



An Exploratory Case Study

What Makes a Good School Website: Investigation of
Long Island School District Website Homepages
Across Socioeconomic Status

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to examine 50 public school district websites in Nassau and Suffolk County to identify the differences in quality and content across the different socio-economic levels.



Introduction

With the New York State Board of Education spending 17.2 million dollars during this fiscal year on Informational Technologies, we believe that individual school district websites are a good indicator of how districts are using informational technologies to reach students, staff and the community around them.



Literature Review

We conducted a thorough literature review from a broad range of recent literature across four disciplines. We identified key characteristics of 44 articles of the more than eighty articles reviewed as part of this empirical research where items such as the what and why school districts should have websites.



The Problem

State of New York's Department of Education needs to provide a consistent template for the distribution of money placed forth for informational technologies so that all schools can have quality websites regardless of socio-economic status thus promoting communication with the community.



The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine school district websites and identify differences between website quality based on two instruments developed to measure website contents and website quality.



Significance of the Study

“The nation’s continued investment in school-based technology has resulted in significant progress toward closing the digital divide”

(Judge, Pucket & Bell, 2006).



Research Question

Is there a difference between socio-economic status and school district website quality and its content?



Sample

- Selected from the 127 Long Island public School districts
- **This research examined 50 school websites from the following distribution:**
 - 10 Districts from Lower Class (below 55k),
 - 15 Districts from Lower Middle Class (55k-67.499K),
 - 15 Districts from Upper Middle Class (67.5-79,999k)
 - 10 Districts from Upper Class (greater than 80k)

This sample represents 40% of the total school district population in the two counties.



Method

- After the 50 sites are randomly selected, they were reviewed independently by both researchers.
- Each of the two researchers reviewed the same 50 school districts, using the two instruments, and the data was cross-referenced.
- Research was compared and only websites for which there was a 90% agreement on the criteria between researchers was included in the analysis.



Instrument One

- Developed from the review of previously published literature on the topic of quality school websites.
- The instrument consists of 17 Common Components in school websites.
- Each of the websites was examined for common components based upon the article's suggestion which states an effective school based website should consist of a minimum of **ten** of the components.



Instrument Two

- Our second instrument is tool developed by two professional educators whose goal is aligned with our research. This instrument assesses website quality to determine if the website provides useful information for classroom use, or student and parent use at home.
- This instrument measure four areas: **S**timulating features, **M**eaningful contents, **O**rganization and **E**ase-of -Use



Procedure

- The 50 were identified by only a number.
- This was done by placing each of the school districts into a Microsoft Excel Spread sheet by name, socio-economic status and website URL.
- The status column was then removed and the districts were sorted by alphabetical order.
- As the researchers we then at different locations investigated the 50 websites, upon completion of the evaluations we caucused to compare our findings.



Data Analysis Policy Information

Table 1: Percentage of research population having standard policy information				
<u>Item</u>	<u>Lower Class</u>	<u>Lower Middle Class</u>	<u>Upper Middle Class</u>	<u>Upper Class</u>
Mission Statement	70%	67%	60%	70%
Rules & Policies	50%	53%	40%	50%
Internet Use Policy	20%	33%	33%	50%

