio, which provided a much richer messaging experience. The popularity of MMS rose rapidly, and by 2008, worldwide MMS levels passed 1.3 billion users with over 50 billion MMS messages sent ("MMS vs SMS", 2013, para. 5).

Social Media.

Social media websites and applications enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines social media as ". . . forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and micro-blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos) . . ." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, 2017, para. 1).

Assumptions

The following assumptions were anticipated in the design of the study and the responses received from the participants. The use of technology may not be limited to school personal and students. The geographic boundary of the network is within the boundary of the school district. The researcher assumed that participants' responses derive from their perception of the policy. The researcher acknowledged multiple perspectives including voices of informants were included in the study

Limitations

The limitations of this study pertained to school sample, size, and location.

1. The sample size only represents limited number of districts and may not be indicative of other school districts in the state.
2. The sample derives from three schools classified as rural schools, which may not accurately represent other public school districts.
3. The districts are in Northeast Texas.

Delimitations

Simon and Goes (2013) explained that "The delimitations of a study are those characteristics that arise from limitations in the scope of the study (defining the boundaries) and by the conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decisions made during the development of the study plan" (para. 10). These delimitations are the result of choices the researcher makes. These choices include objectives and questions, interests, methodology, framework, and participants. "To elucidate the delimitations of your study you should review each decision you had to make in putting together your study" (Simon & Goes, 2013, para. 10). Researchers decide what type of research is of interest and what they desire to study. Topics are included or excluded depending on the relevance of the subject matter. "Your decisions for excluding certain pursuits are likely based on such criteria as *not directly relevant*; *too problematic because*…; *not feasible* and the like" (Simon & Goes, 2013, para. 11). For the purpose of this research, the study was delimited by the selection of three school districts (University Interscholastic League, 2016, p. 32) in Northeast Texas. The respondents were limited to the faculty and

administration (not limited by the amount of timed employed by the district) currently employed by the school district. The findings are nongeneralizable, limited to the participants' perceptions, and limited to the participants' memories.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I introduced the reader to the study conducted by the researcher as it pertains to the electronic communication in public schools between educators and students. The researcher established the historical progression of connectivity in the classroom and explained how educators utilized electronic communication to contact parents and families as well as students.

Information regarding the development of technology policies of acceptable use encompassing electronic communication was provided. The researcher provided the limitations and the assumptions of the study.

In Chapter II, the researcher presents the National Education Technology Plan for technology use beyond the walls of the classroom. Highlighted for the reader are the most common methods that educators utilize to establish communication between the school and the families of their students. E-mail, social media, and text messaging through school accepted applications are illustrated as the preferred forms of electronic communication.

Literature establishing current information from studies and articles found in professional journals pertaining to the effective use of electronic communication from school to home lays the groundwork for the positive impact families and educators can have when working together for the benefit of the students. Communication avenues

such as one-way communication (e.g. newsletters, report cards, and school websites) and two-way communication (e.g. school-based activities, E-mail, and group messaging applications) are discussed.

Chapter II concludes with an explanation of how policy in public schools is developed - namely, acceptable use policies for technology along with policies regarding rules for the ethical use of electronic communication between educators and students. The design for the development of policy through discussions, negotiations, compromises, and authoritative decisions was presented to the reader.

Chapter III presents a description of the case study method selected for the research. The chapter provides details regarding the specific procedures for data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and an explanation of the role of the researcher, which includes possible researcher bias.

Chapter IV presents the definition of the Educator Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators relating to the use of electronic communication as its connection with this study. This background information is germane to the study and the two case studies chapters that follow. General information about school district 1 (SD 1) is provided. The researcher presents an overview of the timeline of the implementation of the technology policy of the district along with the actual technology policy from the district for the use of electronic communication between educators and students. A policy analysis along with a participant data analysis illustrates the policy as well as participants' perceptions of the policy. Finally, the researcher presents a summary of the case analysis.

Chapter V begins with a demographic representation of the student and educator population for school district 2 (SD 2) along with a general description of the UIL academic classification of the district. The researcher presents a timeline of the implementation of the technology policy regarding electronic communication between educators and students. The timeline includes events such as when the policy was approved by the school board, how long the policy has been in place, practitioner use of technology in the district, and implications and perception of the policy by the educators. The chapter continues with the electronic communication policy for educators and students. The data analysis presents specific elements of participant perceptions of their district's electronic communication policy. Lastly, the researcher presents a summary of the case study.

Chapter VI begins with a description of the student and educator demographics along with a general description of SD 3. The researcher then presents a timeline of the electronic communication policy from the first implementation to the current policy posted by the district. A data analysis of the participant interviews follows, which presents the major themes and categories derived from the interviews. Finally, the researcher presents a summary of the case study.

Chapter VII presents the cross-case research data gained from licensed educators of three public school districts in Northeast Texas. The analysis includes information from Chapters IV, V, and VI incorporating the electronic communication policy relating to educator and student communication and educator perception of that policy. The cross-case analysis initially focuses on the themes expressed by the participating

educators as well as examining educator perceptions the electronic communication technology policy. This is followed by a cross-case analysis of districts 1, 2, and 3 including the demographics and electronic communication policy. Chapter VIII presents a summary of the research, conclusions of the research, and implications for further research regarding electronic communications between educators and students, the educators' perceptions of the electronic communication policy, and the impact the policy may or may not have on the development of relationships between educators and students.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

Technology is a very powerful tool (Couros, 2011, para. 1). It affirms and advances the relationships developed between students and educators, allows collaborative opportunities across the globe, and enables learners of all abilities to access resources which otherwise might be unavailable. "The National Education Technology Plan (NETP) is the flagship educational technology policy document for the United States. The NET Plan articulates a vision of equity, active use, and collaborative leadership to make everywhere, all-the-time learning possible" (NETP, 2017). According to former U. S. Secretary of Education John King, "One of the most important aspects of technology in education is its ability to level the field of opportunity for students" (NETP, 2017, p. 3).

As educators incorporate more technology into the classroom, and as the use of technology extends the classroom beyond the school building, there is the risk for inappropriate activity to occur. The regulation of social media in education is an ever-changing field. This literature review describes scholarly journals, research studies, and commonly found current issues related to parental involvement in student education,

communication theory, and the technology utilized in the dissemination and communication of information between the school and home.

How Connected Are We

Internet connectivity around the world continues to grow. According to *Internet Live Stats*, "Around forty percent of the world population has an Internet connection today. In 1995, it was less than one percent" (Internet Users, 2017). Statistics showed that the number of Internet users had increased dramatically from 1999 to 2013. "The first billion was reached in 2005. The second billion in 2010. The third billion in 2014" (Internet Live Stats, 2017, para. 1). The Pew Research Center studies societal use of the Internet. Beginning in 2000, the center had completed ninety-seven national surveys documenting the extent to which society uses the Internet as an integral part of life (Perrin & Duggan, 2015). Utilizing fifteen years' worth of data regarding the trends in Internet availability, accessibility, and affordability, Perrin and Duggan (2015) suggested the following analysis.

> A new analysis of 15 years' worth of data highlights several key trends: For some groups, especially young adults, those with high levels of education, and those in more affluent households, Internet penetration is at full saturation levels. For other groups, such as older adults, those with less educational attainment, and those living in lower-income households, adoption has historically been lower but rising steadily, especially in recent years. At the same time, digital gaps still persist. (p. 2)

According to the study, eighty-four percent of American adults use the Internet daily (Perrin & Duggan, 2015). With such a large number of American adults connecting to the internet on a daily basis, it seemed logical for schools to utilize this connectivity and take advantage of electronic communication as a means to interact with students and parents. Incorporating technology into the daily school routine changed the ways that teachers and parents interacted as well as the ways that students learned. In the article *Probing the Impact of Parent-Teacher Digital Communication*, Sara Gilgore (2015) explored the rise of digital communication for educators and parents.

> Educators and researchers have long been intrigued by the potential of digital platforms and tools to strengthen communication between teachers and families. But in recent years, the proliferation of smart phones and various forms of apps, text-messaging, email, and social media has vastly improved the speed and scope of that communication, a digital transformation that carries implications for educators and parents alike. (Gilgore, para. 2)

While the full implications of digital communication had not been explored, educators still sought to establish effective communication with students and their families utilizing formats that were a part of a growing digital society.

Czerkawski (2013) utilized the case study methodology for her research into the successful implementation of an online educational technology master's degree program. The study, published in the *Contemporary Educational Technology* journal in 2013, reviewed emerging technologies often used in online master's programs. Referring to her study, Czerkawski stated, "It is the author's hope that using this case study, others can

conceptually think about what technology effectiveness means in their online programs, and gather qualitative data to set the stage for a wider empirical study" (2013, p. 310). In the study, Czerkawski (2013) identifies several emerging tools of the internet. The tools were compiled into categories relating to their standard uses. In the category of course/content management, the author selected Moodle, Canvas, and Drupal. For basic important Web 2.0 tools, Czerkawski (2013) cited blogs, Wikis, Social Bookmarking tools, Virtual Worlds, Podcasts, and various educational games.

Moving to the category of Synchronous Instruction Technologies, the author selected Blackboard Collaborate, Skype, and Panopto. The rise of social media prompted the educational world to embrace such social media sites as Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Flicker, Twitter and Google+. Productivity Technologies included Prezi, GoogleDocs, Mindmap, IHMC Cmap, and VoiceThread. Czerkawski added Dropbox as another useful tool for online courses in the sense of collaboration and submitting assignments. In Betul Czerkawski's case study, *Strategies for Integrating Emerging Technologies: Case Study of an Online Educational Technology Master's Program*, " . . . six foundational pillars of educational technology as described by Spector (2012) are used to gauge the integration concerns so that qualitative data could be collected before conducting a more comprehensive empirical research about learning effectiveness and program evaluation" (as cited in Czerkawski, 2013, p. 312).

Positive Parent Relationships through Electronic Communication

Establishing a positive parent-teacher relationship via electronic communication can positively impact student achievement (Epstein, 2001; Sheldon, 2007, p. 267;

Sheldon & Epstein, 2004, p. 39). As schools and families worked together to support learning, students became more successful not only in their academic endeavors, but also in their life choices. Henderson and Berla suggested as much in their 1994 article *A New Generation of Evidence: The family is Critical to Student Achievement.* The truth of the matter remains evident in the 21st century classroom. "When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life. The extent to which a family is involved most often predicts the student's level of achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1994, p. 1). The benefits of positive parent-school cooperation and communication exist for parents, students, and teachers, as well as the school climate. "Substantial evidence exists showing that parent involvement benefits students, including raising their academic achievement" (American Federation of Teachers, 2007, para. 4).

Teacher Use of Communication with Families

Educators have many duties they must fulfill. Not only are they teachers, but they also have the roles of coach, counselor, mediator, referee, and activity coordinator. However, possibly the most important role for an educator is as a communicator (Silver, 2018, para. 1). "While it's important to communicate well with your students and colleagues, communicating with the parents at your school is just as important – maybe even more so at the elementary school level" (Harrell, 2015, para. 2). Developing a communications plan between families and schools is difficult, and failure to do so often results in a lack of effective communication. Quite often it is necessary to educate the

public in the methods of communication available to them (Nelson & Anderson, 2002, p. 138).

As teachers sought to develop partnerships with parents and guardians in order to support student success, the impact of effective communication could not be understated. Effective communication was fundamental to the partnerships that built a sense of community between school and home. The following section includes various avenues educators may utilize to communicate with families. "Attitude, behavior, and communication are the ABCs from which a school can create a customer-friendly environment that welcomes and serves all its constituents" (Chambers, 1998, p. 33).

Types of Teacher Communication with Families

Williams and Cartledge (1997), examining written communication, explained it "is probably the most efficient and effective way we can provide valuable ongoing correspondence between school and home" (p. 30). Written communication provided a lasting product, which necessitated careful planning in order to communicate the content. Educators needed to provide concise, organized, and accurate information allowing parents to read and understand the information. This communication was expressed as one-way communication or two-way exchanges (Berger, 1991).

In order to engage parents in conversation, teachers utilized formal and informal communication. Internet-facilitated communications (IFC) was a convenient tool that facilitated both formal and informal communications as well as scheduled and unscheduled communications. Parents and educators alike participated in two-way

communications in order to support student achievement, build a common vision, and develop a unified commitment to the student's success (Anderson & Minke, 2007). In the journal article, *Communicating with Parents: Strategies for Teachers*, Susan Graham-Clay offered insight into methods of one-way and two-way communication.

One-way communication.

One-way communication is possibly the most common form of communication from schools to families. Educators utilize one-way communication for two basic purposes: sharing information, and offering reminders to students (Sayre, 2014, para. 3). Through one-way communication, teachers send out information on a regular basis to provide parents with class updates. Announcements through email newsletters, voicemail messages, text messaging services and email newsletters provide additional avenues for communicating class information (Sayre, 2014, para. 4).

> One-way communication occurs when teachers seek to inform parents about events, activities, or student progress through a variety of sources, such as an introductory letter at the beginning of the school, classroom or school newsletters, report cards, communication books, radio announcements, school Web sites, and so on. (Graham-Glay, 2005, p. 118)

Teachers must provide clear, concise information for families. Careful consideration of the purpose of the one-way communication should remain the focus of this type of communication. The most common methods of one-way communication are explained in the following sections.

Informative newsletters. The most commonly used form of one-way communication remains the school newsletter. District, campus, and classroom newsletters convey a sense of community between the school community and the parent community. Educators utilize newsletters to share general information with the parent community. By providing consistency in layout, format, and application, classroom and school newsletters become more effective communication tools. Susan Graham-Clay (2005) suggests that providing a uniform communication set incorporating continuity in color, quality, and paper size creates a uniform, effective newsletter.

Report cards. The report card provides a general analysis of a student's academic progress. Often a report card will provide an invitation or an opportunity for parents to respond. This communication is generally in written form. Graham-Clay (2005) noted that "Report cards are the traditional mode of conveying permanent, written evaluative information regarding student progress. Report cards should be clear and easy for parents to understand…Carefully prepared report cards, coupled with parent conferences as needed, provide effective communication regarding student learning" (Graham-Clay, 2005, p. 119).

Quite often, a progress report or a report card may be the only form of one-way communication to which families actually respond. "Without having to worry about too much academic detail, parents can take a quick glance at a report card and get a fairly accurate idea about how their child is doing in class" (Reynolds, 2013, para. 2). The Independent School Management (IMS) support firm states, "Report cards: One of the few things that parents are guaranteed to read. It's a unique opportunity for your teachers

to communicate –clearly and authentically—with both students and families" ("Grading your report card communication," n. d. para. 1). Report cards offer families a basic picture of their child's progress at a particular moment. However, since parents may only receive this type of feedback every six or nine weeks, it is important for teachers to provide the context in which parents view the grades. The IMS also suggests these three strategies for communication via report cards:

1. Teachers should offer specific praise or explanations for outstanding grades that are relevant to the student.
2. If a teacher must give negative feedback, be sure to report facts and not feelings.
3. If the teachers are utilizing reporting software that does not provide an area for custom comments, ask teachers to write a brief explanation with detailed comments on the student's performance.

("Grading your report card communication," n.d., para. 7)

School website. DeLoatch (2015) explained "The school website is the first place to get [school culture, mission, priorities, diversity, services, and activities] information. And, just as when people meet, the first impression is often the last impression . . ." (para. 2, n.p.). Thus, it is necessary to create a school website that is useful and one that generates an immediate and long-term sustained impression. The school website is generally the starting point for families to begin finding the information they need regarding their student's campus, teachers, and classes.

