Parent Perspectives on Disability and Home-School Communication

By

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The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 2021
Under the Supervision of Dr. Mary Beth Leibham

The purpose of this study was to examine home-school communication. Specifically, this study examined parents' of students with disabilities perceptions of the communication method, frequency of the communication, content of communication, and overall satisfaction with school communication. Of particular interest was whether or not these perceptions varied across disability category and severity of disability. 41 parents of kindergarten through 12th grade students with disabilities completed an online survey assessing parents' perceptions of home-school communication. The results revealed that parents of students with disabilities were mostly satisfied with home-school communication, and there were no significant differences across disability category or perceived severity of disability. The limitations of this study, in addition to implications and directions for future research, are addressed.

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Thesis Advisor (Signature)   Date

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INTRODUCTION

During the last 50 years, American schools have become increasingly more accessible to and accommodating of students with disabilities. This accessibility in large part, can be attributed to parental advocacy. Parental advocacy underlies early legislation, such as PARC v. Commonwealth of PA in 1972, which in turn laid the groundwork for the Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) requirement included in the 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) legislation. Ultimately, the expansion of rights for individuals with disabilities within school settings, championed by parent advocacy, has led to the current policies set forth in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 (Jacob, Decker, & Timmerman Lugg, 2016).

In addition to the in-school accommodations that legislation such as IDEIA mandates that students with disabilities receive, parent engagement with school also proves to be important. In fact, optimal academic outcomes (e.g. achievement, post-secondary outcomes, etc.) have been associated with parent engagement (Collier, Keefe, & Hirrel, 2015). Multiple factors are related to parents' school engagement. For example, parents' perceived time and energy, feelings of self-efficacy related to their children's educational needs, and relationship with school personnel all play an important role in parents' levels of engagement with school (Benson et al., 2008; Fishman & Nickerson, 2015; McWilliam et al., 1999). While multiple legislative acts supports the provision of specialized education to students with disabilities, there is little guidance on facilitating collaboration and communication with families of students with disabilities. Further, little is known about the unique communication dynamics between parents of students with disabilities and the school (Woods, Morrison, & Palincsar, 2018). The present review of

the literature will highlight the importance of home-school collaboration, and how

communication relates to these collaborative efforts.

Benefits of Parental Collaboration & Engagement

The Concept of Engagement

A parent's level of engagement in their child's schooling varies widely (Houri,

Thayer, & Cook, 2019). For the purpose of this paper, engagement entails both home-

based and school-based activities. Home-based activities include actions such as positive

behavior supports, such as utilizing routines and praise to support student development of

a desired behavior, and educational activities, such as helping with assignments or

reading books with the child (Carlson et al., 2020; Rispoli, Hawley, & Clinton, 2018).

School-based activities include actions such as conversations with educators, attending

Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings attendance, and classroom observations

(Benson et al., 2008).

Parent Engagement and Students' School Performance

The benefits of parent engagement are well documented in the general education

student population, and include improved classroom performance, higher school

attendance, increased graduation rates, and fewer disciplinary problems (Collier et al.,

2015; Woods et al., 2018). Many studies have highlighted the importance of parent

engagement for academic success (Houri et al. 2019). For example, Kraft and Rogers

(2015) found that high school students who were in a credit recovery program and whose

parents had a higher level of engagement with school had increased rates of success in

earning course credits. In this particular study, the parents of these students received a

weekly one-sentence individualized message from the teacher to inform them of positive

progress and areas for student improvement (Kraft & Rogers, 2015; Kraft, 2016). This

shows that increased engagement with parents, even in as small of ways as brief weekly

messages, can be beneficial to students. Teachers and other school personnel have taken note of these benefits, which has led to implementation of policies and frameworks intended to increase parental engagement (Sheridan, Clarke, & Christenson, 2014).

Parental involvement in special education is not only required by law, but can be a powerful tool in improving student outcomes for students with disabilities. Shared high expectations between the parents and the teacher for the students' school performance may increase parental involvement, and specifically, may increase the frequency of communication with the school team. Further, IEPs are likely to be of higher quality (e.g. more clarity, greater detail) when there are more interactions and consultation between educators and parents (Ruble, Birdwhistell, Toland, & McGrew, 2011). Higher-quality IEPs contribute to improved outcomes for those students. The quality of the IEP is likely to be improved by further individualization goals, continued direct discussion of goals, and improved structuring of goals resulting from increased speech exchanges. With increased confidence, enhanced understanding of what is occurring at school, and meaningful opportunities to contribute as a member of the IEP team, parents can potentially have a more significant impact on student outcomes (Azad et al., 2016; Benson et al., 2008; Eskow et al., 2018; Rispoli et al., 2019; Lendrum et al., 2015).

Connection between Engagement and Postsecondary Outcomes

Failing to support home-school communication may have significant consequences for many students. Individuals with disabilities have poorer postsecondary outcomes than peers not receiving special education services (Ruble et al., 2019). Policies, such as IDEIA (2004) mandate that an IEP include plans for transitioning to postsecondary contexts (Jacob et al., 2016). In other words, there must be discussions about students' with disabilities post-secondary goals, as well as discussions about the plans to help them attain these goals and the services that are available to them after they

finish school. Ruble et al. (2019) found that more progress was made on students' IEP

goals, and improvements were made to postsecondary outcomes, when there was a

greater level of alliance between home and school. Simply put, when parents are actively

involved, higher-quality transition plans were made. This in turn contributed to

improvements in their child's IEP processes, and improved student outcomes overall.