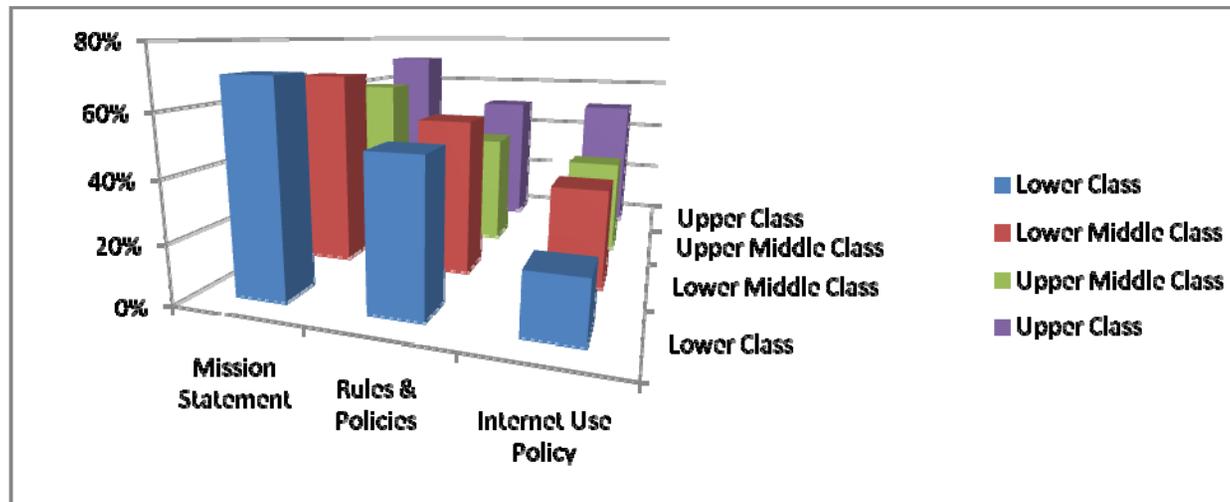


Figure 1: Comparison of socio-economic status and standard policy information



Data Analysis Curriculum

<u>Item</u>	<u>Lower Class</u>	<u>Lower Middle Class</u>	<u>Upper Middle Class</u>	<u>Upper Class</u>
Curriculum and Standards	4	5	9	7
Classroom Level Information Page	2	6	5	3

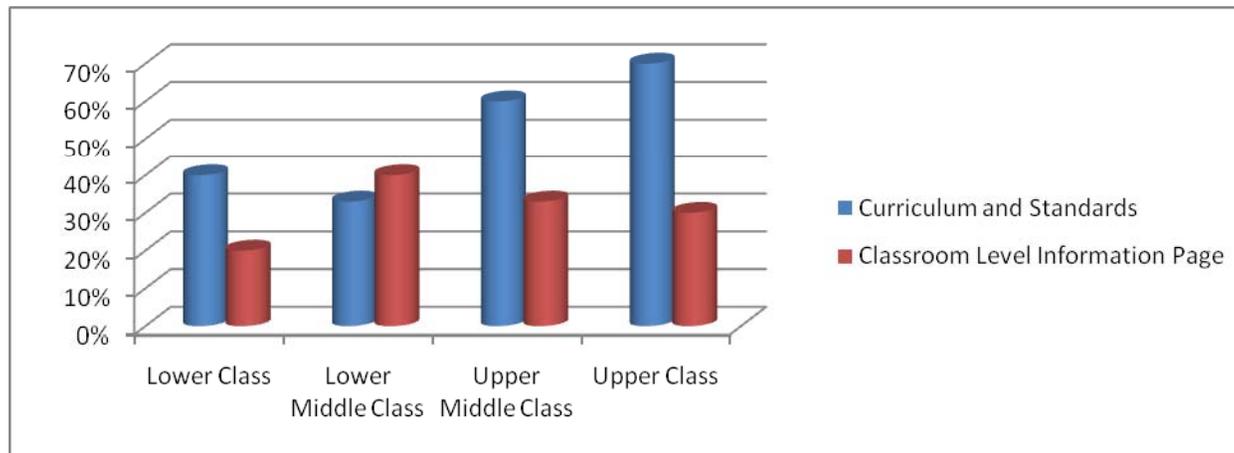


Figure 2: Percentages of schools within a SES that have curriculum and classroom information pages.