Generally, there are six key components for a school website. Pamela DeLoatch (2015) explained the criteria utilized by The Web Marketing Association to identify

exceptional websites. The following were the aspects school webmasters should consider:

- Design: What does the layout look like? How is color and text used? How are visuals incorporated?
- Innovation: Does the website look like a template . . . , or is it original, conveying the uniqueness of the organization?
- Content: Is the content fresh and interesting? Does it get updated frequently?
- Technology: Do the pages load promptly? Do the hyperlinks work?
- Interactivity: Is the information presented in a variety of ways to engage the user, including text, video, photos, and hyperlinks?
- Ease of Use: Is it hard to navigate the pages or perform a search function (DeLoatch, 2015)

A national survey conducted in 2011 by the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) queried parents about their most desired method of delivery for communications as well as the frequency. Anne OBrien (2011) summarized the information from the survey of 50 school districts in 22 states. The results from the survey resulted in 43,410 responses to the survey. :

> Parents want more information about their child's progress in school on a regular basis and definitely want to know if their child is struggling before it is too late to do something about it. They prefer to have it all delivered to them in

> electronic/internet-based sources like email, e-newsletters, district websites, and parent portals. (p. 1)

The 2011 survey conducted by the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) shed light on the communications preferences of parents and non-parents. The results heavily favored electronic communication as the preferred method of delivery for school news. Below are the top five answers.

- E-mail from the district/school
- Online parent portal
- District/school e-newsletter
- District/school website
- Telephone/voice messaging system. (Obrien, 2011)

The district's webpage provides the portal for all other forms of electronic communication between schools and families; therefore, it is important to keep the website uncluttered, free from distracting fonts and graphics, and easy to navigate.

Two way communications.

Two-way communications take place when teachers and families conduct a dialogue together. Consistently communicating to families about school-based community activities, or texting families with class information helps build relationships. The most effective type of dialogue "develops out of a growing trust, a mutuality of concern, and an appreciation of contrasting perspectives" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004, p. 24). Authentic relationships are the result of authentic communication. Just as educators

seek a connection with students in the classrooms, there must be a connection with the families of those students.

> In the traditional classroom, you'd never just stand in front to lecture every day. You lead class discussions. And there are times when you need to sit down with a student individually. This is where the authentic relationships are developed and maintained. (Sayer, 2014, para. 6)

Although electronic mail communication is the simplest way for educators to communicate with their students, quite often students do not utilize this form of electronic communication on a regular basis. Forms of two-way communication generally consist of telephone calls, home visits, parent-teacher conferences, and open house/meet the teacher events.

School-based community activities. From fundraisers to bazaars, sports, and musicals, the importance of involvement of the community in the school system cannot be overstated. Successful support for the school derives from a sustainable partnership between the community and stakeholders. "It takes a village to raise a child is a popular proverb with a clear message: the whole community has an essential role to play in the growth and development of its young people" (Van Roekel, n.d.). However, the form of community and parent involvement means different things to different people. "Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University describes six types of involvement: (a) parenting; (b) communicating; (c) volunteering; (d) learning at home; (e) decision making; (f) collaborating with the community" (Van Roekel, p. 1). The assessment of the success

of these partnerships also differs. These programs must be sustained by effective communication and integration with the overall mission of the school.

Texting. Hoder (2014) shared insight in the article *Why Parents Shouldn't Fear Teacher-Student Text,* suggesting that by default many parents have very strong reactions to teachers texting their children. "After all, creepy adults abound, and teens can be vulnerable prey. So, by extension, it's tempting to want school districts to ban all such communication between teachers and students" (Hoder, 2014, para. 3). Hoder explained that the ease of back-and-forth communication between students and teachers creates an important bond. These bonds are significant for young people who may be in need of extra help at school or who may be at risk due to mental health issues, sexuality, bullying, or even problems at home. "These are kids who need more positive adult relationships, not less" (Hoder, 2014, para. 2).

Mica Pollock, a professor of education at the University of California, San Diego, in a 2009-2011 collaborative project with families, young people, programmers and educators, found that "texting increased personalized student support by enabling, then strengthening, teacher-student relationships" (Hoder, 2014, para. 7). Pollock led the large-scale collaboration known as The Oneville Project (http://wiki.oneville.org), which evaluated the effectiveness of common technology, utilized in new ways, to assist a diverse education community to collaborate, with the purpose of helping young people become successful. As school personnel wrestled with this complex situation, they considered all options for maintaining a safe environment for the students. Districts often

use a group-text application for school information while discouraging one-to-one texting between teachers and students.

Some parents do not take issue with their children contacting teachers through private text messages; however, many times the communication begins through social media networks. Alexandra Rockey Fleming (2014), author and journalist for the Today show's webpage featuring family advice, writes that parents want to know where the boundaries are when it comes to texting and teacher friendships. When one considers that, according to the Pew Research Internet Project's national survey of teens and parents, ninety-five percent of teens are online, and eighty-one percent frequent social networking sites such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, it is easy to understand that schools could find these formats extremely convenient for connecting with students (Lenhart, 2012).

Referring to an interview of Terri Miller, president of SESAME (Stop Educator Sexual Abuse Misconduct and Exploitation), Fleming (2014) urges that convenience cannot be the ultimate reasoning and deciding factor for allowing teacher-student communication (http://www.sesamenet.org/). Flemming (2014) explained "Communication technology has perpetuated blurred boundaries and sexual misconduct. Adults are saying things to children online and via text that they wouldn't say face-to-face. They forget who they're talking to. This can be a prelude to sexual contact" (para. 6).

Jennifer Beaver urged that educators make students aware of the differences between personal and professional digital communication. "Social media is where

teenagers are. This is a great tool that allows teachers to connect with students in a way that interests them" (cited in Flemming, 2014, para. 7). Beaver advised educators to utilize applications such as Remind (Remind.com). The app gives teachers the opportunity to send text message reminders to students and parents' alike regarding due dates for projects and assignments without giving out the teacher's personal cell phone number. Although the Remind app does not provide a method for responses, other applications such as Class Dojo (Classdojo.com) have incorporated a respond feature.

Class Dojo is set up in a way that neither the message nor the response appears to originate from the teacher's personal device. This adds a level of privacy and security for all parties involved. Hans Mundahl, a former school administrator, describes digital communication between teachers and students as a gray issue (Fleming, 2014, para. 10). Mundahl currently conducts policy reviews with school districts in order to set clear guidelines and implementation of the district's social media policies. Favoring training and passive monitoring in order to ensure the digital communication is appropriate is the emphasis that guides Mundahl's policy strategies. Mundahl recommends that all schools have a social media policy that clearly outlines how teachers should and should not interact with students and on social media in general. Mundahl also suggested that faculty not engage in social media with students. When it comes to texting with students, Mundahl indicated that assignment-related topics are fine as long as the texting follows school policy. However, Mundahl warned against communications that could be construed as any form of misconduct and cause a student to be concerned if others saw the message (Fleming, 2014, para. 10-14).

In *Student Smartphone Use Doubles; Instant Messaging Loses Favor* for Wired Campus, Kelly Truong (2010, para. 4,5) referenced a study conducted by a researcher at Ball State University, stating that ninety-seven percent of college students reported using SMS texting as their main form of communication. In a recent faculty development program, Dr. Jason Rhode (2012), Director of the Faculty and Instructional Design Center for Northern Illinois University, explained that valid concerns exist regarding the manner in which students and faculty can utilize electronic communication while maintaining their privacy. Rhode (2012) pointed out that in general, when a person texts, they must have the individual's cell phone number. However, Rhode also suggested free solutions that allow communication without sending out a personal phone number. In the online faculty development program, *Text Messaging in Teaching*, Rhode (2012) discussed the dynamics involved in incorporating SMS into teaching. The program includes five specific solutions for text messaging safely between students and faculty listed as follows.

First, Rhode (2012) suggested setting up a free Google Voice account. This account provides a phone number that the educator sets to forward to their mobile, office, or home number. This method also allows educators to receive text messages. The instructor's number is kept private while offering an alternative method for communication. Second, Rhode (2012) suggested educators consider the purpose for contacting the students. If the purpose is to send out reminders without the need for a response, faculty should seek out one of the free applications specifically for that purpose. The third suggestion from Dr. Rhode was to set up an account through a group

messaging application such as *Remind*, *Class Parrot*, or *Follow My Teacher*. These apps allow the educator to send messages to students without revealing their personal mobile number. Lastly, Rhode (2012) suggested that educators provide information and details for opting-in to receive text messages. When properly deployed and maintained, these approaches provide the options teachers seek in communication with their students while maintaining a high standard of professional ethical behavior.

Both Remind and Class Dojo received the iKeepSafe (2005) certification for student data privacy. "iKeepSafe (2005) is an independent certification organization that helps companies like Remind demonstrate compliance with federal and state-specific laws around student data privacy. These certifications makes it easier for schools to navigate those laws and make the best decision" (iKeepSafe.org, 2005). iKeepSafe complies with both Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) and Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 2000 (COPPA) ". . . bringing these products into compliance with federal and state privacy and children's safety laws" (iKeepSafe.org).

Elements of school-based community activities.

According to a recent article written by Roche and Strobach (2016) for the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) there are nine elements that are necessary in order to develop sustainable school-community partnerships. Roche and Strobach (2016) suggested these elements:

- A leadership team consisting of school personnel, students, and community members,

- Goals for developing the school and the community that build upon the partnership,
- A school individual responsible for timely communication with the community regarding goals and school activities,
- Clear expectations and shared accountability,
- Utilization of the resources in the community to promote the health and well-being of the students,
- Professional development for school employees and community members that focusing on building trust and developing a commonality,
- Development of a long-term plan for sustainability for the school community partnership,
- Regular evaluation for effectiveness,
- A communication plan to share successes as well as challenges.

The National Education Association (NEA) addressed several of these elements in the Priority Schools Campaign*: Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0 – Collaborative Strategies to Advance Student Learning* (Henderson, 2011, p. 7). "In many communities, we can already see clear benefits for students, such as increased attendance and engagement in school, improved work habits and behavior, higher enrollment in college preparatory classes, better grades and test scores, and higher graduation rates" (Henderson, 2011, p. 7).

Benefits of School-based Community Activities

Van Roekel (n.d.) noted benefits of school-based activities: "When schools, parents, families, and communities work together to support learning, students tend to earn higher grades, attend school more regularly, stay in school longer, and enroll in higher-level programs" (p. 1). In their book, *Schools and Communities Working Together*, Nelson and Anderson (2002) outline the benefits of collaboration between school districts and community stakeholders. Although there are many benefits to collaboration between schools and communities, Nelson and Anderson (2002) illustrate five of the most notable benefits.

The first benefit is that of improved student academics. The Center for School Change (2002) reported ". . . academic achievement increased in the areas of reading, writing and math. Performance-based assessments revealed improvements in areas such as public speaking, use of technology, and writing" (Nelson & Anderson, 2002 p. 5). Students involved in self-directed entrepreneur opportunities gained a greater understanding of business concepts introduced in their accounting classes.

The second benefit proposed by Nelson and Anderson (2002) is that of interpersonal skills. "Survey results from students, teachers, and parents on the subject of students' attitudes toward school reported a high level of interpersonal skill development. Participants reported improvements in problem-solving, the ability to work productively with others, and emerging leadership skills" (Nelson & Anderson, 2002 p. 6).

The third benefit of school and community collaboration, according to Nelson and Anderson (2002), is engagement in the community as active citizens. "When students understand their community's culture, economy, history and environment, they become

more invested and more likely to find ways to contribute – especially if they know their contributions are valued" (Nelson & Anderson, 2002 p. 6). When students become involved in their communities, they participate in an authentic setting. Students have the opportunity to solve real-word problems. Extending beyond the classroom by developing a plan and producing actual products that meet the needs of the community helps the students' recognition by a wider audience and helps the students experience a sense of satisfaction in their active citizenship. "As a social benefit and from a human capital perspective (p. 7), Nelson and Anderson (2002) noted that "…when students learn about their community's valuable qualities and opportunities, they may be inspired to stay or to return and contribute as adults. Wherever they choose to live, they will be better prepared to participate in community life" (p. 7).

Nelson and Anderson (2002) stated the fourth benefit comes in the form of increased family involvement.

> As valued team members, their ideas, resources, and support were critical in the early stage of planning. Once projects were up and running, many parents took on advisory roles to guide sustainability efforts. School personnel took the feedback from parents seriously and often used their suggestions to make modifications and set new goals. (p. 7)

When involved with school/community activities, parents often provide resources in the school and the community to improve opportunities for their students. Often parents will volunteer in whatever capacity that might be necessary as the school year progresses.

The fifth benefit proposed by Nelson and Anderson (2002) was a stronger bond between the school and the community as they collaborate in order to improve relationships and citizenship. The authors listed specific benefits of a stronger relationship between schools and communities. These benefits include:

- Bringing community resources into schools;
- Connecting students and schools to their communities;
- Building community pride in students and communities alike;
- Making school facilities more accessible to community use; and
- Pooling resources to create facilities and programs that benefit both schools and communities. (Nelson & Anderson, 2002, p. 7)

Many educational leaders recognize that schools cannot prepare students for productive adulthood without the assistance of the community (Mitrofanova, 2004, para. 1).

> Partnerships should be considered as connections between schools and community resources. The partnership may involve use of school or neighborhood facilities and equipment; sharing other resources; collaborative fund raising and grant applications; volunteer assistance; mentoring and training from professionals and other with special expertise; information sharing and dissemination; networking; recognition and public relations; shared responsibility for planning, implementation and evaluation of programs and services; expanding opportunities for internships, jobs, recreation and building a sense of community. (Mitrofanova, 2006, para. 2)

Development of Policies

Fazal Riziv (2006, p. 198) described Stephen Ball's policy research as examining three main components of that policy: texts, discourses, and effects. Policies are viewed as encoded representations of a combination of discussions, negotiations, compromises, and authoritative decisions. Policies without clearly defined guidelines often appear to be vague and ambiguous. Interpretations and meanings of such policies are open to scrutiny and subjectivity.

> While Ball's discussion of the concept of policy is most useful in highlighting the complexities of the various ways in which policies are constructed and interpreted, and through which authority is exercised, it does not problematise the issues surrounding the nature and extent of this authority itself. (Rizvi, 2006, p. 198)

Riziv posited that Ball suggested the authority for the policy lies within the governing bodies of the organization; therefore, the policy authority for local school districts lies within the administration and school board. "Educational policy researchers need to examine how policies are produced and legitimated within a broader framework" (Rizvi, 2006, p. 199).

Policy for Technology Use in Schools

Acceptable Use Policies (AUP) required research and planning in order to encompass the needs of both the students and the educators (Education World, n.d., para. 1). "With the current push for computer technology in the classroom, many educators and parents fear dangers that the uncensored internet might hold for children: inappropriate or obscene words and images, violence, and people who pose an online

threat" (Education World, n.d., para. 2). The technology plan may be a separate plan that combines a vision, a needs assessment, integration with curriculum and instruction, and professional development. The technology department should devise a method of tracking and replacing infrastructure, hardware, and software necessary to maintain up-to-date technology for teachers and students to use (NCES, 2002, p. 10).

According to Christopher Coffman (2014) in *Six-Step Process in Creating a Technology Plan* (Coffman, 2014, para. 2), there are focus areas of technology expertise to which attention must be given.