This indicates that the efforts of schools to engage parents can have effects lasting long

past the students' time in the education system.

Association between Engagement and Relationships

    Providing parents with the opportunity to be involved in school is not enough to

get them engaged. When schools proactively encourage interaction between parents and

school personnel, parents are more likely to have an increased willingness to work

collaboratively (Arnold et al., 1994). Building collaborative relationships can have

important repercussions for student achievement and success. Establishing a sense of

trust with the school is especially important in the case of parents of students with

disabilities. Azad and Mandell (2016) indicated a potential lack of trust as a factor

contributing to less optimized home-school collaborative efforts. Specifically, they

indicated that the additional stress for parents in working with school personnel who they

are less familiar with may be enough to derail communication. The effort to build

relationships, although time intensive, is necessary to generate meaningful parent

engagement opportunities. From the engagement opportunities, the relationships are also

reinforced and strengthened. These strengthened parent-school relationships, in turn,

increase the likelihood of students' success.

    Opportunities for parents to collaborate with school personnel are an important

predictor of home-school relationships (Benson et al., 2008; Fishman & Nickerson, 2015;

McWilliam et al., 1999). Various studies, however, point to a disconnect between the

services that families are receiving and the level of involvement and collaboration they deem to be ideal (McWilliams et al., 1999; Rispoli et al., 2019). Parents of children with disabilities have rated their experience of collaboration lower than that of parents of children without disabilities. Many parents of children with disabilities express a desire to be more involved with the school team and the decision making, and also express a desire to be seen as an expert on their child (Rispoli et al., 2019). Families who are satisfied with their school involvement also perceive the progress of their child, in particular in academic areas, to be greater than those who are not satisfied (Eskow et al., 2018). Over time, schools have shifted towards a more family-focused approach when working with students who have disabilities and their families (McWilliams et al., 1999, Azad et al., 2016). The importance of this shift, and providing increased opportunities for engagement, are likely beneficial to promoting meaningful relationships between parents and school personnel.

Communication and Collaboration

The Role of Communication

Communication is an essential element for establishing collaborative relationships between parents and school personnel. However, differences exist in the way that parents communicate with teachers and other school personnel. These differences are evident in the method, purpose, and content of their communication (Azad & Mandell, 2016; Barge & Loges, 2003; Houri et al., 2019; Fonteine, Zijlstra, & Vlaskamp, 2008). Past experiences, both positive and negative, can be highly impressionable. These experiences are likely to impact subsequent communication by way of enhancing, or inhibiting, the likelihood of a parent's willingness to engage with the school. Understanding this interplay becomes a point of emphasis in fostering conducive collaboration (Esquivel & Bonner, 2008; Rispoli et al., 2018).

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Attitudes Toward Communication

One important factor in parent-school communication is parent attitudes towards schools. Schools can play a role in shaping parent attitudes towards communication and interaction with school personnel. For example, a study conducted by Arnold et al. (1994) highlighted how parent attitudes towards interaction with the school were related to events between the family and school, including communication, visiting the school, or knowledge about the school. Providing information in the form of booklets or trainings to the families without active engagement negatively influenced attitudes about communicating with the school. However, the more a school engaged parents in activities and exposure to the teacher the more positive the attitudes were towards communicating with the school. The negative relationship between attitudes of parents and sharing of information could be due to the perception of the presentation of information as being condescending (Arnold, Michael, Hosley, & Miller, 1994). Due to the mere exposure effect, or the idea that frequent exposure increases familiarity and comfort, it is likely that the more frequent the interaction between home and school, the more likely the parent is to have a positive attitude towards their children's school. Schools that invest more effort into personalized contact (e.g., phone calls, emails) and fostering active relationships between school personnel and families are likely contributing to parents' positive attitudes toward home-school collaboration. These efforts can also serve to improve parents' engagement with school. Proactive positive communication, along with dedicated attempts to involve families actively, are apt to be reciprocated with parent engagement (Carlson et al., 2020).

Communication and Problem-Solving

A history of one-sided interactions, with school personnel assuming the lead role, may prompt both school personnel and parents to assume these roles inadvertently. This

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common dynamic, in which parents do not feel empowered to initiate communication with school personnel, is not conducive to a truly collaborative relationship. Associated perceptions of the communicative roles are connected with how both parties approach collaboration (Woods et al., 2018). Teachers generally provide more suggestions and feedback when given opportunities to discuss problems with parents. These opportunities are typically monopolized by the teacher, with the focus geared toward their specific concerns rather than the parents' specific concerns (Azad et al., 2016; Ruble et al., 2011). Teachers and parents tend to share many mutual concerns for their student. The extent to which they agree on the priority of these concerns, however, differs considerably. These trends point to limited attention to these parent concerns and increases the risk of leaving them inadequately addressed (Azad & Mandell, 2016). Parents' contributions in routine problem-solving scenarios, such as IEP meetings, are important to create a more complete picture of the student and their functioning across environments (Ruble et al., 2019). Evidence suggests that measures to improve communication with parents of children with disabilities are necessary to facilitate true collaboration and effective problem-solving (Collier et al., 2015).