Data Analysis General Information

Table 3: General information found at school district websites

<u>Item</u>	<u>Lower Class</u>	<u>Lower Middle Class</u>	<u>Upper Middle Class</u>	<u>Upper Class</u>
Teacher Information	8	10	9	7
Grade Level Information Page	2	2	4	5
School News	8	14	14	9
Breakfast and Lunch Menus	8	13	11	7
Student Work Samples	3	6	6	1
Physical Location of the School	10	15	15	9

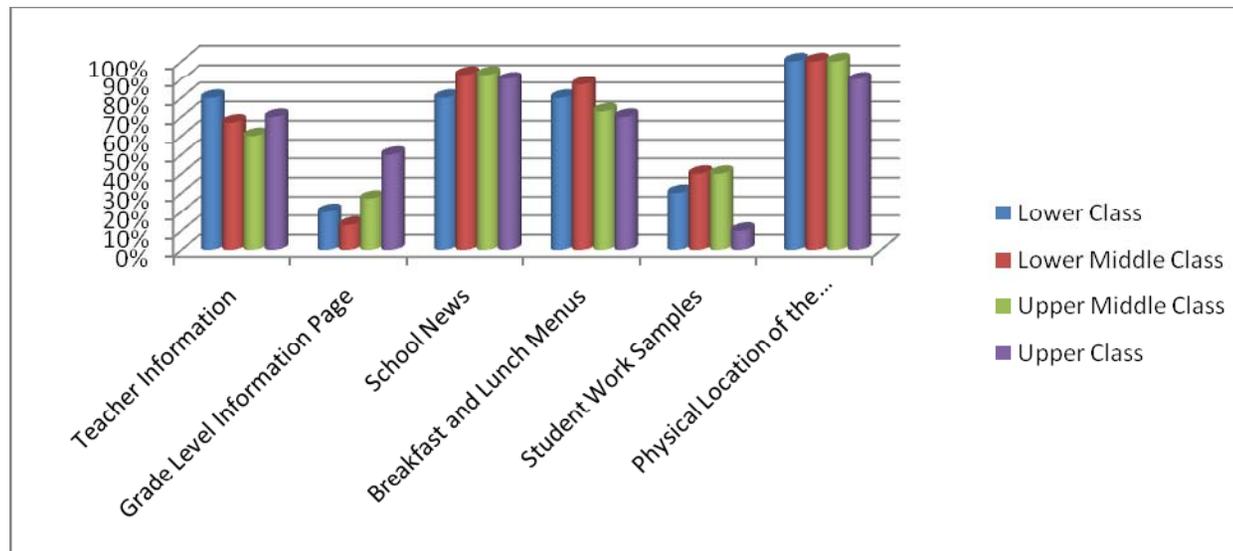


Figure 3: Percentage of schools general information found at school district websites



Data Analysis Resources

Table 4: Resources made available for users

<u>Item</u>	<u>Lower Class</u>	<u>Lower Middle Class</u>	<u>Upper Middle Class</u>	<u>Upper Class</u>
Home School Organization Info	90%	80%	87%	70%
Homework Hotline	20%	27%	27%	20%
Links for Teachers	40%	53%	67%	50%
Links for Parents	50%	73%	73%	70%
Links for Students	70%	73%	67%	50%