1. Student learning (includes technology skills)
2. Teacher preparation and delivery of instruction
3. Administration / Data Management / Communication processes
4. Resource distribution and use
5. Technical support

These technology focus areas intermingle throughout the technology plan thus ensuring a plan that is comprehensive and workable, and that continues to maintain a focus throughout each section of the plan. Selecting appropriate members for the technology planning committee is very important. Coffman, writing for The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Coffman, 2014), offers an example of a technology committee. This committee might consist of any combination of these individuals: a) Superintendent or other central office administrator, b) Principal, c) Technology director, d) Library media specialist; e) Teachers from different campuses,

grades, and content areas, and f) Students, parents, and support staff (Coffman, 2014, para. 4).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2002), "Policies are guidelines for activity, put into writing and officially decreed or accepted by the organization" (p. 11). In essence, a technology plan represents specific end points while providing directions along the way. The definition of a technology plan may differ slightly from district to district; however, the basis for the policy covers the same vision.

> A technology plan serves as a bridge between traditional established standards and classroom practice. It articulates, organizes, and integrates the content and processes of education in a particular discipline with appropriate technologies. It facilitates multiple levels of policy and curriculum decision-making, especially in school districts, schools, and educational organizations that allow for supportive resource allocations. (McKenzie, 1993, para. 2)

In *Creating Technology Policy: A Systematic Model*, Randal Carlson (1998) explained that policies affecting the acceptable use of school technology lie at three distinct levels in conjunction with the three levels of governing bodies to which public schools must report. "These levels represent the three hierarchal units that exhibit fiscal control over the schools, since one of the primary characteristics that determines policy is resource allocation. The entity controlling the resources frequently sets policies concerning use of the funds" (Carlson, 1998, p. 257). Federal policies regarding local use of technology generally have a very broad scope and design through public laws. State policies are less general and tend to focus on specific issues and practical implementation

of the technology policy. "Local policies reflect the cumulative effect of federal and state policies, but have a unique local flavor added to this level. That is because policy reflects the community values and needs, and each community makeup is different" (Carlson, 1998, p. 257).

Policy does not simply appear; rather it must be framed, formed, and fostered through gray and ambiguous areas. "A systemic approach to policy formulation will enable policymakers to establish realistic policies in reasonable time frames" (Carlson, 1998, p. 257). Carlson explained that the goal is central to the process of developing the policy. The goal then is the ultimate guiding force around which the policy develops. The six elements surrounding the goals may be addressed in any order, and in that case, each of the elements includes a specific starting point. Carlson lists the elements of designing policy as: a) Articulate policy, b) Collect data, c) Determine guidance, d) Prioritize options, e) Identify resources, and f) Develop policy.

Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a review of the extant literature focused on educators' use of electronic communication with students and their families and the progression thereof. Establishing the historical background of internet connectivity in the classroom provides the reader with the concept of electronic communication and the ways in which that communication has changed and evolved into an aspect of daily life in current society.

Relevant points in the literature review included the types of communications that educators utilize with families including, but not limited to, one-way communication

through school web pages, personal phone calls, and report cards. Two-way communication was presented by the researcher as a growing method of preferred communication between schools, educators, families, and students. Elements of community development, campus culture, and positive parental participation through effective communication also were discussed. I also included literature discussing the development of public school policy, specifically a school district's technology policy, since the research included a policy progression analysis.

Chapter III presents a discussion of the particular method selected for this study. The following chapter provides details regarding the procedures, data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness, as well as an explanation of the role of the researcher.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

The design selected for this research was a qualitative multi-case study. The purpose of the study of three similar school districts was to a) analyze the historical progression, along with addendums of technology policies and Acceptable Use Policies, at three East Texas school districts, and b) examine the perception of educators regarding their electronic communication policy between educators and students. The sites for the research consisted of three school districts similar in demographics, socio-economic status, and size. The researcher examined the technology policy and the Acceptable Use Policy of each school district and reviewed the progression of their technology policies for changes or addendums.

Chapter III presents a brief discussion of a qualitative multi-case study method, followed by a restating of the purpose, guiding research questions, interview questions, and survey questions. The next section presents a discussion of the participants for the study and the sampling technique. The role of the researcher is presented, which includes the responsibilities and potential biases of the researcher.

An Overview of Case Study Method

Case study research design utilizes policy analysis combined with a multi-case study design to describe and examine electronic communications between educators and students for three rural Northeast Texas school districts similar in size. The policy analysis provided an illustration of the historical progression of the technology policy pertaining to the use of electronic communication in the classroom, with parents, and with students of six Northeast Texas rural school districts.

According to John Gerring (2011), "A case study may be understood as the intensive study of a single case for the purpose of understanding a larger class of cases (a population)" (p. 6). Gerring (2011) explained that a case study may even incorporate more than one case. If the focus of the study moves from the individual case to a collection of cases, the study is then described as a cross-case study. Within a case study, it is necessary to understand a few additional terms. First, observation is the basic component of any study. Since this study focused on the progression of the technology policy regarding educator/student electronic communications in three school districts, the researcher selected a case study format as an appropriate means of investigation.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) explained, "A document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic computer-based and Internet-transmitted material. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, 2009; Rapley, 2007). In order to gain an understanding of the progression

of the technology policy relating to educator/student electronic communication, a document analysis was employed for this research.

The purpose of a qualitative study method was to "Describe and examine events of the past to understand the present and anticipate potential future effects" (Qualitative Research Designs website, n.d., para. 6). Administrators and school boards develop policies to comply with laws regulating the use of social media by school personnel. While policy cannot be written to include every possible transgression by school personnel and students, it is with great diligence that policy makers become proactive rather than reactive when developing policy. However, since technology and the general functionality and use of technology develop at such a rapid pace, policy makers must evaluate as many areas as possible.

In this chapter, the research design and data collection and analysis methods are discussed. The role of researcher is presented, explaining the responsibilities and the potential biases of the researcher. This multi-case qualitative study of historical policy progression is intended to gain insight into and explore the complexity of the development and implementation of similar-sized school districts' technology policy.

Restating the Purpose and Research Questions

Electronic communications between educators and students evolves as quickly as the technology itself evolves. The information gathered in the development of this research presented historical progressions of school policy for three small school districts in Northeast Texas. Educator perception of the technology policy of each school district sampled provided further avenues of research regarding the development of technology

policies, educator perceptions of those policies, and the possible impact on educator/student communications. In an attempt to understand the process by which new policies are developed and implemented, as well as educator perception of the policy, this study sought to answer four research questions:

1. What changes were made in the technology policy at this school district regarding educator/student electronic communication?
2. Why was the change in the technology policy necessary?
3. How did addendums impact the technology policy's progression?
4. How has the change in the technology policy impacted non-school related educator/student electronic communication?

Context of the Study

The context for this study was three small schools in 1A, 2A, and 3A districts located in Northeast Texas. The researcher selected the districts based on similar size and geographic region of Texas. The researcher used pseudonyms to represent the three school districts in order to maintain confidentiality.

The selection of participating districts focused on districts classified by the University Scholastic League as 1A, 2A, and 3A schools. Additional criteria included: 1. Districts designated as rural; 2. Districts with electronic communication policy; 3. Districts with a designated technology director or comparable district position; and 4. District personnel employed for three or more years who regularly communicate with students via electronic communication.

Participants

The sample of this study was limited to three rural school districts in Northeast Texas. The researcher contacted the superintendent of each district via e-mail (see Appendix A) to request permission for conducting the study. The researcher communicated the purpose of the study and provided an overview of district personnel who would participate. A follow-up phone call was made to the superintendent to confirm approval and request a signed informed consent form be returned to the researcher (see Appendix A). The researcher obtained informed consent forms from each district.

Individual respondents selected from the districts were limited to technology directors currently employed by each district and administrators, superintendents, and personnel employed by the district for three or more years who regularly communicate with students via electronic communication. The participants from each of the three districts were selected by researcher, in cooperation with the district technology director and/or a person designated by the superintendent. An introductory communication to provide an overview of the study, including the purpose, was sent to each participant, and an informed consent form was obtained prior to conducting the study (see Appendix B).

If current administrators or superintendents employed with their respective districts less than three years wish to participate in the study, the researcher presented their interviews and surveys in a separate section. The researcher had a general knowledge of each district but had no direct connection with the districts or the individuals who participated in the interview questions.

The Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is much different from that of the researcher in a quantitative study. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) describe the qualitative researcher as the instrument of data collection. Thus, data comes through the qualities of the human rather than machines or inventories. "The qualitative researcher needs to describe relevant aspects of self, including any biases and assumptions, and expectations, and experiences to qualify his or her ability to conduct the research" (Simon, 2013, para. 2).

One of the primary roles of the researcher in this qualitative study was the role of interviewer. As noted under the data collection section of this study, three levels of interviews were conducted to obtain data that was later transcribed and transformed into narrative stories. A second primary role of the researcher was the role of participant observer. In this role, the researcher conducted the data collection and simultaneously observed the participants during the data collection. As well, data collection, as noted in the data collection section, included review of district technology policy. The role of policy analyst requires an understanding of technology policy as well as policy analysis.

The researcher's role is also to ensure a high standard of ethical behavior while conducting this study. The researcher examined available literature in order to develop the interview questions. "Qualitative researchers lack many of the protections against errors that the statistical methods, standardized measures, and classical designs afford. They must rely on their own competence, openness, and honesty. That is, on their person" (Capella.edu, n.d., para. 4).

The researcher role in this multi-case study included assuring that all districts provide approval for conducting the study and that all participants sign an informed consent form, agreeing to participate in the study. An ethical responsibility of the researcher was to ensure that participants are protected from harm. Once the researcher began the study, she ensured that all documents, data, and related forms and communications were stored in locked file in her home where only she had access.

Data Collection

Data collection consists of unstructured interviews with the aim of discussing limited topics. Informal hand-written field notes along with audio recordings of interviews were used for the purposes of this qualitative study. The data collection also included the acquisition of the technology policy for each of the three school districts involved in the study.

Prior to data collection, the researcher prepared and filed an Institutional Review Board application for approval of the study. The IRB Committee reviewed the application and provided a formal letter of approval. All data was maintained under locked conditions with only the researcher having direct access. In all parts of the data collection, pseudonyms were used to assure confidentiality of participants and selected 3A districts. All data was maintained for a period of three years per IRB policy, and then the researcher will destroy all files related to the study.

Interviews.

The interviews were conducted with each of the participants using a three-tiered process that enables the researcher to ensure data saturation (see Appendix C). As noted

previously, each participant was informed of the purpose of the study and a signed informed consent was obtained and placed on file (see Appendix B). All documents related to the study were maintained in a secure location at the researcher's home and only the research had access.

A schedule for each interview was established with participants selecting a location for the interview. The first level of interview was conducted and digitally recorded. Once the interview was completed, the researcher transcribed the digital recording using NVivo 11. The software application enabled the researcher to transcribe and check the transcript. The second level of interview questions was constructed based on each individual participant's first-level interview. When required, a third-level interview was conducted following a similar process of transcript as used in level one. The researcher conducted the first-level and second-level interviews in a face-to-face setting, whereas the third-level of interview, when required for data saturation, was conducted either face-to-face or via phone and digitally recorded.

Archival document review.

The researcher acquired the technology policies of each district from the technology coordinators. Each policy was reviewed and analyzed, and notes made concerning the key parts of the policy that related to electronic communication between district personnel and students. The researcher's review of the historical progression of each district's technology policy sought to determine contributing factors to changes or amendments, as well as moving from ambiguous terminology to specific terms and explanations.

Data Analysis

The responsibility of the researcher conducting qualitative research was to obtain information (data) from the respondents, organize the data, code the data, and analyze the data, seeking to identify recurring themes and/or trends (Lodico et Al., 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Therefore, the purpose of data analysis was to bring order, meaning, and structure to the large amount of data that is collected (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150). In this study, two primary forms of data were analyzed, including interview data and policy data.

The three levels of interview data were initially analyzed in sequence during the interview process. The first level of interview data was analyzed in preparation for the second level of interview and the process replicated for the second level of interview in preparation for the third level of interview. Subsequently, once the interviews were completed, the researcher returned to the initial interview analysis for each level, examining the narrative data and analysis for patterns and themes. When necessary, the researcher reanalyzed the interviews for deeper examination. The emergent patterns and themes were coded using open and axial coding to systematically examine for similarities and dissimilarities in the narrative data. Respondents' answers, found to be similar, were grouped accordingly, and analyzed for trends. Teachers' responses were grouped together. Likewise, administrators' responses were grouped together.

The technology policy in each district was analyzed for historical progression, specifically focusing on communication. Once each policy analysis was completed and patterns of progression were identified, the researcher examined progression patterns for

unique patterns, identifying similarities and dissimilarities. The policy analysis provided a triangulation of recurrent themes and/or trends. The technology policies from each district were systematically analyzed for specific nuances in the policy, as well as recurrent themes and trends. Themes and trends from each district policy were re-examined, identified, and recorded, and the data was coded. This coding took on specific relevant themes, common wording, recurring phrases, and descriptions of the actual use of electronic communications (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

A final investigation of the two points of data analysis and emergent patterns/themes, including interview and policy, were utilized to produce a final set of patterns/themes in the data. Specifically, the researcher sought to answer the guiding research questions for the study.

A case study of each district's historical progression of the implementation of a policy developing specific guidelines regarding the electronic communication district was prepared. A cross-case analysis of the historical profession of policy was conducted to determine emerging patterns/themes.

Trustworthiness

The question of validating trustworthiness in a qualitative research arises due to the conflicting method of data acquisition generally accepted for quantitative research. The credibility of the research must be enough to convince the readers that the claims, as well as the analytical information, are accurate (Shenton, 2003). Ergon Guba presented the foundation of constructs researchers seek to address in proving trustworthiness of a study (Guba, 1981). According to Guba, four criteria should be considered in order to

produce a trustworthy qualitative study: a) credibility (internal validity); b) transferability (external validity); c) dependability (reliability); and d) confirmability (objectivity) (Shenton, 2003).

> In addressing credibility, investigators attempt to demonstrate that a true picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny is being presented. To allow transferability, they provide sufficient detail of the context of the fieldwork for a reader to be able to decide whether the prevailing environment is similar to another situation with which he or she is familiar and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to the other setting. The meeting of the dependability criterion is difficult in qualitative work, although researchers should at least strive to enable a future investigator to repeat the study. Finally, to achieve confirmability, researchers must take steps to demonstrate that findings emerge from the data and not their own predispositions. (Shenton, 2003, p. 1)

In order to ensure the integrity and validity of the study, the researcher maintained confidentiality of the respondents. The respondents were assured that their responses would not be revealed to other teacher-respondents, as well as to administrator-respondents. Each respondent received and signed a letter of consent and participation, which explained the extent to which the anonymity of the respondents and the integrity of the researcher's position would be maintained at all times.

Reporting the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study with an analysis of three school districts' technology policy was to review the historical progression of the

implementation of a district's policy developing specific guidelines regarding the electronic communication between teachers and students. Pseudonyms for the three school districts, teacher respondents, and administrator respondents were created in order to ensure that all identifying factors are kept private. The findings for the historical progression of each districts' technology policy were not combined, but wre presented separate from one another as individual cases. Administrator and teacher interviews were transcribed and presented with the corresponding school district.

Summary

This study reviewed the historical progression of the implementation of the technology policy of three Northeast Texas school districts. The study presents the progression of the technology policy including policy changes, additions of stipulations, and amendments. Particular attention was given to specific guidelines regarding the electronic communication between teachers and students.

Recurring themes will be collected, coded, and analyzed. Interviews will be transcribed and submitted to the respondents for verification. Any corrections or clarifications will be made and recorded. The backgrounds of the three school districts' technology policies are presented in a chronologically historical progression. A cross-case analysis of the findings is presented in a separate section of the study.