Specialization of Communication

The diversity across the categories of special education is noteworthy. Special education services involve individuals with both low-incidence disabilities (e.g. Autism, Intellectual Disability) and high-incidence disabilities (e.g. Learning Disability, Emotional-Behavioral Disability). The challenges students with different types of disabilities face at school vary markedly in capacity and severity. It is likely an oversight to consider one standardized practice of home-school communication as sufficient for all student and their families. It may be necessary to parse out differences across disability

category to understand how communication practices between groups may vary (Fishman & Nickerson, 2015).

Few studies have examined how the unique needs of the student relates to parents' perceptions of, and need for, communicative supports from school. Stresses associated with children who have a higher severity of need are particularly impactful on parent educational involvement in both home and school (Benson et al., 2008). This indicates that higher severity of disability could serve as a barrier for parents' school engagement. Woods et al. (2018) looked at variables associated with communication and perceptions of involved school stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and administrators. Parents who had the most frequent home-school communication were generally more satisfied with their experiences. Additionally, parents of the children with the most impairments in the school setting were likely to have high frequency of communication, although high frustration with their communication. This was especially true for students with severe emotional and behavioral difficulties (Woods et al., 2018). These findings illustrate a relationship between disability-related factors and communication needs. It is possible that schools may need to tailor their parent communication approaches and efforts, depending on the nature of the students' disabilities.

A Note on the Covid-19 Pandemic

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been felt across the world since early 2020. In the domain of education the shutdown of school put educators, students, and families in an unprecedented scenario. Any data collected during this time period cannot be separated from this context, and consequently must be interpreted with some caution. It is likely that the pandemic may have influenced both participation in, and response to, the current study.

The Current Study

Parent engagement in home-school collaboration efforts is an important component of student success. Many factors impact parent engagement. The parents' past experiences with the school personnel, the opportunities available for participation, and the parents' perceived level of respect as members of the IEP team, can be related to their satisfaction with, and participation in, home-school collaboration (Azad et al., 2016; Carlson et al., 2020; Esquivel & Bonner, 2008; Fishman & Nickerson, 2015; Houri et al., 2019; Rispoli et al., 2019). While the benefits of parent engagement are widely documented, less is known about parents' of students with disabilities perceptions and needs related to communication with school (Woods et al., 2018). Thus, this study seeks to expand the research surrounding parents' perceptions of home-school communication. Specifically, this study examined parents' satisfaction with (a) the content of home-school communication, (b) the type/method of contact between home and school, (c) the frequency of home-school communication, and (d) how these vary as a function of the students' reported qualifying disability category and perceived severity of the student's disability. It was hypothesized that parents of students with a low-incidence disabilities will report lower satisfaction across all analyzed aspects of communication, as well as lower overall satisfaction with home-school communication. It was also hypothesized that parents who perceived higher disability severity would have similarly low satisfaction ratings overall and across the aspects of communication. The final hypothesis was that parents would perceive Covid-19 as hindering their satisfaction with all aspects of communication, as well as overall satisfaction.

METHODS

Participants

The initial sample of the study included 41 parents of students in kindergarten through 12th grade who receive special education services. Students attended schools in a mid-sized Midwestern school district serving over 3,000 students. The district facilities include five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. During the 2020-2021 school year 14.4% of students were reported as having a disability. The students included in the current study qualified for special education services under one of the following categories: Emotional Behavioral Disability ($n = 3$), Specific Learning Disability ($n = 15$), Autism ($n = 6$), Intellectual Disability ($n = 4$), and multiple disability areas ($n = 11$). These students ranged in age from 5 to 18 years old and were split across genders with 29 male and 12 female. The most common time of disability identification was Birth-3 ($n = 18$). Demographic information was not specifically collected on the parents/caregivers who completed the survey.

Materials

Data was gathered via a Qualtrics online survey. The survey consisted of 26 items. Six items assessed demographic and educational information for the student, five items assessed parent perceptions of disability severity, and 15 items assessed parents' perceptions of home-school communication. Specifically, one item assessed the methods of communication utilized between home and school (e.g., phone, e-mail), six items assessed the content of communication (e.g., student's learning and behavior expectations in school, student accomplishments), four items assessed satisfaction with communication, and four items assessed the perceived impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on communication. There was an additional free response option for participants to add

details or additional feedback. Items were modified from previous measures such as the

Family Involvement Questionnaire Short-Form (Fantuzzo et al., 2013 and the *Disability*

Rating Form (Hoyle et al., 1992).

Survey items required participants to respond via a combination of multiple-

choice selections, dropdown menu selections, and 5-point Likert-type scales. On the scale

for ratings of overall satisfaction, a rating of 1 indicated the participant was "very

dissatisfied" with the home-school communication, and a rating of 5 indicated the

participant was "very satisfied." Participant ratings of satisfaction with the method,

frequency, and content of communication respectively again ranged on a scale from 1,

"very dissatisfied", to 5, "very satisfied." For the items rating frequency of which specific

content areas were discussed a five-point Likert-type scale was used. The ratings ranged

from 0, "Never discussed" to 4, "Always discussed." On scales rating the perceived

impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on satisfaction with the method, frequency, and content

of communication, a rating of 1 indicated "Not At All Impacted" while a rating of 5

indicated "Severely Impacted." Disability severity was determined by asking parents to

assess their child's difficulty with activities of daily living, social functioning,

concentration, adaption to change, and skill development and learning and ranged from 0,

"None", to 4, "Extreme." From these ratings an overall disability severity rating was

derived with a possible range of 0 to 20.