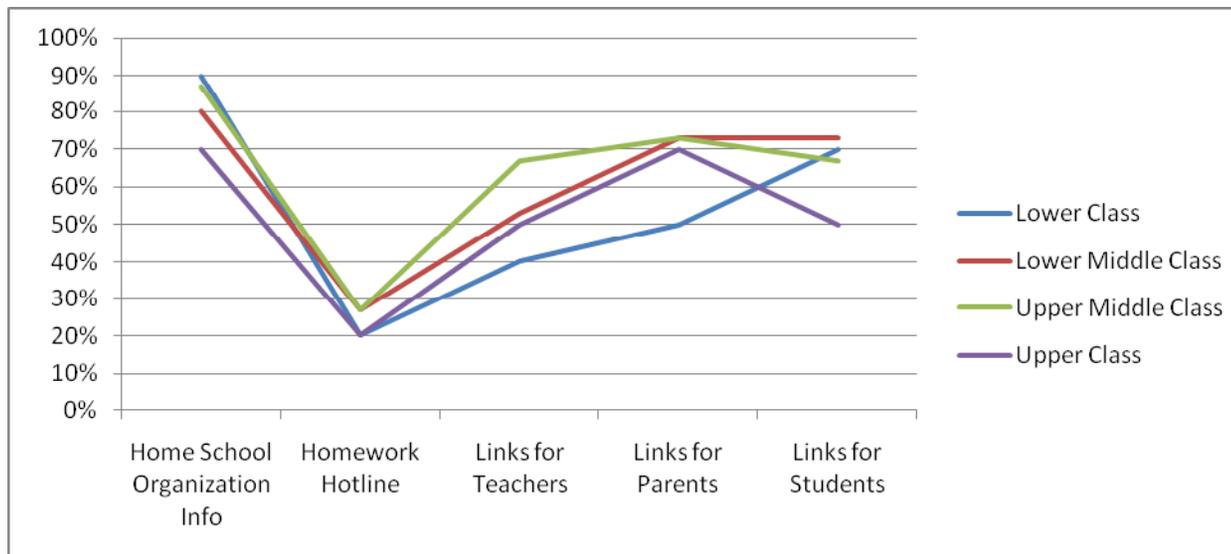


Figure 4: Percentage of resources made available for teachers, parents, and students.



Data Analysis

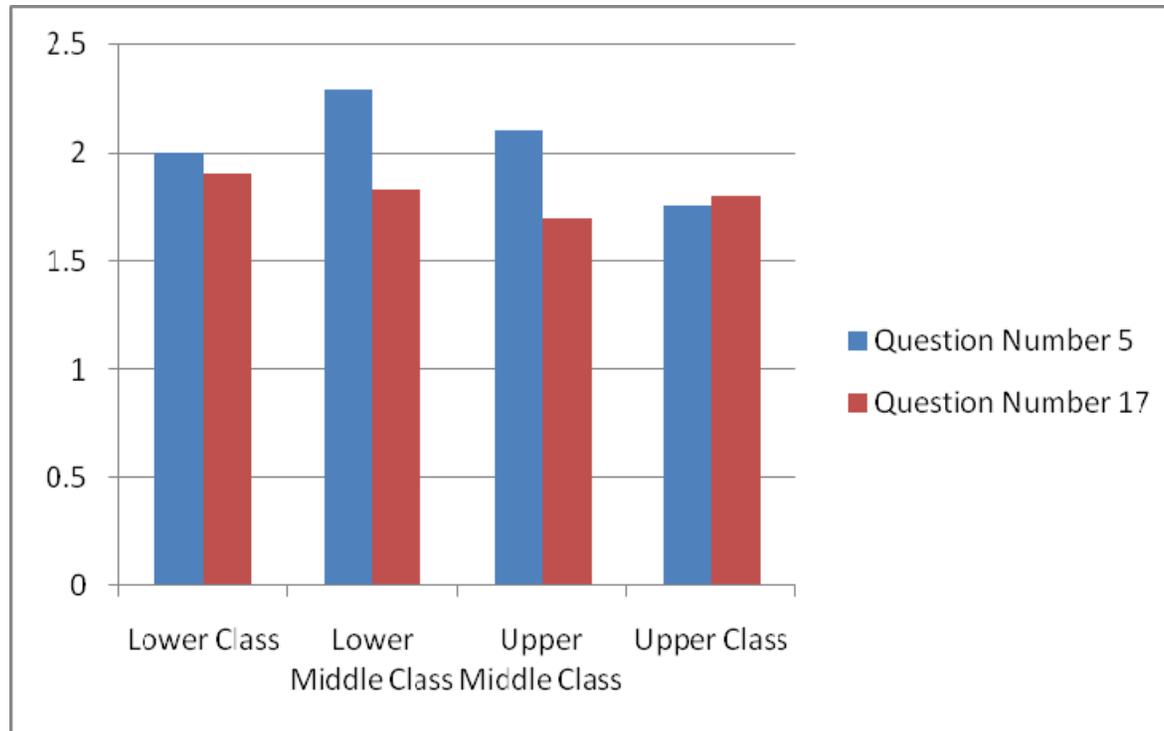


Figure 6 Average score for stimulating website aspects across the socioeconomic statuses.