Chapter IV begins with an explanation of the Educator's Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for the state of Texas. All school districts abide by and defer to the Educator's Code when questions of practices and standards arise.

CHAPTER IV

School District 1 (SD 1, pseudonym)

Introduction

Chapter IV opens with a discussion of Educator's Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators related to electronic communication as related to the purpose of this study. This discussion is germane to the case study presented in this chapter and the two case study chapters that follow. The chapter continues with a description of the student and educator demographics of SD 1 along with a general description of the district. Following the district description, the researcher presents a timeline of the technology policy. The timeline includes events such as when the policy was approved by the school board; how long the policy has been in place; practitioner use of technology in the district; and implications and perceptions. The chapter continues with a policy analysis followed by the participant data analysis. The researcher then provides the first level of interview data thus examining specific elements of the policy that relates to the participant perceptions. Finally, the researcher presents a summary of the case specific case.

Educator Code of Ethics

The Educator's Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators, presents the professional and ethical standards that apply to all educators. Title 19, Part 7, Chapter 247, Rule §247.2 outlines the character and the conduct that each educator is expected to display.

(1) Professional Ethical Conduct, Practices and Performance

(J) Standard 1.10. The educator shall be of good moral character and be worthy to instruct or supervise the youth of this state.

(3) Ethical Conduct Toward Students.

(H) Standard 3.8. The educator shall maintain appropriate professional educator-student relationships and boundaries based on a reasonably prudent educator standard

(I) Standard 3.9. The educator shall refrain from inappropriate communication with a student or minor, including, but not limited to, electronic communication such as cell phone, text messaging, email, instant messaging, blogging, or other social network communication. Factors that may be considered in assessing whether the communication is inappropriate include, but are not limited to:

(i) the nature, purpose, timing, and amount of the communication;

(ii) the subject matter of the communication;

(iii) whether the communication was made openly or the educator attempted to conceal the communication;

(iv) whether the communication could be reasonably interpreted as soliciting sexual contact or a romantic relationship;

(v) whether the communication was sexually explicit; and

(vi) whether the communication involved discussion(s) of the physical or sexual attractiveness or the sexual history, activities, preferences, or fantasies of either the educator or the student.

(Source Note: The provisions of this §247.2 adopted to be effective March 1, 1998, 23 TexReg 1022; amended to be effective August 22, 2002, 27 TexReg 7530; amended to be effective December 26, 2010, 35 TexReg 11242; amended to be effective December 27, 2016, 41 TexReg 10329)

Standard 3.9 explains the expectations regarding electronic communications between educators and students. As a rule, school districts in Texas defer to the Educator Code of Ethics as stated in the Texas Administrative Code.

As with many professions requiring a state license, the teaching profession, like law and medicine, is governed by a code of ethics. This code outlines standards of personal and professional conduct that you, a member of the profession, must uphold. Violating a standard can have serious consequences for your teaching certificate.

(Association of Texas Professional Educators, n.d., para. 1)

The Educator's Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators is presented as a source of reference relevant to this study thus providing a baseline understanding for individuals outside of the education field.

Context

SD 1 (pseudonym) is a rural school district in Northeast Texas. The University Interscholastic League (UIL) classifies SD 1 as a 3A district. For the 2016 school year, the district served 1,112 students. Table 1 illustrates the demographics of the students of SD 1.

Table 1

SD 1 Student Demographics

Reported Racial Profile	Percentage Reported
African American	14.3%
Hispanic	23.5%
White	57.9%
American Indian	1.4%
Asian	0.0%
Pacific Islander	0.1%
Two or More Races	2.8%

Table 2

SD 1 Educator Demographics

Reported Racial Profile	Percentage Reported
African American	2.3%
Hispanic	1.2%
White	96.5%
American Indian	0.0%
Asian	0.0%
Pacific Islander	0.0%
Two or More Races	0.0%

(SD 1 TAPR tea.texas.gov, 2017).

History of the Technology Policy

Although SD 1 utilized educator electronic mail prior to the 2007-2008 school year, no specific policy had been in place other than the policy set forth by the Texas Education Agency. The 2007-2008 school year marked the first incident of district approved specific guidelines for educator use of electronic communication. This policy remained in place until 2015 when the school board placed specific restrictions on educator use of electronic communication for personal use and when communicating with students. The new policy for the use of electronic communication stated that employees should refrain from inappropriate communication with students. The policy listed factors that were to be considered by the district administrators when assessing

whether an electronic communication between an educator and a student is deemed inappropriate. The policy has remained in effect through the 2017-2018 year.

SD 1 Technology Policy from the School District

This multi-case study examined electronic communication policy of three school districts in Northeast Texas. The researcher requested documentation of the school years of any implementation of specific guidelines along with addendums regarding the district's electronic communication system. Technology directors for each district provided the electronic communication policy information. The first school district's policy examined was SD 1. SD 1 set specific guidelines for their electronic communication system as policy at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year. The policy is provided below:

> ***SD 1 Computer use and data management.***
>
> *Policy CQ*
>
> The district's electronic communication systems, including its network access to the Internet, are primarily for administrative and instructional purposes. Limited personal use of the system is permitted if the use:
>
> - imposes no tangible cost to the district;
> - does not unduly burden the district's computer or network resources;
> - has no adverse effect on job performance or on student's academic performance;
>
> Electric mail transmissions and other use of the electronic communications systems are not confidential and can be monitored at any time to ensure

> appropriate use. Employees and students who are authorized to use the systems are required to abide by the provisions of the district's communications systems policy and administrative procedures. Failure to do so can result in suspension or termination of privileges and may lead to disciplinary action. (Employee Handbook, SD 1, 2007, n.p.) (End of Policy)

For the 2015-2016 school year, SD 1included specific language and restrictions pertaining to expectations for educator conduct when utilizing electronic communication with students. SD 1 added verbiage elaborating upon the type and frequency of electronic communication between educators and students as well as factors considered in assessing the communication.

> *Standard 3.9*: The educator shall refrain from inappropriate communication with a student or minor, including, but not limited to, electronic communication such as cell phone, text messaging, email, instant messaging, blogging, or other social network communication (Employee Handbook, SD 1, 2015).
>
> ***Factors that may be considered in assessing whether the communication is appropriate include, but are not limited to:***
>
> (i) the nature, purpose, timing, and amount of the communication;
>
> (ii) the subject matter of the communication;
>
> (iii) whether the communication was made openly or the educator attempted to conceal the communication;
>
> (iv) whether the communication could be reasonably interpreted as soliciting sexual contact or a romantic relationship;

> (v) whether the communication was sexually explicit; and
>
> (vi) whether the communication involved discussion(s) of the physical or sexual attractiveness or the sexual history, activities, preferences, or fantasies of either the educator or the student. (Employee Handbook, SD 1, 2015, p. 29) (End Policy)

Additions to the 2015-2016 Employee Handbook included a specific section pertaining to sexual harassment of students. The policies included definitive explanations of harassment of students by educators as well as the consequences for such action.

> Sexual and other harassment of students by employees or romantic and inappropriate social relationships between students and employees are forms of discrimination and are prohibited by law. Employees who suspect a student may have experienced prohibited harassment are obligated to report their concerns to the campus principal or other appropriate district official. All allegations of prohibited harassment or abuse of a student by an employee or adult will be reported to the student's parents and promptly investigated. An employee who knows of or suspects child abuse must also report his or her knowledge or suspicion to the appropriate authorities, as required by law. Definition of solicitation of a romantic relationship in DF (Legal) and FFH (Local): Sexual harassment of a student, including harassment committed by another student, includes unwelcome sexual advances; requests for sexual favors; or sexually motivated physical, verbal, or nonverbal conduct when the conduct is severe,

persistent, or pervasive. (Employee Handbook, SD 1, 2015, p. 29-30) (End Policy)

SD 1 further elaborated on the technology resource policy expectations for educators. The scope of the policy was broadened in order to include specific types of systems and resources available to district employees. The technology resources policy is listed below.

Policy CQ

The district's technology resources, including its networks, computer systems, e-mail accounts, devices connected to its networks, and all district-owned devices used on or off school property, are primarily for administrative and instructional purposes. Limited personal use of the system is permitted if the use: a) imposes no tangible cost to the district, b) does not unduly burden the district's computer technology resources, c)has no adverse effect on job performance or on student's academic performance.

Electronic media includes all forms of social media, such as text messaging, instant messaging, electronic mail (e-mail), Web logs (blogs), wikis, electronic forums (chat rooms), video-sharing Web sites (e.g., You Tube), editorial comments posted on the Internet, and social network sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram). Electronic media also includes all forms of telecommunication such as landlines, cell phones, and Web-based applications. (Employee Handbook, SD 1, 2015, p. 32) (End Policy)

The policy continues by explaining the character expectations for employees of the district as role models for the students. The policy reiterates the central themes from the Educator's Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators. This section from the policy is stated below.

> As role models for the district's students, employees are responsible for their public conduct even when they are not acting as district employees. Employees will be held to the same professional standards in their public use of electronic media as they are for any other public conduct. If an employee's use of electronic media interferes with the employee's ability to effectively perform his or her job duties, the employee is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. If an employee wishes to use a social network site or similar media for personal purposes, the employee is responsible for the content on the employee's page, including content added by the employee, the employee's friends, or members of the public who can access the employee's page, and for Web links on the employee's page. The employee is also responsible for maintaining privacy settings appropriate to the content. (Employee Handbook, SD 1, p. 32, 33) (End Policy)

SD 1 elaborated further on employee use of electronic media for personal purposes. The policy provides specific examples of personal use of the district's electronic media as including but not limited to personal social network page, phone calls, text messages, pictures and videos, school logo, and images taken during work hours. The information from the policy is stated below:

An employee who uses electronic media for personal purposes shall observe the following:

(a) The employee may not set up or update the employee's personal social network page(s) using the district's computers, network, or equipment.

(b) The employee shall limit use of personal electronic communication devices to send or receive calls, text messages, pictures, and videos to breaks, meal times, and before and after scheduled work hours, unless there is an emergency or the use is authorized by a supervisor to conduct district business.

(c) The employee shall not use the district's logo or other copyrighted material of the district without express, written consent.

(d) An employee may not share or post, in any format, information, videos, or pictures obtained while on duty or on district business unless the employee first obtains written approval from the employee's immediate supervisor. Employees should be cognizant that they have access to information and images that, if transmitted to the public, could violate privacy concerns.

(e) The employee continues to be subject to applicable state and federal laws, local policies, administrative regulations, and the Educators' Code of Ethics, even when communicating regarding personal and private matters, regardless of whether the employee is using private or public equipment, on or off campus. These restrictions include: 1) confidentiality of student records; 2) confidentiality of health or personnel information concerning colleagues, unless disclosure serves lawful professional purposes or is required by law; 3) confidentiality of district

> records, including educator evaluations and private e-mail addresses; 4) copyright law; 5) prohibition against harming others by knowingly making false statements about a colleague or the school system. (Employee Handbook, SD 1, 2015, p. 33)
>
> (End Policy)

The next section of SD 1's Technology Use Policy explains the rules and guidelines for a school employee who wishes to utilize electronic media with students. The provisions, stipulations, and limitations are listed below:

> ***Use of Electronic Media with Students***.
>
> *Policy DH*
>
> A certified or licensed employee, or any other employee designated in writing by the superintendent or a campus principal, may communicate through electronic media with students who are currently enrolled in the district. The employee must comply with the provisions outlined below. All other employees are prohibited from communicating with students who are enrolled in the district through electronic media. An employee is not subject to these provisions to the extent the employee has a social or family relationship with a student. For example, an employee may have a relationship with a niece or nephew, a student who is the child of an adult friend, a student who is a friend of the employee's child, or a member of participant in the same civic, social, recreational, or religious organization. An employee who claims an exception based on a social relationship shall provide written consent from the student's parent. The written consent shall include an acknowledgement by the parent that:

(a) The employee has provided the parent with a copy of this protocol;

(b) The employee and the student have a social relationship outside of school;

(c) The parent understands that the employee's communications with the student are expected from district regulation; and

(d) The parent is solely responsible for monitoring electronic communications between the employee and the student.

(Employee Handbook, SD 1, 2015, p. 33)

The following definitions apply to employee use of electronic media with students.

Electronic media includes all forms of social media, such as text messaging, instant messaging, electronic mail (e-mail), Web logs (blogs), wikis, electronic forums (chat rooms), video-sharing Web sites (e.g., YouTube), editorial comments posted on the Internet, and social network sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram). Electronic media also includes all forms of telecommunication such as landlines, cell phones, and Web-based applications.

Communicate means to convey information and includes a one-way communication as well as a dialogue between two or more people. A public communication by an employee that is not targeted at students (e.g., a posting on the employee's personal social network page or a blog) is not a *communication:* however, the employee may be subject to district regulations on personal electronic communications. Unsolicited contact from a student through electronic means is not a *communication*.

Certified or licensed employee means a person employed in a position requiring SBEC certification or a professional license, and whose job duties may require the employee to communicate electronically with students. The term includes classroom teachers, counselors, principals, librarians, paraprofessionals, nurses, educational diagnosticians, licensed therapists, and athletic trainers. (Employee Handbook, SD 1, 2015, p. 34)

An employee who uses electronic media to communicate with students shall observe the following:

The employee may use any form of electronic media except text messaging. Only a teacher, trainer, or other employee who has an extracurricular duty may use text messaging, and then only to communicate with students who participate in the extracurricular activity over which the employee has responsibility. An employee who communicates with a student using text messaging shall comply with the following protocol: (a)The employee shall include at least one of the student's parents or guardians as a recipient on each text message to the student so that the student and parent receive the same message; (b) The employee shall include his or her immediate supervisor as a recipient on each text message to the student so that the student and supervisor receive the same message; or (c) For each text message addressed to one or more students, the employee shall send a copy of the text message to the employee's district email address.

Limitations to communication.

The employee shall limit communications to matters within the scope of the employee's professional responsibilities (e.g., for classroom teachers, matters relating to class work, homework, and tests; for an employee with an extracurricular duty, matters relating to the extracurricular activity).

The employee is prohibited from knowingly communicating with students through a personal social network page; the employee must create a separate social network page ("professional page") for the purpose of communicating with students. The employee must enable administration and parents to access the employee's professional page.

An employee may make public posts to a social network site, blog, or similar application at any time. The employee does not have a right to privacy with respect to communications with students and parents. (Employee Handbook, SD 1, p. 35) (End Policy)

Included in the final section of the technology resources use policy, SD 1 restates that employees remain subject to all applicable state and federal laws, as well as local policies, regulations and the Texas Educator's Code of Ethics. "Compliance with the Public Information Act and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy (FERPA), including retention and confidentiality of student records, and copyright law, prohibitions against soliciting or engaging in sexual conduct or a romantic relationship with a student" (Employee Handbook, SD 1, 2015, p. 35). SD 1 states that administration has the right to request an employee to provide any information regarding the types and methods of

electronic communication that the employee uses to communicate with students who are currently enrolled with the district (Employee Handbook, SD 1, 2015). "Upon written request from a parent or student, the employee shall discontinue communicating with the student through e-mail, text messaging, instant messaging, or any other form of one-to-one communication" (Employee Handbook, SD 1, p. 35). An employee may request an exception from one or more of the limitations above by submitting a written request to his or her immediate supervisor.