Procedure

The school district was contacted for consent to distribute information to special

education teachers. The information detailing the study was then distributed by the

special education teachers to parents of students receiving special education services via

an email with a link to access the survey. Parent participants were then able to access the

survey via any web browser. Data was collected over a period of four weeks, with one

reminder email sent out after the initial two weeks that the survey link was made available.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore parents' of students with disabilities perceptions of home-school communication.

Disability Category & Communication Satisfaction Rating

It was hypothesized that there would be significant differences in home-school communication satisfaction ratings across student disability categories. Across all parents, the mean home-school communication satisfaction rating was 4.00 ($SD = 1.09$). An ANOVA revealed no significant differences across disability category on satisfaction rating, $F(5,31) = 1.80$, $p = .179$. This means that parents rated their overall level of satisfaction with home-school communication similarly, regardless of disability category.

Additional analyses examined the methods of home-school communication and whether or not satisfaction ratings of methods of communication varied across student disability categories. Most parents ($n = 32$) reported using email to communicate with the school, with phone calls ($n = 18$), and conference/meeting ($n = 17$) being other commonly reported methods of communication. Fewer parents reported using paper note ($n = 7$), text messages ($n = 3$), and classroom apps such as Seesaw or Class Dojo ($n = 2$) to communicate with the school. Across all parents, the mean satisfaction rating with the method of communication used between home and school was 4.05 ($SD = 1.04$). An ANOVA revealed no difference across disability category on rating of satisfaction with communication method, $F(5,31) = 1.70$, $p = .158$. Overall, this indicates that the participants were highly satisfied with the respective methods of communication that they reported using with their child's case manager, and that there were no notable differences in ratings of satisfaction across student disability category.

Figure 1. Ratings of Overall Satisfaction with Home-School Communication

Figure 2. Ratings of Satisfaction with Home-School Communication Method
& Impact of Covid-19 on Home-School Communication Method
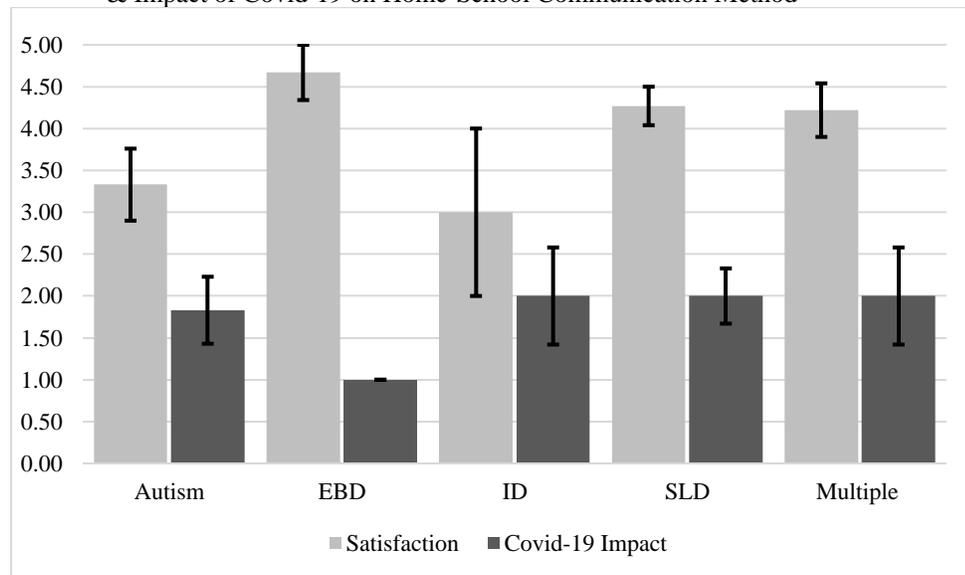
Parents' reported level of satisfaction with the frequency of communication was

3.89 (SD = 1.05). An ANOVA revealed no effect of disability category on reported

satisfaction with the frequency of communication between home and school, $F(5,30)$ =

2.23, p = .077. This indicates that parents' ratings of satisfaction with the frequency of

home-school communication did not differ across student disability category.

Parents' reported satisfaction with the content of communication was 3.95 (*SD* = 1.08). A final ANOVA revealed no difference across disability category on parents' satisfaction rating of the content of the communication between home and school, F $(5,30) = 0.64$, *p* = .672. Overall, parents' ratings of satisfaction with the content communication between home and school did not differ across student disability category.