Data Analysis

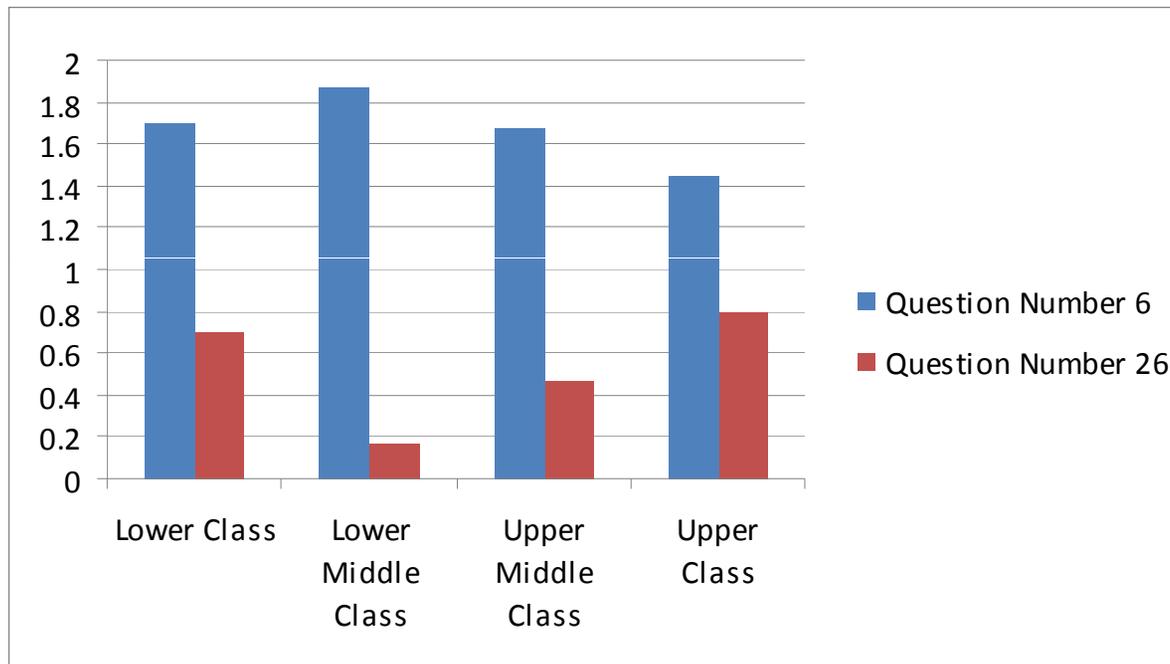


Figure 7 Average score for meaningful website aspects across the socioeconomic statuses.