Teachers' Language Use Describing Technology Policy

The four research questions were addressed by conducting interviews with teachers from each participating district. Data from the interviews was coded by thematically analyzing each response. Semi-structured interviews took place at the convenience of each participant. After receiving permission to participate from the superintendents of each district, solicitation of participants began with an email describing the study along with an informed consent form. The teachers who elected to participate received an email with further instructions as well as the interview questions. Each teacher responded to the interview questions individually and returned their initial interview responses via email. Secondary interviews with participants were conducted after the researcher transcribed the responses in order to ensure accuracy of the responses. Since participation was voluntary from each district, it might be possible for others to identify participants based on their demographics within the educator population. For that reason, efforts were made to exclude grade level, subjects taught, and gender. The total number of years teaching and the number of years at their current district was

included in the study. A general description of the participants along with certain demographics is presented in the following section. Participants' perceptions of their district's electronic communication policy are also presented in the following section.

Policy and Perception

Five educators from school district 1 (SD 1) chose to participate in this research; therefore, the themes and categories derived from those participants. Having interviewed participants from SD 1, several responses contained similar themes. Each interviewee acknowledged an awareness of their district's policy regarding the electronic communication between educators and students. Each interviewee indicated that the changes to the policy appeared to be reactive rather than proactive. Each of the respondents utilizes electronic communication in some form or another with their students. Some of the respondents only communicate through the district's electronic mail system, while some reportedly use only the district selected smart phone application. The interviewees indicated a connection between educator responsibility and parental/guardian responsibility.

Specific Themes and Categories

An analysis of the interviews with the respondents from SD 1 exposed specific themes regarding their interpretation of the technology policy regarding electronic communication between educators and students along with their implementation and use of electronic communications with students in their classrooms. The overarching themes of individual morals and ethical responsibility as professional educators emerged from all of the participants of SD 1. As explained by the respondents, each educator is ultimately

responsible for their actions. Policies present guidelines for expected behaviors by school employees. These policies exist to protect the employees as well as the students in their care. Upon further investigation, coding of the interviews with the participants from SD 1 revealed six categories: 1) Parental/Guardian Involvement; 2) Multiple Roles of Rural Teachers; 3) Informed and Active Administration 4) Social Media and Casual Postings; 5) Heightened Awareness by Employees; 6) Regular Policy Reviews.

Parental/guardian involvement.

The topic of parental/guardian involvement with electronic communications between educators and students was widely agreed upon by the respondents from SD 1. "While the parent may not be an active participant in the communication, it holds the teacher and student accountable to the words they write" (SD 1, R3, 2018). Each participant discussed the district approved computer and smart phone applications allowing the sharing of information with students, parents, and guardians alike. The respondents indicated that by adhering to the approved methods of electronic communication, would protect all parties from unwanted communications. While these types of applications and communications keep the communications on a professional level, they also hide the educators' personal cell phone numbers. The respondents all indicated that retaining a private life was very important and that giving students their personal cell phone numbers might lead to compromising situations. Including the parents/guardians in the electronic communications creates another level of checks and balances in order to maintain a professional relationship with students.

Multiple roles of rural teachers.

Developing relationships with their students ranked high on the responses by the participants from SD 1. Respondents indicated that understanding the multiple roles of educators in small rural communities is important in understanding the perceived necessity for educators to communicate with students over non school-related topics. Several of the participants cited roles of educators as coaches in community youth sports programs, church youth leaders, scout leaders, and civics originations outside of their school responsibilities.

> I know that some of our teachers also serve as representatives of service organizations and churches. This policy change has made people realize that involving the parent/guardian in all communication is a necessary step in protecting ourselves, our reputations, and the children that are entrusted into our care. (SD 1, R1, 2018)

This leads to the next topic found during coding of the interviews. Respondents indicated that an active and informed administration proved essential in maintaining a professional relationship with students.

Informed and active administration.

Active engagement by school administration assists in providing options for employees to maintain professional relationships with their students. Equipping educators with district approved alternative methods of electronic communication allows administrators to encourage communication while promoting professional and ethical responsibility.

> I have received two or three emails (that were sent to all employees) with reminders about the policy, requesting an update of information about teachers' pages or posts, or notification of proper social media etiquette and support for the school. I think clarification, reminders, and examples are helpful to support the policy. (SD 1, R2, 2018)

By utilizing reminders, examples, and continuing education over the necessity to maintain a heightened awareness toward the nature of the communications and the relationships developed with students, district administrators act as an ongoing system of checks and balances for their employees.

Social media and Casual postings.

The need to educate school faculty and staff on the ethical use of social media and casual postings also drew the attention of the participants from SD 1. The respondents noted that new teachers, who have grown up using electronic communication methods such as Facebook, SnapChat, Kik, Instagram, and text-messaging applications regard such sources as their most often preferred means of communication. Therefore, they are less likely to perceive these casual types of electronic communications as potentially inappropriate.

> With social media, we are able to write like we talk, and we forget that it can be a document of record. For some people, I think it helps keep their communication more professional. For others, it won't matter what the policy is – they have no filter, no conscience, and no moral character to do the right thing. (SD 1, R2, 2018)

Heightened awareness by employees.

Acknowledging the casual attitude toward electronic communications, the participants from SD 1 suggested providing training opportunities designed around scenarios that might place employees in compromising situations. Respondents also reported that maintaining a heightened awareness of ethical and moral responsibility ultimately rests on each individual.

Regular policy reviews.

Another theme that persisted throughout the interviews with the participants from SD 1 was that of regular review and analysis of the technology communication policy by the district administration. Rapidly changing communication technology utilized by students creates a need for constant vigilance by the administration. All respondents suggested that it is not enough to have a policy in place if the policy is outdated due to the changing methods of communicating electronically. "As technology continues to advance, our technology policy will have to stay up to date with what develops as appropriate and the best way to communicate with students and parents" (Personal SD 1, R3, 2018).

Observing current trends for communication software and applications in larger school districts, networking with other school administrators to remain aware of potential problems, and reviewing and amending the technology communication policy makes it possible for the district administration to support those who develop the district's policies. Knowledgeable and informed employees foster and cultivate a school community concerned with the health and well-being of all individuals.

Summary

Chapter IV is a presentation of interview responses obtained from educators from SD 1. The responses indicate an awareness of their district's technology policy regarding electronic communication between teachers and students. The interviewees reported that electronic communication seems necessary in order to maintain a connection with families of the students they teach. The respondents expressed similar concerns over communicating with students in a professional manner while still exhibiting a genuine interest in the students and families.

Prior to the 2007-2008 school years, SD 1 deferred to the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) policy regarding the use of electronic communication with students by educators. In 2007, the district developed their technology policy to include terminology and examples to use as guidelines for educators to follow when corresponding electronically with students. Policy makers provided factors to consider when considering whether the communication between teachers and students might be deemed inappropriate. Reminding the faculty and staff that all electronic communications were not private, the district encouraged all employees to remain professional while interacting with students through messaging applications, electronic mail, and group texting applications.

Regarding the multiple roles rural teachers perform in their community, SD 1 policy makers sought to solicit and incorporate parental involvement in electronic communications by requiring the parents or guardians of the students be included in messaging applications. Furthermore, immediate supervisors were to be included in all

non-school related electronic communications between educators and students in their school district. By providing definitions and examples of texting applications and communications, including parents and guardians as well as immediate supervisors in communications sent to students, and training educators in professional ethics and standards, the school board and policy makers of SD 1 regularly reviews their technology communication policy as they consider the impact that policy has on the school community.

CHAPTER V

School District 2 (SD 2, pseudonym)

Introduction

Chapter V begins with a description of the student and educator demographics of SD 2 along with a general description of the district. Following the district description, the researcher presents a timeline of the technology policy. The timeline includes events such as when the policy was approved by the school board; how long the policy has been in place; practitioner use of technology in the district; and implications and perceptions. The chapter continues with a policy analysis followed by the participant data analysis. The researcher then provides the first level of data thus examining specific elements of the policy that relate to the participant perceptions. Finally, the researcher presents a summary of the case.

The respondent participation was not as robust in SD 2 as in SD 1. The researcher corresponded with the superintendent of the district who was supportive of the study. However, when the researcher began the interviews and questionnaires, only one individual chose to participate. The information provided in this chapter came from the interview with that one respondent.

Context

SD 2 (pseudonym) is a rural school district in Northeast Texas. The University Interscholastic League (UIL) classifies SD 2 as a 2A district for the 2016-2017 school year. During the specified year, the district served 643 students. Table 3 illustrates the demographics of the students of SD 2.

Table 3

SD 2 Student Demographics

Reported Racial Profile	Percentage Reported
African American	12.6%
Hispanic	52.4%
White	28.1%
American Indian	0.4%
Asian	4.2%
Pacific Islander	0.1%
Two or More Races	2.2%

(SD 2 TAPR tea.texas.gov, 2017).

For the 2016-2017 school year, SD 2 employed 57 teachers. Teacher demographics are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

SD 2 Educator Demographics

Reported Racial Profile	Percentage Reported
African American	10.2%
Hispanic	26.6%
White	59.8%
American Indian	0.4%
Asian	1.5%
Pacific Islander	0.4%
Two or More Races	1.1%

(SD 2 TAPR tea.texas.gov, 2017).

History of the Technology Policy

The earliest available documentation of the technology policy provided to the researcher by SD 2 was 2002. The policy did not include any recommendations or rules pertaining to the use of social media or electronic communication between educators and students. The current superintendent of SD 2 provided the most recent documentation of the Technology Use Policy for employees of the district. The 2012 policy defined electronic media and provided examples of the expected educator behavior while communicating with students.

SD 2 Technology Policy From the District

The most recent technology policy for educators and students of SD 2 retrieved from the district's website. The technology resource policy from the 2016-2017 Employee Handbook provides a description of technology resources as well as expected use of technology by employees.

Electronic Media.

Electronic media includes all forms of social media, such as text messaging, instant messaging, electronic mail (e-mail), Web logs (blogs), electronic forums (chat rooms), video-sharing Web sites, editorial comments posted on the Internet, and social network sites. Electronic media also includes all forms of telecommunication, such as landlines, cell phones, and Web-based applications.

Use with Students.

In accordance with administrative regulations, a certified or licensed employee, or any other employee designated in writing by the Superintendent or a campus principal, may use electronic media to communicate with currently enrolled students about matters within the scope of the employee's professional responsibilities. All other employees are prohibited from using electronic media to communicate directly with students who are currently enrolled in the District. The regulations shall address:

1. Exceptions for family and social relationships;
2. The circumstances under which an employee may use text messaging to communicate with students; and

3. Other matters deemed appropriate by the Superintendent or designee.

Each employee shall comply with the District's requirements for records retention and destruction to the extent those requirements apply to electronic media. [see CPC]

Personal Use.

An employee shall be held to the same professional standards in his or her public use of electronic media as for any other public conduct. If an employee's use of electronic media violated state or federal of District policy, or interferes with the employee's ability to effectively perform his or her job duties, the employee is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

(Employee Handbook, SD 2, 2013, p. 1)

Technology Resources Policy CQ

The district's technology resources, including its networks, computer systems, e-mail accounts, devices connected to its networks, and all district-owned devices used on or off school property, are primarily for administrative and instructional purposes. Limited personal use is permitted if the use: 1) Imposes no tangible cost to the district; 2) Does not unduly burden the district's computer or network resources; 3) Has no adverse effect on job performance or on a student's academic performance.

Electronic mail transmissions and other use of the technology resources are not confidential and can be monitored at any time to ensure appropriate use.

Employees are required to abide by the provisions of the acceptable use agreement and administrative procedures. Failure to do so can result in suspension of access or termination of privileges and may lead to disciplinary and legal action. Employees with questions about computer use and data management can contact the IT Director.

Policy DH (Continued)

A certified or licensed employee, or any other employee designated in writing by the superintendent or a campus principal, may communicate through electronic media with students who are currently enrolled in the district. The employee must comply with the provisions outlined below. All other employees are prohibited from communicating with students who are enrolled in the district through electronic media.

An employee is not subject to these provisions to the extent the employee has a social or family relationship with a student. For example, an employee may have a relationship with a niece or nephew, a student who is the child of an adult friend, a student who is a friend of the employee's child, or a member or participant in the same civic, social, recreational, or religious organization. An employee who claims an exception based on a social relationship shall provide written consent from the student's parent. The written consent shall include an acknowledgement by the parent that:

The employee has provided the parent with a copy of this protocol

The employee and the student have a social relationship outside of school;

The parent understands that the employee's communications with the student are excepted from district regulation; and

The parent is solely responsible for monitoring electronic communications between the employee and the student. The following definitions apply for the use of electronic media with students:

- ***Electronic media*** includes all forms of social media, such as text messaging, instant messaging, electronic mail (e-mail), Web logs (blogs), wikis, electronic forums (chat rooms), video-sharing websites (e.g., YouTube), editorial comments posted on the Internet, and social network sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram). *Electronic media* also includes all forms of telecommunication such as landlines, cell phones, and web-based applications.
- ***Communicate*** means to convey information and includes a one-way communication as well as a dialogue between two or more people. A public communication by an employee that is not targeted at students (e.g., a posting on the employee's personal social network page or a blog) is not a *communication*: however, the employee may be subject to district regulations on personal electronic communications. See *Personal Use of Electronic Media*, above. Unsolicited contact from a student through electronic means is not a *communication*.
- ***Certified or licensed employee*** means a person employed in a position requiring SBEC certification or a professional license, and whose job

duties may require the employee to communicate electronically with students. The term includes classroom teachers, counselors, principals, librarians, paraprofessionals, nurses, educational diagnosticians, licensed therapists, and athletic trainers.

An employee who uses electronic media to communicate with students shall observe the following:

- The employee may use any form of electronic media **except** text messaging. Only a teacher, trainer, or other employee who has an extracurricular duty may use text messaging, and then only to communicate with students who participate in the extracurricular activity over which the employee has responsibility. An employee who communicates with a student using text messaging shall comply with the following protocol:
- The employee shall include at least one of the student's parents or guardians as a recipient on each text message to the student so that the student and parent receive the same message;
- The employee shall include his or her immediate supervisor as a recipient on each text message to the student so that the student and supervisor receive the same message; or
- For each text message addressed to one or more students, the employee shall send a copy of the text message to the employee's district e-mail address.

- The employee shall limit communications to matters within the scope of the employee's professional responsibilities (e.g., for classroom teachers, matters relating to class work, homework, and tests; for an employee with an extracurricular duty, matters relating to the extracurricular activity.
- The employee is prohibited from knowingly communicating with students through a personal social network page; the employee must create a separate social network page ("professional page") for the purpose of communicating with students. The employee must enable administration and parents to access the employee's professional page.
- The employee shall not communicate directly with any student between the hours of 8:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. An employee may, however, make public posts to a social network site, blog, or similar application at any time.
- The employee does not have a right to privacy with respect to communications with students and parents.
- The employee continues to be subject to applicable state and federal laws, local policies, administrative regulations, and the Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators, including:
- Compliance with the Public Information Act and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), including retention and confidentiality of student records. [See Policies CPC and FL]
- Copyright law [Policy CY]

- Prohibitions against soliciting or engaging in sexual conduct or a romantic relationship with a student.
- Upon request from administration, an employee will provide the phone number(s), social network site(s), or other information regarding the method(s) of electronic media the employee uses to communicate with one or more currently-enrolled students.
- Upon written request from a parent or student, the employee shall discontinue communicating with the student through e-mail, text messaging, instant messaging, or any other form of one-to-one communication.

An employee may request an exception from one or more of the limitations above by submitting a written request to his or her immediate supervisor.