Figure 3. Ratings of Satisfaction with Home-School Communication Frequency
& Impact of Covid-19 on Home-School Communication Frequency
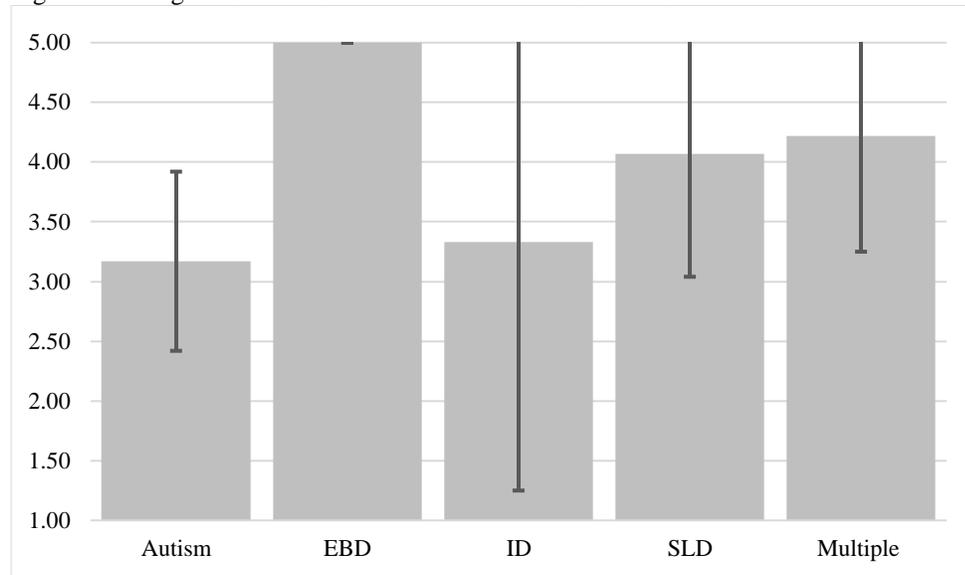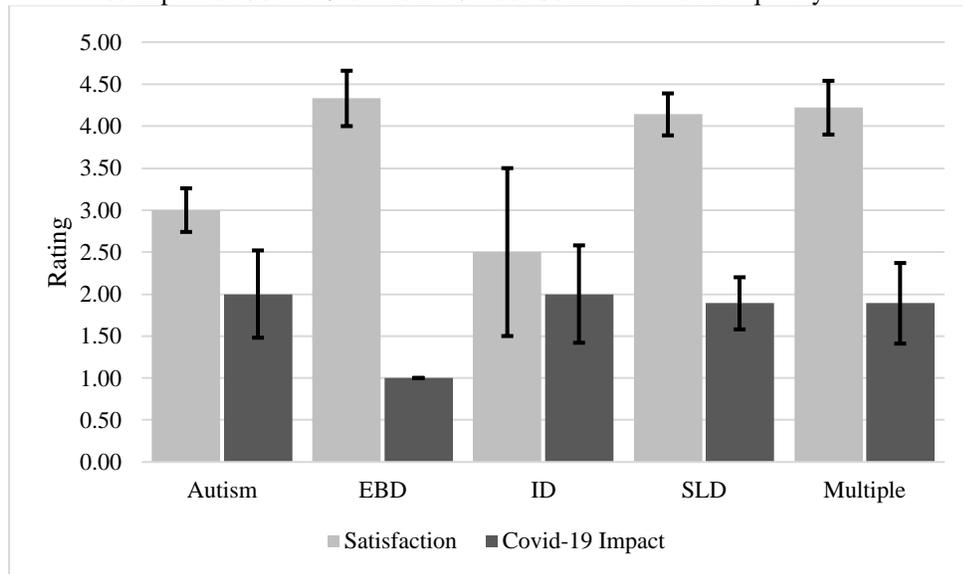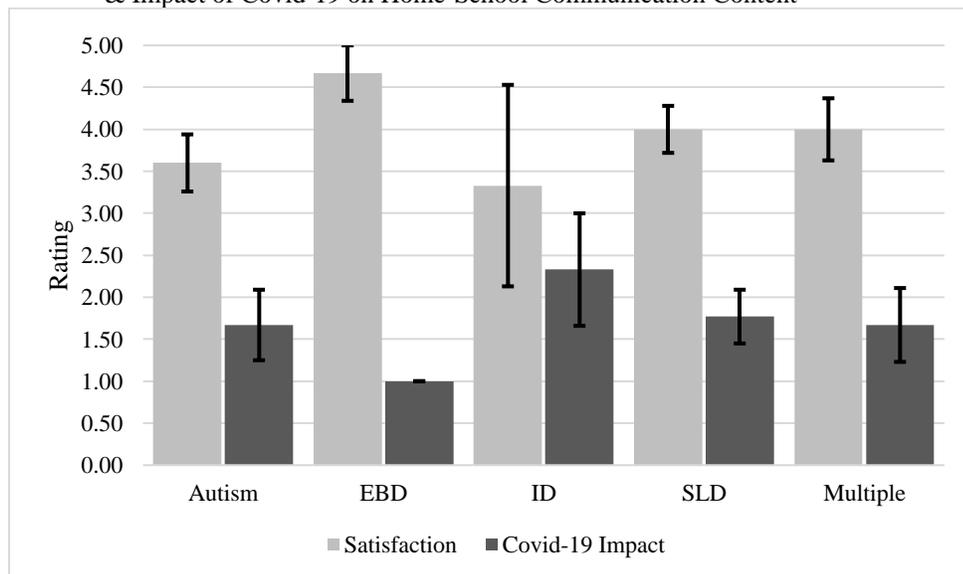

Figure 4. Ratings of Satisfaction with Home-School Communication Content
& Impact of Covid-19 on Home-School Communication Content

Disability Severity & Communication Satisfaction Rating

Within the current sample, the minimum disability severity rating of a student was 2, and the maximum rating was 17 (*M* = 7.95, *SD* = 4.15). An ANOVA revealed a significant effect of disability category on reported disability ratings, F(5,32)= 3.72, *p* = .009. Post-hoc comparisons revealed a significant difference between the SLD group and the multiple disabilities group in rating of disability severity (*p* = .010) with parents of students qualifying with SLD on average reporting lower severity of disability.