Data Analysis

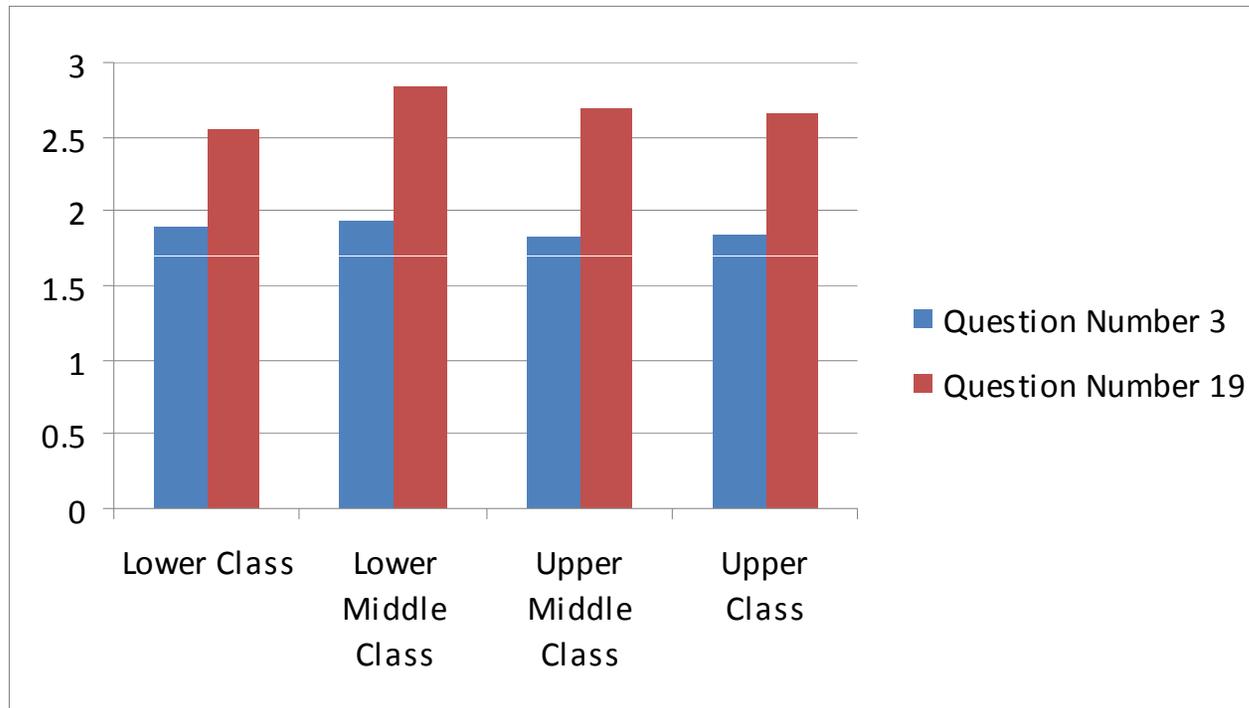


Figure 8: Average score for organizational aspects of district websites across the socioeconomic statuses.