(SD 2, Employee Handbook Update, 2016, p. 50-52)

Email

E-mail will be the primary means of communication for information using laptops and desktops provided by the district. Check your e-mail at least twice per day. Limit e-mail communication and web searches to official business, and do not forward chain e-mails. Refrain from using personal handheld devices for e-mail communication during class time. (SD 2, Employee Handbook Update, 2016, p. 54) (End Policy)

Teachers' Language Use Describing Technology Policy

As with Chapter IV, the research questions were addressed by conducting interviews with the one teacher from SD 2. The researcher coded the data by thematically analyzing each response. Semi-structured interviews took place at the convenience of the participant. After receiving permission to participate from the Superintendent of SD 2, volunteers were sought by means of an email describing the study along with an informed consent form. The volunteer who elected to participate received an email with further instructions as well as the interview questions. The volunteer responded to the interview questions individually and returned her initial interview responses via email to the researcher.

A secondary interview came after the researcher transcribed the responses in order to ensure accuracy of the responses. Since participation was voluntary from each district, it might be possible for others to identify participants based on the demographics within the educator population. For that reason, the researcher excluded grade level, subjects taught, and gender. The total number of years taught and the number of years at their current district was included in the study. A general description of the participant along with certain demographics is presented in the following section. Participants' perceptions of her district's electronic communication policy is also presented in the following section.

Policy and Perception

The single participant from SD 2 indicated a general knowledge of the district's electronic communication policy. The participant suggested that positions, grades

taught, and initial need for communicating electronically with students set the tone for future communications. The participants confirmed she had received a copy of the employee handbook for the district along with a signed document indicating her knowledge and understanding of the electronic communication policy.

Specific Themes and Categories

An analysis of the responses from the participant from SD 2 revealed specific themes regarding electronic communication between educators and students along with the implementation and use of electronic communications. Specific themes from the respondent centered on three overarching themes: 1) Accepting personal responsibility for your actions; 2) Recognizing the depth of involvement the students have in social media; and 3) Overall changes in society that include greater use and access of electronic communication.

Accepting personal responsibility.

Accepting personal responsibility for one's actions ranked highest in the data response from the participant of SD 2. The frame of reference for her response derived from the belief that all adults understand and know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behavior regarding educator/student relationships. The respondent indicated that being friendly toward students was important since that relationship developed the trust necessary for the students to attempt activities, assignments, and projects in class that they otherwise would not. Nonetheless, the teacher/adult knows when a friendship turns to something else. It is the adult's responsibility to make sure that it goes no farther. Accepting personal responsibility for ones' actions as an adult, a

leader, and an educator, ranked high in the response from SD 2. "The students rely on the adults for emotional support and guidance. Policies present guidelines for expected behaviors by school employees. These policies exist to protect the district, the employees, and the students they see every day" (SD 2, R1, 2018). Although relationships outside of the school day are important, educators reflected upon the implications of too personal of relationships. "I do think it has changed relationships outside of school. I think that teachers over time started to realize they need to keep the teacher/student relationship socially with kids out of school, that it needed to only be with a relative, or to be like your best friend's child if they give me permission" (SD 2, R1, 2018).

The participant indicated the necessity to practice caution when facing potential compromising situations that present themselves during extracurricular activities. It is often during these times when an innocent act might change the course of the educator/student relationship. The educators who spend time after school hours as sponsors, coaches, band/orchestra or choir directors, various after school clubs and school sanctioned extracurricular events need to remain vigilant and always act ethically.

Depth of student involvement in social media.

Current use and technology integration in the curriculum presents a paradox for educators. Students today immerse themselves in media rich lessons and curriculum, and are encouraged to become members and contributors in the global community. R1 from SD 2 recognized that it is common for the students to use electronic technology to socialize with friends and family outside of the school day. However, they indicated that

school use of electronic technology for communication has changed. The change created a greater amount of responsibility.

> We used to be able to just email the parents or the kids back in the day. Now when we send a message, it's a text, which is more a form of communication accepted by both adults and students. You are supposed to include the parents or guardians in those text messages. There are those forms of changes throughout time with social media. (SD 2, R1, 2018)

While the respondent from SD 2 welcomes the opportunity to stay connected with families via text messaging applications, school websites, and teacher websites, she expressed concern that many parents and guardians seemed to want instant and constant access to the educators. Parents expect educators to respond to emails and messages quickly while seemingly forgetting that educators have limited opportunities throughout the day to compose responses. Students text their parents and guardians rather than call them on their cell phones, thus it becomes an acceptable mode of communication with their teachers as well.

These types of communication, while commonly accepted, are often where some educators cross the line. The participant suggest that since adults utilize text messaging more often and are more comfortable with it as a form of daily communication with family and friends, it might be tempting to communicate with students through texting as well. The educators do not forget the rules of communication, but they compromise the separation of their roles. "When there are rules set in place, you start thinking, "Okay . . . there are rules set, and it's obvious you don't set rules unless you learned from

experience. Any little thing, you know, is looked upon and frowned upon" (SD 2, R1, 2018).

Societal use and access to electronic communication.

The final theme expressed by the participant from SD 2 involved the overall changes in society that include greater use and access of electronic communication as well as the influence of social media on students and adults alike.

> Most of the changes [to the technology policy] have been student and teacher relationships. With media and inappropriate relationships in the last 10 years, with you know that's highlighted on the media, that [technology policy] gives the school districts more litigation to protect the teachers, and whether they're accused of (or not of) or wrongly or rightly, it just protects the district and protects the teachers. (SD 2, R1, 2018)

The changes to the technology policy to include social media, text messages, and electronic communication applications available to students and educators are not the only changes that are strictly enforced by the administrators at SD 2. Sites maintained by school employees to provide information to the families in the community must also adhere to the posting policies of the district. This includes sites such as Facebook. The educator explained that maintaining the privacy and security of students is always a priority when posting information or pictures on school-sanctioned sites.

> I have to be careful. I post a lot of pictures . . . I have to be very careful that, just because it's, you know, a Facebook site, I have to follow of all the social policies on media as far as . . . which students in our school district are not allowed to

> have pictures released. So it is a . . . responsibility because the school district allows me do it, but it's on me, honestly, so it's kind of scary using social media, to be honest with you. (SD 2, R1, 2018)

Accepting personal responsibility for your actions, recognizing the depth of involvement the students have in social media, and the overall changes in society that include greater use and access of electronic communication were major themes expressed by the participant from SD 2. Separating school life from social life is a challenge these educators recognize. Building and maintaining friendships and relationships with students is important; however, these respondents encourage educators to maintain their professionalism above all things.

Summary

Chapter V is a presentation of interview responses obtained from educators from SD 2. The responses indicate an awareness of their district's technology policy regarding electronic communication between teachers and students. The interviewee reported that electronic communication is necessary in order to maintain a connection with families of the students they teach. The respondents expressed similar concerns over communicating with students in a professional manner while still exhibiting a genuine interest in the students and families.

Prior to the 2011-2012 school years, SD 2 deferred to the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) policy regarding the use of electronic communication with students by educators. In 2012, the district developed their technology policy to include wording and examples as guidelines for educators to follow when corresponding electronically with

students. SD 2 electronic communication policy states that only licensed employees may communicate electronically with students; furthermore, electronic mail (e-mail) is the preferred form of electronic communication. The policy also states the licensed employee may use any form of electronic media except text messaging. Provisions allow for employees with students in the district who are family members.

Regarding the multiple roles rural teachers perform in their community, SD 2 policy makers sought to incorporate parental involvement in electronic communications by accepting the use of district approved group texting applications. The employee's immediate supervisor must be included in the message, and a copy of the group message must be sent to the employees' school email account. Licensed employees of SD 2 must limit their communications to matters that fall within the scope of their professional responsibility. A separate social network page must be created for the express purpose of communicating with students. Administration and parental access to the employee's professional page is required. Educators are not permitted to communicate with students between 8:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. The technology use policy states that employees remain subject to " . . . applicable state and federal laws, local policies, administrative regulations, and the Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators" (SD 2 Employee Handbook Updated, 2016).

CHAPTER VI

School District 3 (SD 3, pseudonym)

Introduction

Chapter VI begins with a description of the student and educator demographics of SD 3 along with a general description of the district. Following the district description, the researcher presents a timeline of the technology policy. The timeline includes events such as when the policy was approved by the school board; how long the policy has been in place; practitioner use of technology in the district; and implications and perceptions. The chapter continues with a policy analysis followed by the participant data analysis. The researcher then provides the first level of data thus examining specific elements of the policy that relate to the participant perceptions. Finally, the researcher presents a summary of the case.

It should be noted the respondent participation was not as robust in SD 3 as in SD 1. Only four individuals chose to participate. However, since the school district is a 1A district, the number of participants is equal to seventeen percent of the licensed educators in the district. The experience level of the participants also played a key role when responding. Two of the respondents are new to the district and have a limited knowledge of the electronic communication policy between educators and students. They received

the employee handbook from SD 3, and they attended a district-wide in-service over the technology policy. One of the participants is a new teacher. SD 3 is her first teaching position, thus her knowledge of the policy is very limited. The final participant from SD 3 has been in education for many years. All of their teaching experience has been at SD 3. The respondent does not use texting, and limits communication with families to e-mail and phone calls. The information provided in this chapter came from the interview with these four respondents.

Context

SD 3 (pseudonym) is a rural school district in Northeast Texas. The University Interscholastic League (UIL) classifies SD 3 as a 1A district for the 2016-2017 school year. During the specified year, the district served 109 students. Table 5 illustrates the demographics of the students of SD 3.

Table 5

SD 3 Student Demographics

Reported Racial Profile	Percentage Reported
African American	3.7%
Hispanic	7.0%
White	87.2%
American Indian	0.5%
Asian	0.0%
Pacific Islander	0.5%

Table 5 Continued

Two or More Races	1.1%

For the 2016-2017 school year, SD 3 employed 57 teachers. Teacher demographics are listed in Table 6.

Table 6

SD 3 Educator Demographics

Reported Racial Profile	Percentage Reported
African American	5.0%
Hispanic	5.0%
White	90.0%
American Indian	0.0%
Asian	0.0%
Pacific Islander	0.0%
Two or More Races	0.0%

(SD 3 TAPR tea.texas.gov, 2017).

History of the Technology Policy

Prior to 2017, SD 3 deferred to the technology policy guidelines provided by the Texas Education Agency. The researcher was not able to obtain a copy of the electronic communication policy prior to the 2017 school year. In 2017, policy makers conducted a policy review that led to the addition of stipulations, examples, and wording to elaborate

and expound upon the existing policy. The Educator Code of Ethics and standards of conduct along with district expectations of employee behavior were added as a part of the introduction to the electronic communication policy. The following section presents the technology policy along with the electronic communication policy of SD 3.

Technology Policy from the District

This cross-case research examined the electronic communication policy of SD 3. The researcher requested documentation of the school years of any implementation of specific guidelines along with addendums regarding the district's electronic communication system in reference to educator/student electronic communication; however, earlier policies were not available The electronic communication policy of SD 3 is provided below.

(Policy from SD 3)

Employee Standards of Conduct

Each District employee shall perform his or her duties in accordance with state and federal law, District policy, and ethical standards. The District holds all employees accountable to the Educators' Code of Ethics.

Each District employee shall recognize and respect the rights of students, parents, other employees, and members of the community and shall work cooperatively with others to serve the best interests of the District.

Violations of Standards of Conduct

An employee wishing to express concern, complaints, or criticism shall do so through appropriate channels. Each employee shall comply with the standards of

conduct set out in this policy and with any other policies, regulations, and guidelines that impose duties, requirements, or standards attendant to his or her status as a District employee. Violation of any policies, regulations, or guidelines may result in disciplinary action, including termination of employment.

Electronic Communication Use with Students

A certified employee, licensed employee, or any other employee designated in writing by the Superintendent or a campus principal may use electronic communication, as this term is defined by law, with currently enrolled students only about matters within the scope of the employee's professional responsibilities.

(SD 3 Policy continued)

Unless an exception has been made in accordance with the employee handbook or other administrative regulations, an employee shall not use a personal electronic communication platform, application, or account to communicate with currently enrolled students.

Unless authorized above, all other employees are prohibited from using electronic communication directly with students who are currently enrolled in the District. The employee handbook or other administrative regulations shall further detail:

Exceptions for family and social relationships;

The circumstances under which an employee may use text messaging to communicate with individual students or student groups;

Hours of the day during which electronic communication is discouraged or prohibited; and

Other matters deemed appropriate by the Superintendent or designee.

In accordance with ethical standards applicable to all District employees, an employee shall be prohibited from using electronic communications in a manner that constitutes prohibited harassment or abuse of a District student; adversely affects the student's learning, mental health, or safety; includes threats of violence against the student; reveals confidential information about the student; or constitutes an inappropriate communication with a student, as described in the Educators' Code of Ethics.

(SD 3 Policy continued)

An employee shall have no expectation of privacy in electronic communications with students. Each employee shall comply with the District's requirements for records retention and destruction to the extent those requirements apply to electronic communication.

Personal Use

All employees shall be held to the same professional standards in their public use of electronic communication as for any other public conduct. If an employee's use of electronic communication violates state or federal law or District policy, or interferes with the employee's ability to effectively perform his or her job duties, the employee is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Reporting Improper Communication

In accordance with administrative regulations, an employee shall notify his or her supervisor when a student engages in improper electronic communication with the employee.

Disclosing Personal Information

An employee shall not be required to disclose his or her personal e-mail address or personal phone number to a student. (End Policy)

The following section of the policy relates specifically to the prohibition of romantic or inappropriate relationships between educators and student, including consensual relationships.

Relationships with Students

An employee shall not form romantic or other inappropriate social relationships with students. Any sexual relationship between a student and a District employee is always prohibited, even if consensual.

As required by law, the District shall notify the parent of a student with whom an educator is alleged to have engaged in certain misconduct. (Employee Standard of Conduct, Date Issued: 10/6/2017. Update 109. DH(Local)-A. pp.1-5)

Teachers' Language Use Describing Technology Policy

Research questions were addressed by conducting interviews with teachers from SD 3. The researcher coded the data by thematically analyzing each response. Semi-structured interviews took place at the convenience of each participant. After receiving permission to participate from the superintendents of each district, solicitation of

participants began with an email describing the study along with an informed consent form. The teachers who elected to participate received an email with further instructions as well as the interview questions. Each teacher responded to the interview questions individually and returned their initial interview responses via email. The researcher conducted secondary interviews after transcribing the responses in order to ensure accuracy of the responses.

In the narrative, the researcher made efforts to exclude grade level, subjects taught, and gender. The total number of years teaching and the number of years at their current district was included in the study. Participants' perceptions of their knowledge and understanding of their district's electronic communication policy is presented in the following section.

Policy and Perception

With only one exception, the participants from SD 3 are new to the district. The participants acknowledged the awareness of their district's technology communication policy between educators and students. Respondents indicated the recent changes to the policy appeared to be related to an incident in the district's recent past. Each of the respondents utilizes electronic communication with their students to inform families of class related assignments and upcoming school events. The interviewees indicated that accountability for ethical behavior ultimately remains with the individual.

Specific Themes and Categories

Analyzing the interviews with the respondents from SD 3 provided recurring themes regarding the technology policy focused on electronic communication between

educators and students. Maintaining a professional relationship with students was the most common theme from the participants. Further analysis and coding of the interviews with the participants from SD 3 revealed three categories: 1) responsibility and accountability to the school district; 2) conducting oneself professionally at all times; 3) diligently providing a safe environment while building relationships with students and families.

Responsibility and accountability.