To analyze whether the rating of perceived disability severity was related to satisfaction with home-school communication, a bivariate correlational analysis was conducted. This analysis revealed no significant association between mean satisfaction ratings and mean ratings of disability severity, *r* = -.23, *p* = .274. This means that overall, despite rating the severity of the student's disability differently, parent ratings of satisfaction with home-school communication were similar.

Covid-19 & Communication Satisfaction Rating

Participants' average rating of the Covid-19 pandemic impact on their satisfaction with the method of home-communication was 1.86 (*SD* = 1.23). The average rating of Covid-19 impact on frequency of home-communication in this population was 1.81 (*SD* = 1.15). The average rating of Covid-19 impact on content of communication in this population was 1.69 (*SD* = 1.09). Simply put, participants rated the impact of Covid-19 on their satisfaction with home-school communication as minimal.

A bivariate correlational analysis revealed an association between mean overall home-school communication satisfaction rating and rating of the impact of Covid-19 on communication content between the participant and the student's case manager, *r* = -.36, *p* = .030, but no significant associations between the rating of the impact of Covid-19 and communication method, *r* = -.06, *p* = .730, or communication frequency, *r* = -.17, *p* =

.301. In all, this means that there was a moderate association between parents' ratings of overall satisfaction with home-school communication and their ratings of the impact of

Table 1. Correlations Among Communication Satisfaction Rating and Rating of the Impact of Covid-19

	Satisfaction	Method-covid	Frequency-covid	Content-covid
Method-covid	-.06	--	--	--
Frequency-covid	-.17	.72**	--	--
Content-covid	-.36*	.57**	.89**	--

*$p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

the Covid-19 pandemic on the content of home-school communication. Specifically, the higher the parents rated the perceived impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the content, the lower they tended to rate their satisfaction with home-school communication.

Another bivariate correlational analysis revealed a moderate correlation between mean disability severity rating and rating of the impact of Covid-19 on frequency of communication between the participant and the student's case manager, $r = .33$, $p = .046$. There was no significant association observed between rating of disability severity and rating of Covid-19 impact on method of communication, $r = .30$, $p = .076$, or content of communication, $r = .33$, $p = .054$. This means that there was an association between parent's ratings of student's disability severity and their ratings of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the frequency of home-school communication. Said otherwise, the

Table 2. Correlations Among Overall Disability Severity Rating and Rating of the impact of Covid-19

	Disability Severity	Method-covid	Frequency-covid	Content-covid
Method-covid	.30	--	--	--
Frequency-covid	.33*	.72**	--	--
Content-covid	.33	.57**	.89**	--

*$p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

higher the ratings of disability severity, the higher the ratings of the impact of Covid-19 on the frequency of home-school communication.

Content of Communication & Satisfaction Rating

Participants reported on the frequency that different subjects were discussed in their communication with their student's case manager. Participants reported on student specific learning and behavior ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.94$), student specific school-based expectations and routines ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.99$), student's peer relationships ($M = 1.15$, $SD = 1.14$), student specific accomplishments ($M = 1.97$, $SD = 0.99$), student specific difficulties and concerns ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.14$), and home expectations for the student ($M = 1.51$, $SD = 1.05$).

In order to better understand the relationship between the content of the communication and the rating of overall satisfaction, a bivariate correlational analysis was conducted. This analysis revealed an association between mean overall satisfaction ratings and ratings of frequency of specific content areas of communication common in discussion between parents and case managers. Significant correlations with large effect sizes included discussion of student-specific accomplishments ($r = .70$, $p < .001$), student-specific learning and behavior ($r = .59$, $p < .001$), and student-specific skills expected to be practiced at home ($r = .55$, $p < .001$). There were also positive relationships between satisfaction ratings and discussion of student's current

Table 3. Correlations Among Overall Satisfaction Rating and Content of Communication

	Satisfaction	Learning/ behavior	School expectations	Peer relationships	Student accomplishments	Student difficulties	Home expectations
Learning/ Behavior	.59**	--	--	--	--	--	--
School expectations	.48**	.64**	--	--	--	--	--
Peer relationships	.43**	.52**	.62**	--	--	--	--
Student accomplishments	.70**	.82**	.59**	.52**	--	--	--
Student difficulties	.46**	.76**	.68**	.57**	.71**	--	--
Home expectations	.55**	.69**	.66**	.66**	.83**	.63**	--

*$p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

school-based expectations and routines ($r = .48$, $p = .002$), student peer relationships ($r = .43$, $p = .008$), and student-specific difficulties and concerns ($r = .46$, $p = .004$). In all, this shows that there is a strong positive association between these content areas of home-school communication and ratings of overall satisfaction with home-school communication, meaning that the more often these areas are discussed during home-school communication, the higher the ratings of overall satisfaction with home-school communication are likely to be. While the reported frequency in which the specified content areas were discussed during home-school communication were low, the strong associations observed in the data from the current sample with overall ratings of satisfaction with home-school communication are notable.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the perceptions of parents of students with disabilities regarding home-school communication. Communication is an important mechanism for supporting students with disabilities, and facilitates opportunities for parent engagement such as consultation and joint problem solving (Azad et al., 2016).