Data Analysis

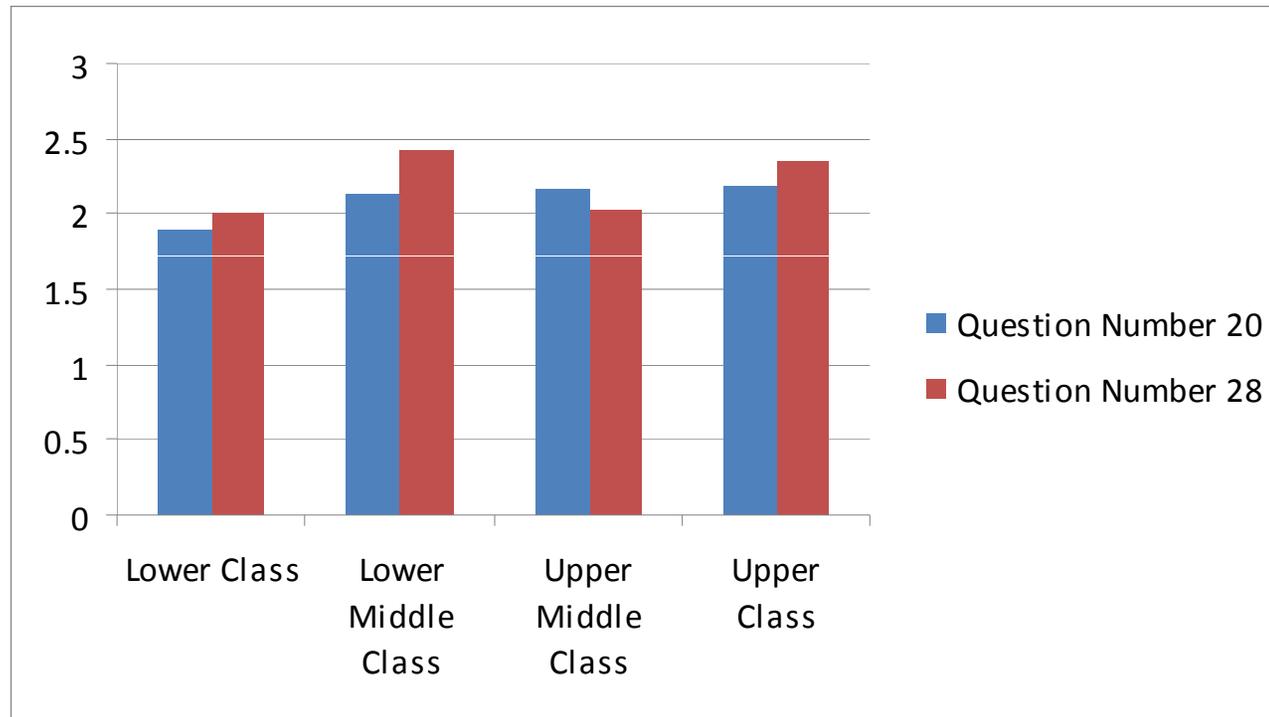


Figure 9 Ease of use average grades on questions 20 and 28 for lower class districts



Cross Summary Motivation Analysis

- Similar to the results on question 17, question 3 resulted in a majority of positive responses but only a handful of districts receive the maximum score of three points because of the failure to provide audio and visual clarification tools to describe topics.
- In table 7 is the chi square comparison of the questions 3 and 17, results are similar with the lower grades on average going the more in depth question (question 3).



Table 7

	Stimulating	Organization
	17	3
<hr/>		
School SES Level		
Lower Class	1.9	1.9
Lower Middle Class	1.83	1.93
Upper Middle Class	1.7	1.83
Upper Class	1.8	1.85

Table 7 Cross summary motivation analysis of stimulating and organization questions



Research Findings

The findings suggests the importance of attending to personal, as well as, contextual motivators of parental engagement in their children's education as researchers and educators work to understand and enhance the effectiveness of parent-school relationships (Hoover-Dempsey, Jones, Reed, and Walker, 2000).

Teachers should find ways to extend invitations to parents for participation, and to provide parents information on course work and materials.

These finding hold implications for parents, teachers, principals, and policy makers interesting in strengthening family-school partnerships and their influence on children's educational outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey, Jones, Reed, and Walker, 2000).



Conclusions

- There is a need for the creation of a consistent template for school web site development or at least an agreed upon list of common components for school district web sites.
- There is no surprise that across the socioeconomic landscape some schools of greater means provide more valuable resources than others. These resources can include many variables such as technologies, experience and staffing but never the less all school districts at this point need to have a media outlet for communication of events, school happenings and students work.



Recommendations for Future Studies

- Among the reasons for development of valuable school/classroom websites this research determined that it as a field educators need to develop meaningful websites where all uses can not only access information but also be directed to additional help and support.
- Further research should include investigation of individual school websites. Looking at the current effort at the school levels will help to identify the importance placed on the internet more so websites by school leadership as a tool in communicating with the community at larger.
- Individual school development of websites should be viewed as an opportunity for publication of student work and could be a motivating factor in student achievement.



Summary of Study

- Review of the data gathered from the instruments we used has shown that regardless of socio-economic status websites fail to provide such useful resources as homework hotlines for students, classroom level informational pages, an explanation of the district Internet Safe Usage policy and many districts fail to promote student success by displaying the student work.
- While reviewing the data we have also identified that the most common component was all but one district identified the physical location of the schools within the district.



References

Judge, S., Puckett, K. & Bell, S. M. (2006) Closing the digital divide: Update from the early childhood longitudinal study. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 100(1), 52-60.

Hoover-Dempsey, K., Jones, K.P., Reed, R., and Walker, J. (2000, April). Parents motivation for involvement in children's education: Testing a theoretical model. Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Educational research Association, New Orleans, LA. Retrieved October 9, 2007, from the ERIC database.