Responsibility and accountability to their district and the students they serve proved to be of greatest importance to the participants from SD 3. "As the policy stands now it would seem to ensure that all communication is above board and accountable. This keeps all parties in a safe realm and helps keep relationships in the areas that are appropriate" (SD 3, R1, 2018). The district provides faculty and staff in-services prior to the beginning of the school year, as well as throughout the year, to inform and remind the employees of their responsibility to the school district and to the community they serve. "The electronic communication policy is explained in our Employee Handbook, and verbally communicated to staff during in-services" (SD 3, R1,2018).

Professional conduct.

Maintaining professionalism as educators was another major theme that emerged from the interviews. Educators from SD 3 are encouraged to communicate with families of their students. The district expects that the communications will be of a nature regarding official school business. One participant explained, "Employee electronic communication with students must be limited to that pertaining to official school

business. Employees are not to participate in social, casual, confrontational, or entertaining exchanges with students" (SD 3, R3, 2018). Another respondent commented "Any emails that are sent to students are to be forwarded or bcc to an administrator, and staff are not to send electronic communications after 9:00 p.m." (SD 3, R3, 2018).

A safe environment online or offline.

SD 3 provides ongoing training for technology integration into the curriculum. The desire of the district for each student to have the opportunity to participate in a global electronic community. Educators stress the importance of student accountability as they learn to interact with others online. SD 3 educators know that social media, smart phones, and texting are methods of communication with which their students are comfortable. They strive to caution the students of possible dangers of those same instruments. The educators realize that many of their students are possibly unsupervised regarding the amount of time spent with these devices and the sensitive information potentially shared through these devices.

> Hearing second-hand stories about past inappropriate stories from this school district makes me realize that [SD 3] did need to change their policy in order to ensure that all students have a safe learning environment. I believe that [SD 3] takes an incredible amount of time to research current and future technologies in an effort to find the tech that would best benefit our student learners, staff, community, and district. I believe that it has had a positive impact in that it has appropriate boundaries for staff and students. (SD 3, R2, 2018)

Summary

Chapter VI presents responses obtained from educators from SD 3. The responses indicate an awareness of their district's technology policy regarding electronic communication between teachers and students, but the responses also indicate that most of the participants are new to the district. Investigation of the of responses provided three major themes: 1) responsibility and accountability to the school district; 2) conducting oneself professionally at all times; 3) diligently providing a safe environment while building relationships with students and families.

Prior to the 2017-2018 school year, SD 3 deferred to the Texas Education Agency's (tea.texas.gov) policy regarding the use of electronic communication between educators and educators. In 2017, the district developed their technology policy to include wording and examples as guidelines for educators to follow when corresponding electronically with students. Major changes to the electronic communication policy are as follows:

> Unless an exception has been made in accordance with the employee handbook or other administrative regulations, an employee shall not use a personal electronic communication platform, application, or account to communicate with currently enrolled students.
>
> Unless authorized above, all other employees are prohibited from using electronic communication directly with students who are currently enrolled in the District.
>
> The employee handbook or other administrative regulations shall further detail the exceptions and limitations:

Exceptions for family and social relationships;

The circumstances under which an employee may use text messaging to communicate with individual students or student groups;

Hours of the day during which electronic communication is discouraged or prohibited; and

Other matters deemed appropriate by the Superintendent or designee. (End of SD 3 Policy)

Providing current technology and stressing the importance of preparing their students to function as cyber-citizens while protecting them from the pitfalls and potential dangers of that community is a guiding force of the technology policy of SD 3. The electronic communication policy between educators and students is intended to foster professionalism and accountability for the district.

CHAPTER VII

Cross-Case Analysis

Introduction

During this qualitative study in a cross-case research interviewing licensed educators of three school districts in Northeast Texas, the purpose of this study was to identify recurring themes related to educator perception of the policy regulating educator/student electronic communications. The study includes the technology policy specifically relating to the electronic communication policy from each of the three school districts. Data were collected from questionnaires/interviews completed by licensed educators. Educators from each of the three districts expressed many of the same concerns and perceptions. These connections provided information the researcher utilized as themes for the educator perception sections of Chapters IV, V, and VI. The cross-case analysis initially focused on the themes expressed by the participating educators and secondly the cross-case analysis examined the technology policy specifically related to the districts' electronic communication policy.

Context

This study was composed of educators from three public school districts in Northeast Texas. The University Interscholastic League classifies these districts as a 1A

district, a 2A district, and a 3A district. Table 7 and 8 provide a demographic analysis of students and educators.

Table 7

Comparison of Student Demographics Across SD 1, SD 2, SD 3

Reported Racial Profile	Percentage Reported		
	SD 1	SD 2	SD 3
African American	14.3%	12.6%	3.7%
Hispanic	23.5%	52.4%	7.0%
White	57.9%	28.1%	87.2%
American Indian	1.4%	0.4%	0.5%
Asian	0.0%	4.2%	0.0%
Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%	0.5%
Two or More Races	2.8%	2.2%	1.1%

(TAPR, tea.texas.gov, 2017)

As denoted in Table 7, the student demographic profile varied significantly, with White students having the largest percentage in SD 1 (57.9%) and SD 3 (87.2%), with SD 2 (28.1%) lower in comparison. Hispanic students presented the next highest percentage of students for SD 1 (23.5%) and SD 2 (52.4%), whereas SD 3 (7.0%) was proportionately lower. African American students presented the third highest percentage of students for SD 1 (14.3%) and SD 2 (12.6%), whereas SD 3 was proportionately lower (3.7%). The

remaining categories of race for each district were low in comparison to the White, African American, and Hispanic students.

Table 8

Comparison of Educator Demographics Across SD 1, SD 2, SD 3

Reported Racial Profile	Percentage Reported		
	SD 1	SD 2	SD 3
African American	2.3%	10.2%	5.0%
Hispanic	1.2%	26.6%	5.0%
White	96.5%	59.8%	90.0%
American Indian	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%
Asian	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%
Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%
Two or More Races	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%

(TAPR, tea.texas.gov, 2017)

As denoted in Table 8, White educators had the highest percentage in all three districts. Hispanic educators was the next highest in SD 2 (26.6%), with SD 1 (1.2%) and SD 3 (5.0%) having lower percentages in relation to SD 2. African American educators was next highest in SD 2 910.2%), with SD 1 (2.3%) and SD 3 (5.0%) having lower percentages in relation to SD 2. The remaining categories of race for each district were low in comparison to the White, African American, and Hispanic students.

In the following three subsections, information is offered that summarizes the findings for each of the three cases (SD 1, SD 2, SD 3). The analysis first focused on the themes of educator perception regarding the electronic communication policy between educators and students providing specific corresponding themes from the interview narratives. Second, the researcher examined the electronic communication policy from each district identifying themes and patterns. The following subsections summarize the questionnaire responses regarding educator perception of the electronic communication policy of their respective districts.

The findings from the interview/questionnaire described the following themes: parental/guardian involvement; multiple roles of rural teachers; informed and active administration social media and casual postings; heightened awareness by employees; regular policy reviews; accepting personal responsibility for one's actions; recognizing the depth of involvement the students have in social media; and changes in society that include greater use and access of electronic communication.

SD 1 Case Analysis

The School.

SD 1 (pseudonym) is a rural school district in Northeast Texas. The University Interscholastic League (UIL) classifies SD 1 as a 3A district for the 2015-2016 school year serving 1,112 students.

SD 1 teacher demographics.

Five licensed educators participated in the study. All five respondents self-identified as Caucasian, which is representative of 96.5% of the educators employed by

SD 1. According to the Texas Education Agency's district detail search website, SD 1 employees eighty-six educators for their three campuses. Of those eighty-six educators, 2.3% identify as African American, 1.2% identify as Hispanic, and 96.5% identify as White, with 0.0% reporting as American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander or Two or More Races (see Table 8).

SD 1 student demographics.

The student demographic profile of SD 1 is 57.9% White, 23.5% Hispanic, 14.3% African American, 1.4% American Indian, 0.0% Asian, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 2.8% of Two or More Races (see Table 7).

Specific themes resulting from personal interviews revealed the following categories: parental/guardian involvement; multiple roles of rural teachers; informed and active administration social media and casual postings; heightened awareness by employees; regular policy reviews.

Electronic communication policy.

Prior to the 2007-2008 school years, SD 1 deferred to the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) policy regarding the use of electronic communication with students by educators. In 2007, the district developed their technology policy to include terminology and examples to use as guidelines for educators to follow when corresponding electronically with students. Policy makers provided factors to consider when considering whether the communication between teachers and students might be deemed inappropriate. Reminding the faculty and staff that all electronic communications were not private, the district encouraged all employees to remain professional while interacting

with students through messaging applications, electronic mail, and group texting applications.

Due to the multiple roles rural teachers perform in their community, SD 1 policy makers sought to solicit and incorporate parental involvement in electronic communications by requiring the parents or guardians of the students be included in messaging applications. Educators must include their immediate supervisors in all non-school related electronic communications sent to students. By providing definitions and examples of texting applications and communications, including parents/guardians and immediate supervisors in communications sent to students, and training educators in professional ethics and standards, the policy makers of SD 1 regularly review the technology communication policy as they consider the impact the policy has on the climate and function of the school community.

SD 2 Case Analysis

The School.

SD 2 is a rural school district in Northeast Texas. The University Interscholastic League (UIL) classifies SD 2 as a 2A district for the 2016-2017 school year. During the specified year, the district served 643 students and employed fifty-seven educators. The following section presents the teacher demographics for SD 2 for the 2016-2017 school year. The researcher obtained the information from the public records found on the Texas Education Agency website (tea.texas.gov).

SD 2 teacher demographics.

Only one teacher chose to participate in the research. This educator self-identified as Caucasian thus representing 59.8% of the educators employed by SD 2. According to the Texas Education Agency's district detail search website, for the 2016-2017 school year, SD 2 employed fifty-seven educators. Of those fifty-seven educators, 10.2% identify as African American, 26.6% identify as Hispanic, and 59.8% identify as White, with 0.4% reporting as American Indian, 1.5% identify as Asian, 0.4% identify as Pacific Islander, and 1.1% identify as Two or More Races (see Table 8).

SD 2 student demographics.

SD 2 (pseudonym) is a rural school district in Northeast Texas. The University Interscholastic League (UIL) classifies SD 2 as a 2A district for the 2016-2017 school year. During the specified year, the district served 643 students. The student demographic profile of SD 2 is 10.2% African American, 52.1% Hispanic, 28.1% White, 0.4%, American Indian, 1.5% Asian, 0.4% Pacifica Islander, and 1.1% Two or More Races (see Table 7). The student demographic profile of SD 2 is 57.9% White, 23.5% Hispanic, 14.3% African American, 1.4% American Indian, 0.0% Asian, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 2.8% of two or more races (see Table 7).

Specific themes from respondents are presented as follows: accepting personal responsibility for one's actions; recognizing the depth of involvement the students have in social media; and overall changes in society that include greater use and access of electronic communication.

Electronic communication policy.

Prior to the 2011-2012 school years, SD 2 deferred to the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) policy regarding the use of electronic communication with students by educators. In 2012, the district developed the technology policy to include wording and examples for educators to follow when corresponding electronically with students. Only licensed employees may communicate electronically with students; furthermore, electronic mail (e-mail) is the preferred form of electronic communication. The policy states the licensed employee may use any form of electronic media except text messaging. Provisions allow for employees with students in the district who are family members.

Regarding multiple roles rural teachers perform in their community, SD 2 policy makers sought to incorporate parental involvement in electronic communications by accepting the use of district approved group texting applications. The employee's immediate supervisor must be included in the message, and a copy of the group message must be sent to the employees' school email account. Licensed employees of SD 2 must limit their communications to the scope of their professional responsibility. A separate social network page must be created for the express purpose of communicating with students; administration and parental access to the employee's professional page is required. The policy states that educators are not permitted to communicate with students between 8:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. The technology use policy states that employees remain subject to ". . . applicable state and federal laws, local policies, administrative

regulations, and the Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators" (SD 2 Employee Handbook, 2016).

SD 3 Case Analysis

The School.

SD 3 (pseudonym) is a rural school district in Northeast Texas. The University Interscholastic League (UIL) classifies SD 3 as a 1A district for the 2016-2017 school year. During the specified year, the district served 109 students.

SD 3 teacher demographics.

For the 2016-2017 school year, SD 3 employed 57 teachers. Teacher demographics are listed as follows: African American, 5.0%; Hispanic, 5.0%; White, 90.0%; with 0.0% for American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races (see Table 8). Four licensed educators participated in the research. All four of these participants self-identified as Caucasian, which is representative of 90.0% of the educators employed by SD 3.

SD 3 student demographics.

SD 3 (pseudonym) is a rural school district in Northeast Texas. The University Interscholastic League (UIL) classifies SD 3 as a 1A district for the 2016-2017 school year. During the specified year, the district served 109 students. The student demographic profile of SD 3 is 5.0% African American, 5.0% Hispanic, 90.0% White, with 0.0% for Asian, Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races (see Table 7).

After collecting data from the participants of SD 3, the researcher identified three overarching themes in their responses. Specific themes from respondents are presented

as follows: 1) responsibility and accountability to the school district; 2) conducting oneself professionally at all times; 3) diligently providing a safe environment while building relationships with students and their families.

Electronic communication policy.

Prior to 2017, SD 3 deferred to the Texas Education Agency's (tea.texas.gov) electronic communication policy for educators and students. In 2017, the district included guidelines and stipulations for educator/student electronic communication. The district did not focus specifically on social media topics, and the policy was not included in any section discussing social media.

Cross-Case Analysis

As noted earlier in this study, the participation from SD 2 and SD 3 were not as robust as the participation from SD 1. The researcher corresponded with the superintendent of SD 2 who was supportive of the study. However, when the researcher began the interviews and questionnaires, only one individual chose to participate. The information provided in this chapter came from the interview with that one respondent. Only four individuals chose to participate from SD 3. However, since the school district is a 1A district, the number of participants is equal to seventeen percent of the licensed educators in the district.

The experience level of the participants also played a key role when responding. Two of the respondents are new to the district and have a limited knowledge of the electronic communication policy between educators and students. They received the employee handbook from SD 3, and they attended a district-wide in-service over the

technology policy. One of the participants is a new teacher. SD 3 is her first teaching position, thus her knowledge of the policy is very limited. The final participant from SD 3 has been in education for many years. All of their teaching experience has been at SD 3. The respondent does not use texting, and limits communication with families to e-mail and phone calls. The information provided in this chapter came from the interview with these four respondents.

A cross-case analysis allows a researcher to compare and contrast the common elements found in separate cases. "Cross-case analysis is a research method that facilitates the comparison of commonalities and difference in the events, activities, and processes that are the units of analyses in case studies" (Kahn & VanWynsberghe, 2008, para. 1). This type of research offers the opportunity to gain a better understanding of relationships in cases which in turn may provide connections in events in order to further develop a solution to a problem or make sense of a theory or hypothesis.

> Cross-case analysis enables case study researchers to delineate the combination of factors that may have contributed to the outcomes of the case, seek or construct an explanation as to why one case is different or the same as other, make sense of puzzling or unique findings, or further articulate the concepts, hypotheses, or theories discovered or constructed from the original case. (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008, para. 2)

Chapter VII presents the themes that emerged from interviews with licensed educators from all three of the selected school districts that have formed the electronic communication policies of those districts that contribute to the safety and well-being of

educators and students alike. Each respondent shared their opinions and concerns during the interviews, which provided a basic guide for categorization of the policy and perceptions. Table 9 presents the major themes observed and the school districts represented.

Table 9

Comparison of Themes Among SD 1, SD 2, SD 3

Major Themes and Categories	Educator Perception		
	SD 1	SD 2	SD 3
Parental/Guardian Involvement	✶	✶	✶
Multiple Roles of Educators in Small Schools	✶		
Informed and Actively Involved Administration	✶	✶	
Active Administration	✶		
Social Media and Casual Postings	✶	✶	
Heightened Awareness by Employees	✶	✶	
Regular Policy Reviews	✶		✶
Accepting Personal Responsibility		✶	
Depth of Student Involvement in Social Media		✶	

Table 9 Continued

Societal Changes that Include Greater Access to Electronic Communication	✶	✶	✶
Responsibility to the School District			✶
Professional and Ethical Behavior	✶	✶	✶

Table 9 Continued

Safe Environment While Building Relationships with students	✶

After reviewing and coding the major themes from each school district involved in the study, respondent perceptions exhibited four categories of influence upon which of the participants' indicated as important: 1) Personal, 2) External, 3) Administrative, and 4) Societal. These categories are examined in detail below.

Personal

Respondents from the three participating school districts all agree that the educator is ultimately responsible for their own actions. Certification courses in ethical behavior reinforce this position. The Educator Code of Ethics from the Texas Education Agency, to which the researcher referred in an earlier chapter, is included in the Employee Handbook for each of the districts involved in the study. To the respondents in this study, conducting oneself in a professional manner extends to the professionalism one shows the district that hired them, the parents and families of the students they serve, and the relationships with the students themselves.

External

External contributors are the forces that act upon the educators to maintain an open line of communication with their students and the families of their students. Respondents cited parental involvement or lack thereof; parental insistence on instant and limitless access to educators at all times of day; and multiple roles that educators fill in

their community. Participants from all three school districts expressed the importance of maintaining parental contact even if the parent is not particularly actively involved. "While the parent may not be an active participant in the communication, it holds the teacher and student accountable to the words they write" (SD 1, R3, 2018). Including the parents/guardians in the electronic communications creates another level of checks and balances in order to maintain a professional relationship with students.

Administrative

An actively engaged administration aids in facilitating an awareness to the due vigilance necessary as an educator regarding communications and interactions with students. Equipping educators with district approved alternative methods of electronic communication allows administrators to encourage communication while promoting professional and ethical responsibility.

> I have received two or three emails (that were sent to all employees) with reminders about the policy, requesting an update of information about teachers' pages or posts, or notification of proper social media etiquette and support for the school. I think clarification, reminders, and examples are helpful to support the policy. (SD 2, R2, 2018)

Although respondents from SD 1 and SD 3 indicated that an actively involved administration was an important element in maintaining a safe digital environment for both educators and students, the single respondent from SD 2 took the stance that their electronic communication policy was written in such a manner to leave very little to self-

interpretation. The policy is clear and provides examples of accepted sources, reasons, and types of electronic communication between educators and students.

Societal

Overall changes in society's attitude toward, and acceptance of text messages as a method of communication, is evident from all three school districts in this study.

> Talking on the phone is so old school. Most teens today prefer texting. About 75 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds in the United States own cellphones, and 75 percent of these teens send text messages, according to the Pew Research Center's Pew 2010 Internet and American Life Project. More than half of these teens text daily. With texting outpacing other forms of communication, you have to wonder how this technology shift alters the social lives and behavior of today's teens. (Blanchard, 2017, para. 1)

In her article, *How Text Messaging is Affecting Communication Between Parents & Children*, Sheryl Faber explains the positive aspects that electronic communication provides families through text messages. "Texting allows parents to touch base with their children multiple times daily. This ongoing messaging can assist in providing a closeness and caring that may have not possible in years past" (Faber, 2017, para. 3).

Participants at all three school districts indicated that the surge in the use of text messages as a preferred method of communication impacts relationships students develop with each other, with their families, and with their teachers. This is evident by the number of applications created for smart phones and computers that allow group

messaging through electronic communication without access to the educator's personal phone number.

Nonetheless, there are boundaries and lines in developing relationships with students that should never be crossed. A romantic relationship between educators and students is inappropriate. Educators will always be held to an ethical code of conduct.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher has provided case-study information from SD 1, SD 2, and SD 3 in an examination of the student demographics, educator demographics, and the overarching themes and categories found as a result of interview data with participants from each of the districts. The researcher then provided an analysis of the technology communication policy regarding electronic communication between students and educators. Finally, a cross-case analysis was presented of SD 1, SD 2, and SD 3 where the researcher compared and contrasted four categories of influence resulting from a further coding of the participants' data. Chapter VIII presents the summary, conclusions, implications and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER VIII

Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary, conclusions of the research, and implications for further research regarding electronic communications between educators and students, the educators' perception of the electronic communication policy, and the impact the policy may or may not have on the development of relationships between educators and students. The purpose of this study was to examine and identify educator perception of the district technology policy and to conduct an analysis of the electronic communication policy. Information was gathered utilizing personal interviews with educators from three public schools in Northeast Texas.

Summary of the Study

The qualitative multi-case study utilized two sets of data to conduct an analysis of the technology policy regarding electronic communications between educators and student of three school districts in Northeast Texas along with interviews of educators regarding their perception of the policy. A convenience sampling resulted in three school districts that elected to participate in the study. Major themes and categories emerged as the interview data was coded. The interviews allowed the participants the opportunity to

express their understanding of their district's electronic communication policy. Furthermore, the participants expounded on their perception of the policy and offered their opinions. The educators expressed concerns over the impact of social media, text messaging, and the familiarity with which the students want to interact with the educators. Maintaining the Educator's Code of Ethics along with personal responsibility were also major themes expressed. The participants indicated that their districts understand the multiple roles the educators perform in their communities. They also expressed that their districts made efforts to maintain the safety of employees and students within their jurisdiction.

Conclusions

Understanding the importance of maintaining communication with families as well as promoting parental involvement was a key to the responses in this study. Utilizing current methods of communications which include text messaging and electronic communication aides schools and families as they build a community/school culture and environment that promotes success of the students. The results of this cross-case analysis expose major themes and categories expressed by the respondents across the three school districts. The researcher utilized the themes to develop four overarching categories: personal, external, administrative, and societal. Each category represents the forces that act upon educators as they develop relationships with their students to provide a safe environment conducive to learning. Although each theme contributed to the overall picture presented by the respondents, the data corresponding to the theme of personal responsibility proved to be the greatest focus. All of the participants pointed to

ethical behavior and professional relationships as intrinsically necessary for educators to avoid compromising situations with the students in their care. No amount of rules that administrators put in place can change the fact that it is ultimately the educator's decisions that determine the direction of their behavior.

When reviewing the driving research questions behind this study, it is important to ascertain how each question was or was not ultimately answered. The research questions are restated here for the benefit of future researchers.

R1. What changes were made in the technology policy at school districts regarding educator/student electronic communication? Changes in each district's policy resulted from a desire for increased electronic communication between parents and teachers. Changes included acceptable forms of communications as well as examples of acceptable messages.

R2. How have changes impacted technology policy? The electronic communication policies of each district is a dynamic policy. Each district utilizes examples and verbiage familiar and particular to their district while not overstepping boundaries set by the Texas Education Agency. The policies have been expanded to include educator actions on social media, educator responsibilities toward the students and families they serve, and the larger community in which they live.

R3. How have addendums impacted the technology policy's progression? Each of the electronic communications policies examined included addendums to their earlier policies. However, the most recent policies were written with new inclusive sections rather than addendums.

R4. How has the change in the technology policy impacted non-school related educator/student electronic communication? Each of the respondents in the study indicated a knowledge of colleagues who preformed community roles outside of their school role. Restrictions on electronic communications and a concern with implications outside of the school day has caused several individuals to relinquish their community roles. Others see it as a progression of society and accept it as such.

Implications

This study examined the technology policy regarding electronic communication between educators and students as well as participants perceptions of that policy. All three districts follow the policy as presented by the Texas Education Agency. However, one district went to great lengths to give examples of the types of communication methods that were not allowed, the time of day that communication should not take place, and the necessity to include administrators and families of the students in any communications. The respondents expressed concern over the pressure to maintain communication and relationships with the students while focusing on the rules of their district in order to not inadvertently overlooking a rule. For this reason, many of the educators choose to limit community activities and functions with students outside of school due to the stress of being under constant scrutiny. They agree that this may affect some community activities where adult leaders are desperately needed; however, that is a choice that each educator must make for themselves.

Recommendations

During the course of this study, the researcher discovered the need for additional research for the benefit of educators, policy makers, and students to provide a safe cyber community for all members of their district. The first recommendation for those seeking research of effective methods for reviewing policy along with incorporating parents and community stakeholders for developing regular policy reviews guidelines regarding social media and electronic communications between educators and students.

The second recommendation is to advance research on social emotional development as it directly relates to the use of social media by both students and educators. Some students develop a dependency on their screen time with friends. The number of 'likes' for their social media and instant messaging posts become more important to the student than actual real-world friends. This research could include the social sciences with regard to obsessive-compulsive disorders and addictions.

Recommendations for research include the role of coworkers and professional peers as the first line of prevention in educator/student improper relationships. Such research questions might include, "When is it appropriate for coworkers to confront their peers when inappropriate relationships are suspected?"

Final Reflections

There have always been some professions in society that fall under more scrutiny than other professions. These professions include oaths and codes of conduct by which they are bound. However, society has drifted from a moral compass, and those many in those professions are now blurring the lines of their ethical code of conduct. Educators

seek to develop relationships with their students in the light of Maslow's Hierarchy. Often, good intentions turn into situations that leave educators open to compromising decisions. Maintaining a moral character that is above reproach seems to be an out-dated concept in our society, but it is, in the opinion of this researcher, crucial now more than ever before.

Moving forward, I would like to expand on this study by working with school counselors and psychiatrists to develop a curriculum of study for educators to help with the mental health of our educators. I would like to work toward educating school personnel in understanding addiction behavior. I believe that by treating the whole person will be much more effective than simply treating symptoms after the fact.

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APPENDIX A

Sample Superintendent's Letter

Date

Superintendent Name
XXXX Independent School District
City, Texas

Dear XXXX,

My name is Laura Dacus, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Secondary Education and Educational Leadership at Stephen F. Austin State University. The purpose of this letter is to ask for your support and cooperation in my dissertation study, which is a qualitative multi-case study of technology policies regarding electronic communication between educators and students and the progression of those policies from the first implementation to current revisions. This study seeks to identify specific revisions and addendums to the technology policy along with teacher perception of the policy as it relates to their daily interaction with students.

I am requesting your permission to interview selected principals, teachers, the technology director concerning their perception of and experience with the technology policy as it specifically relates to electronic communication between teachers and students. This research study is a qualitative case study. The interviews will be conducted at the convenience of the participants and are expected to last 30-60 minutes. All interview responses will be held in confidence. To ensure confidentiality, the school districts and participants of the study will be identified by a special code respectively, in the final documentation of the study. Pseudonyms will be used for the names of the school districts and the participants in the study. Transcripts of the interviews will be available for participants to confirm the accuracy of the information provided.

If you choose to consent to the participation of the teachers and administrators in this qualitative research, please sign the below. If you have any questions or concerns, or if you require any clarifications, please contact me at 903.570.2571 or Dr. Patrick Jenlink, chairperson of the dissertation committee, at 936.468.1756.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Laura Dacus
Doctoral Candidate
Dept. of Secondary Education and Educational Leadership
College of Education
Stephen F. Austin State University

Patrick M. Jenlink, Ed.D.
Chair, Dissertation Committee
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I consent for administrators, teachers, and the technology coordinator/director to participate in the study by meeting with the researcher in interview sessions for the purpose of this study. I understand that all responses, schools, and the school district will remain confidential through the use of a coding system and pseudonyms. I understand that the purpose of this study is to further the research on teacher perception of the electronic communication policy as it related to the larger technology policy.

Any concerns with this research may be addressed to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Stephen F. Austin State University at 936.468.6606.

_____ _____
Superintendent/Assistant Superintendent Date

_____ _____
Person obtaining consent Date

Note: The participant will receive a copy of this letter for his/her information, and the researcher will keep a signed copy in her files.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Date:

Dear Participant,

My name is Laura Dacus. I am conducting a research study towards completing my dissertation for a doctoral degree at Stephen F. Austin State University. The topic of my dissertation is teacher perception of the district's technology policy with regard to electronic communication between educators and students.

I am asking for your voluntary participation in an interview. The interviews will address your perception of the technology policy specially focusing on electronic communications between educators and students.

The entire process will be kept confidential and no personal information will be required at any time during or after the study. Since the study will use pseudonyms, your name will not be associated with the research. If at any time during this study, you decide to discontinue participating, let me know, and I will remove any/all data collected from the study. You may withdraw from the study without any difficulties.

If you have any questions, I would be willing to explain the research further, or you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Patrick Jenlink at 936.468.1756.

Any concerns with this research may be addressed to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Stephen F. Austin State University at 936.468.6606.

Thank you in advanced for your participation in my study.

I hereby give consent to be interviewed and to complete the survey for this study by the above named doctoral student. I understand that my responses will be kept confidential and that the intent of the interview is to assist with the study of teacher/administrator perception of my district's electronic communication policy.

_____ _____

Participant Date

_____ _____

Signature of Researcher Date

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APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol / Questions: Administrators/Teachers

Thank you for participating in my research. The information gathered from this survey will assist in gaining a better understanding of an educator's perception of electronic communication between educators and students. Please understand that all of the information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and that pseudonyms will be used for all participants and districts in the study. Once all of the information has been collected, analyzed and transcribed, it will be destroyed. Again, thank you so much for participating.

Name:_____

Gender: _____ Ethnicity/Race:_____ Position/Dept:_____

# of years teaching:_____

# of years as an administrator:_____

# of years teaching in this school:_____

Highest level of education:_____

Interview Questions:

Level One Interview:

Level one interviews will begin with introductions between the participant and the researcher. The researcher will briefly explain his role, why this study is being done, and provide a brief summary of his background. The researcher will create a trust relationship with each participant, on a personal level, through casual conversation, to create a comfortable and trusting setting.

1. In your opinion, what changes if any were implemented directly pertaining to educator/student electronic communication?

2. In your opinion, was the change in the technology policy necessary? Why?

3. How have addendums impacted the technology policy's progression?

4. How has the change in the technology policy impacted non-school related educator/student electronic communication?

Level Two Interview:

Level two interviews will begin with a review of the member check provided in the interim between level one and two. Based on the analysis of the data collected in the level one interviews, questions will be derived for further investigation or clarification.

Level Three Interview:

As required for saturation of data, questions will be formulated based on analysis of interview responses for level two. Level three interviews will begin with a review of the member check provided in the interim between level two and three. Again, based on the analysis of the data collected in the level two interviews, questions will be derived for further investigation or clarification.

VITA

Laura L. Dacus graduated from Arp High School in 1983. In 1997, she began working as a Special Education Paraprofessional for Arp Junior High School. She attended Texas A&M University-Commerce, and received her Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies Degree in 2004. She worked as a paraprofessional for two years, and she became the school district's technology assistant. After working three years as the technology assistant and working toward her teacher certification, she was emergency certified in 2002. She went back to the junior high school as the technology teacher. She received her Master of Educational Technology Leadership from Lamar University in 2013. She received her principal certification in 2014. She was accepted into the 2015 Doctoral Cohort as Stephen F. Austin State University, where she earned a Doctorate of Educational Leadership in 2018. Currently, she continues to teach computer classes at Arp Junior High, Arp Independent School District in Arp, Texas. She completed her doctorate in 2018.

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