It was hypothesized that there would be a difference observed in ratings of satisfaction across disability categories, with parents of students with low-incidence disabilities and/or higher reported severity of their disability reporting lower overall satisfaction with the communication. This aligns with findings from previous research, such as that by Benson, Karlof, and Siperstein (2008). However, neither of these initial hypotheses were supported by the results of this study. The disability category in which the student qualified for special education services was not related to the overall rating of satisfaction, meaning there were no significant differences observed across categories on satisfaction with home-school communication. Additionally, there were no significant difference observed across disability category in ratings of satisfaction with the method, frequency, or content of the home-school communication. Disability category and the severity of the disability of the student was not related to the ratings of satisfaction, nor was there any association observed between the variables. This is contrary to the findings in the study conducted by Woods et al. (2018), in which there were differences in satisfaction across categories and symptom severity. It should be noted that the average satisfaction ratings in this sample trended higher on the scale, implying that this population was generally satisfied and rated their communication with their child's case manager positively. These responses provide evidence that the current communication practices implemented within the district involved in this study are effective, and are meeting the needs of parents in a manner congruent with parent desires, regardless of the unique challenges of the students.

The final hypothesis was that a negative relationship would be observed between ratings of overall satisfaction of communication and the ratings of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the established components of communication. The responses did not indicate that there was an association between the impact of the pandemic and ratings

of overall satisfaction with home-school communication. However, there was a moderate negative relationship between overall satisfaction and the ratings of the impact of the pandemic on the content of communication. As the perceived impact of the pandemic on content of communication increased the ratings of overall satisfaction with home-school communication decreased. The partial support for this hypothesis may be important to educators when engaging in home-school communication. Particularly, it may be relevant in considering what topics are the focus of discussion when communicating with parents as we continue to navigate through the pandemic and a post-pandemic world.

The data also suggested a moderate positive association between ratings of the impact of disability severity and the pandemic's impact on frequency of communication between home and school, meaning that as the ratings of disability severity increased, the ratings of the pandemic's impact on the frequency of home-school communication also increased. This relationship may be reflective of increased outreach from case managers in response to Covid-19, in order to provide support to families through the associated challenges. Increased communication frequency may have been even more pronounced for families of students with intensive needs, and therefore perceived more by those who rated their child's disability with higher severity (Fishman & Nickerson, 2015).

Another pertinent finding from the data was the relationship observed between overall satisfaction ratings and frequency of discussion of various content, or topic areas. The positive association between satisfaction and these communication variables, particularly learning and behavioral expectations for the student, expectations for student-specific skills to be practiced in the home, and accomplishments made by the student, is something that can be capitalized on by educators. With the important role that communication has in both problem-solving and facilitating relationships, it is reasonable that a connection, such as the one observed between satisfaction ratings and the

frequency in which these topic areas were discussed, would be revealed with overall

satisfaction (Azad et al., 2016). Approaching home-school contact in a purposeful

manner in terms of the content may increase parental satisfaction. Frequent discussion of

these areas, especially student-specific accomplishments, may consequently assist in

fostering an environment that encourages parent engagement with school.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to the current study that should be noted. All of

the data was gathered from a single school district. The approaches and practices related

to special education services within this district are not going to be the standard across all

districts. This limits the ability to generalize the data to other populations.

Another concern is that the response rate to the survey was lower than anticipated.

Initially the goal was a response rate of 25% of the target population. The current sample,

however, only accounts for 8.3% of the population of students within the district who

have been identified and receive special education services. This likely limited the

representation of various disability categories reflective of the district. This significantly

restricts the generalizability of the results.

There were a number of potential factors that may have impacted participation,

despite researcher efforts to combat these. First, participation required access to an

electronic device with internet capability, as well as access to adequate internet

connection. Second, participation of the survey required a certain level of proficiency in

the English language, as it was not offered in another language. Third, there are many

barriers cited in the literature that often interfere with parent engagement in education

(Benson et al., 2008). It is likely that some of these same barriers prevented some parents

from engaging in the study. It is important to recognize when considering the data that

any unique characteristics or factors which may have made the participants more likely to

respond to the survey could also be related to their perceptions regarding home-school communication. Fourth, the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on all aspects of life may have interfered with participation. Any number of stressors experienced by the majority of the population related to the pandemic could potentially have negatively impacted participation.

Another limitation is that the demographic data collected from the participants was minimal, with only identifying the age, grade, gender, and disability category of the students. There was no specific demographic information gathered about the parent respondents. This information may have been able to provide more insight into the data and allowed us to further understand the background of the participant. Additionally, due to the fact this information was not collected, it is not possible to determine if two participants were completing ratings based on the same student, such as the potential scenario of a mother and a father completing the survey. These questions were not asked in order to maintain a level of confidentiality and with the intention of increasing the acceptability of the survey to participants.

Future Directions

The subject of home-school communication for students with disabilities warrants further study. To expand this area future studies should address the limitations of the current study. A reproduction of the current study with a larger sample size of participants would be beneficial in order to establish whether the trends observed in this sample replicate. This may also allow for the inclusion of perceptions from other disability categories that were not involved in this study. With this greater depth of information, more direction can be provided in terms of best practices for home-school communication and supporting parental engagement in education.

Future research in this area should also include ratings from parents of students in general education. This would allow for the potential to compare to see if there are reliable differences in the satisfaction ratings of different aspects of home-school communication. This may determine a need for specialization of home-school communication along with determination of eligibility for special education services.

Finally, it may be beneficial to collect parallel data from educators on their ratings of satisfaction with home-school communication. This would allow for any differences in perception of the method, frequency, and content of communication to be addressed, which may result in improve satisfaction with the communication for both parties involved.

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Appendix A

Parent Home-School Communication Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gather anonymous information about how families with students who receive special education feel about communication between the home and school. When responding please consider communication between you and your child's IEP case manager over the last six weeks.

Page
1_____

Student Information
Student gender _____ Male _____ Female
Student current grade ____
Student's current school _____

Page
2_____

Under what area(s) did your child qualify for special education services? (Select all that apply)

___ Autism
___ Emotional Behavioral Disability (EBD)
___ Hearing Impairment
___ Intellectual Disability (ID)
___ Orthopedic Impairment
___ Other Health Impairment (OHI)
___ Significant Developmental Delay (SDD)
___ Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
___ Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
___ Visual Impairment

Age when first identified? ____
Grade when first identified? ____

Page
3_____

Consider your child's current challenges in the following areas:

1. Disability in Activities of Daily Living
   Need for assistance to perform routine daily activities, independence, initiative, danger to survival without support, and the ability to complete tasks

(None)   (Mild)   (Moderate)   (Significant)   (Extreme)

2. Disability in Social Functioning

Need for assistance to have appropriate social interactions with others. Consider isolation/withdrawl and aggression and the impact of behaviors on other life pursuits.

(None)   (Mild)   (Moderate)   (Significant)   (Extreme)

3. Disability in Concentration and Task Performance
Need for assistance to perform short, simple routine tasks. Limited ability to concentrate, engage in, and complete tasks independently.

(None)   (Mild)   (Moderate)   (Significant)   (Extreme)

4. Disability in Adaption to Change
Need for assistance to accept small changes in routine or environment. Limited flexibility with change, or extreme emotional or physical response to change, that impacts other life pursuits.

(None)   (Mild)   (Moderate)   (Significant)   (Extreme)

5. Disability in Skill Development and Learning
Need for assistance and/or modifications made to academic materials compared to grade level in order to make gains in the specific academic skills. Takes longer and/or needs assistance to learn new skills.

(None)   (Mild)   (Moderate)   (Significant)   (Extreme)

Page
   4_____

Over the last six weeks, how have you communicated with your child's IEP case manager? (Check all that apply)

            ____   Telephone conversation
            ____   Email
            ____   Paper note sent home
            ____   Conference (live or virtual)
            ____   Class dojo (other app?)
            ____   Other (Explain) _____

Page
5_____

Consider your communication with your child's IEP case manager over the last six weeks and select the option that best fits the frequency of the interactions in the following statements:

1. I talk about my child's learning or behavior
        (never)   (rarely)   (sometimes)   (often)   (always)

2. I talk to my child's case manager about their daily school routine and expectations.
        (never)   (rarely)   (sometimes)   (often)   (always)

3. I talk to the case manager about how my child gets along with their classmates in school.

(never)   (rarely)   (sometimes)   (often)   (always)

4. I talk to my child's case manager about my child's accomplishments.
   (never)   (rarely)   (sometimes)   (often)   (always)

5. I talk to my child's case manager about their difficulties at school.
   (never)   (rarely)   (sometimes)   (often)   (always)

6. I talk with my child's case manager about skills they are expected to practice at home.
   (never)   (rarely)   (sometimes)   (often)   (always)

Page
6_____

Consider your communication with your child's IEP case manager over the last six weeks and select the option that best fits your opinion in the following statements:

1. How would you rate your satisfaction with the communication between you and your child's case manager in the following areas?

   Method of communication (phone call, email, etc.)
      (very dissatisfied)   (dissatisfied)   (neutral)   (satisfied)   (very satisfied)

   Frequency of communication
      (very dissatisfied)   (dissatisfied)   (neutral)   (satisfied)   (very satisfied)

   Content of communication
      (very dissatisfied)   (dissatisfied)   (neutral)   (satisfied)   (very satisfied)

2. How would you rate your <u>overall</u> satisfaction with the communication between you and your child's case manager?
      (very dissatisfied)   (dissatisfied)   (neutral)   (satisfied)   (very satisfied)

3. Has the current Covid-19 pandemic impacted your satisfaction with the communication in the following areas?

   Method of communication (phone call, email, etc.)
(not impacted)   (mild impact)   (moderate impact)   (significant impact)   (extreme impact)

   Frequency of communication
(not impacted)   (mild impact)   (moderate impact)   (significant impact)   (extreme impact)

   Content of communication

(not impacted)   (mild impact)   (moderate impact)   (significant impact)   (extreme impact)

If you wish to share any more details or feedback you may do so in the space below: