

Student Use of Communication Technologies – Parent/Guardian Survey Report

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Executive Summary

On behalf of the University of Wisconsin-Extension State Parent Education Team Technology Subcommittee, the Survey Research Center (SRC) at University of Wisconsin-River Falls collected input from parents of middle school students about use of communication and web-based technologies.

The goals of the survey were to better understand how middle school students and their parents are using communication technologies (cell phones, Facebook, etc.), what concerns they may have about these technologies, and parents' interest in programs to expand their facility with these new forms of communication. This executive summary will highlight key findings from each of these goals.

The survey was distributed at parent/teacher conferences in the Hudson, Menomonie, and River Falls school districts. A total of 137 usable responses were received. Because these were distributed at parent/teacher conferences the sample is unlikely to represent the "average" parent. However, the higher level involvement in their children's lives suggested by their attendance at the parent/teacher conference may indicate that these parents are the most likely audience for educational offerings from UW-Extension.

How Middle School Students and their Parents are Using Communication Technologies

- Approximately 80% of parents said that their middle-school kids communicate with them via cell phone or land line and text messages. Similar proportions of parents believe their kids use these technologies to communicate with friends.
- Text messaging is the most popular form of communication for these middle school students. Of those surveyed, two-thirds said their kids use some form of text message communication daily.
- Cell phones are the most common way parents communicate with their students followed by text messaging.

Concerns Parents may have About these Technologies

- The results show that time spent using the technologies, as well as the content of these technologies are both major concerns for parents.
- Safety was also a concern for a majority of respondents.

Parents' Interest in Workshops to Expand their Facility with these new Forms of Communication

- Overall, parents expressed a greater amount of interest in learning about Facebook and Twitter than any of the other communication technologies asked about in the survey.

Survey Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how middle school students and their parents are using technologies and what programs citizens of Wisconsin might need with respect to these technologies.

With consent from the University of Wisconsin-Extension Parent Education Team Technology Subcommittee members, Family Living Educators, Lori Zierl and Kristen Bruder, worked with the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls to conduct this study.

Survey Method

During the month of February 2010, staff from the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls, Lori Zierl, and Kristen Bruder, distributed surveys to parents of middle school students at parent/ teacher conferences in River Falls, Menomonie, and Hudson. 137 completed surveys were collected.

Because these were distributed at parent/teacher conferences the sample is unlikely to represent the “average” middle-school parent. However, the higher level involvement in their children’s lives suggested by their attendance at the parent/teacher conference may indicate that these parents are the most likely audience for educational offerings from UW-Extension.

The survey asked parents of middle school students how their middle school students are using communication technologies (cell phones, Facebook, etc.), what concerns they may have about these technologies, and parents’ interest in programs to expand their facility with these new forms of communication.

In addition to the numeric responses, respondents provided additional written comments that were compiled by the SRC from the surveys. **Appendix A to this report contains the complete compilation of comments.**

Appendix B contains a copy of the survey questionnaire with a quantitative summary of responses by question.

Respondent Profile

137 completed surveys were collected. Table 1 shows the results of three demographic questions asked about gender, age and education.

- A greater number of women responded to the survey than men.
- Slightly more than half were under 45 years of age and half were older than this.
- Approximately two-thirds of the sample have at least a bachelors degree.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents						
Gender	Male	Female				
	37%	63%				
Age	Under 35	36-44	45-54	55-64	65+	
	7%	49%	41%	3%	0	
Education	Less than High School	High School	Some College	2-Year College Degree	4-Year College Degree	Grad/Prof Degree
	1%	5%	14%	11%	39%	30%

We will note significant differences of opinion occur based on demographics in the various sections of the report.

Middle Schooler's Use of Communication Technology

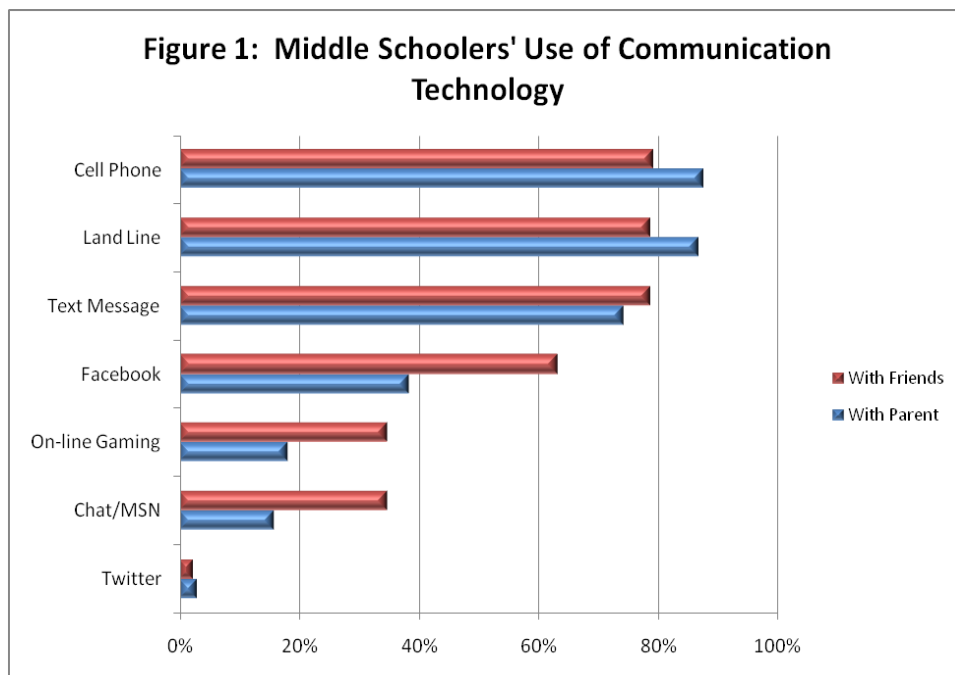
Parents were asked which communication and web-based technologies their child uses to communicate with their parents and their friends. The results show that roughly 80% of middle school students communicate with their parents via a cell phone, land line, and text messages. Parents believe that similar percentages of their middle-schoolers use these technologies to communicate with friends.

The results for communicating with friends or parents using a cell phone, land line, or text message are all similar. In contrast, how parents think their kids are using social network to communicate is quite different. More than 60% of parents said their children communicate with their friends via Facebook, but less than 40% use Facebook to communicate with their parents. Nearly 40% of students communicate with their friends using on-line gaming or MSN compared to less than 20% who communicate with their parents using these tools. Overall, less than 5% of students use Twitter to communicate with either their parents or friends.

Additional comments show that students also use e-mail, webcam, YouTube, and iPods to communicate. A full list of additional comments is provided in Appendix A.

A couple of significant demographic differences to note are:

- Twice as many men as women communicate with their child via on-line gaming.
- Parents with less education (less than 4-year college degree) were significantly more likely to use Facebook or other social network media with their middle schoolers than parents with more education (4-year degree more).

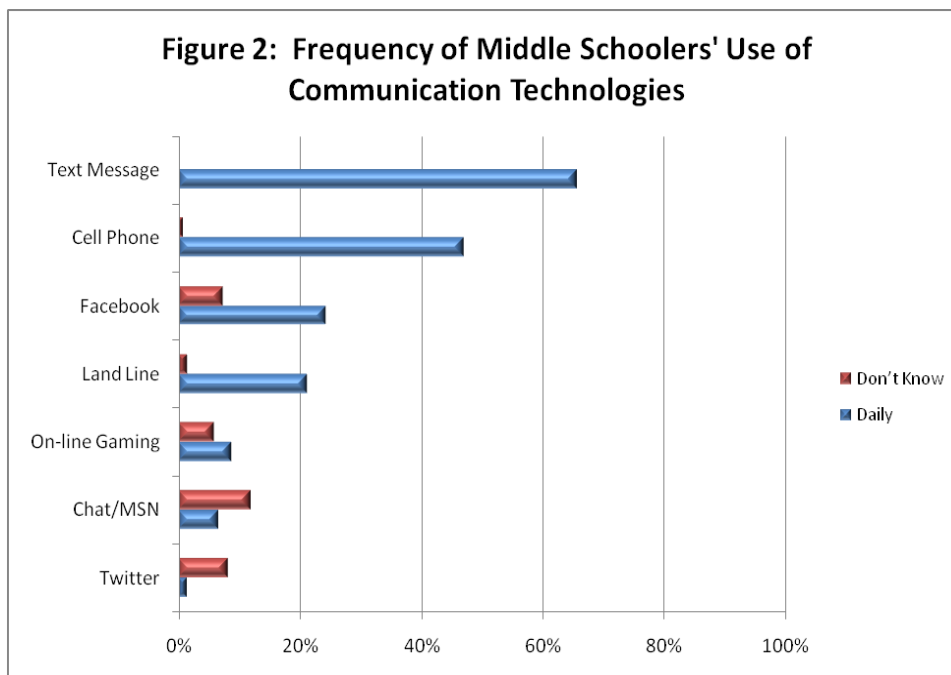


Frequency of Student's Use of Communication Technology

Parents were asked how often their child uses communication and web-based technologies. We have summarized the extremes of the response possibilities in Figure 2 – the percent who feel their child uses these technologies daily and those who don't know how often their child uses them. Complete responses to this question are available in Appendix B. The results show that text messaging is, by far, the most popular form of communication for these middle school students. Of those surveyed two-thirds, use some form of text message communication daily. In addition, nearly half use their cell phones every day, while only 20% use a landline on a daily basis. Approximately a quarter of students check their Facebook once a day, while less than 1% uses Twitter daily. Both MSN and on-line gaming occupy less than 10% of a student's daily activities.

Substantial percentages of parents were not aware of the frequency with which their middle-schoolers are using Facebook, chatting, playing on-line games, or using Twitter.

No significant demographic differences were noted for this question.

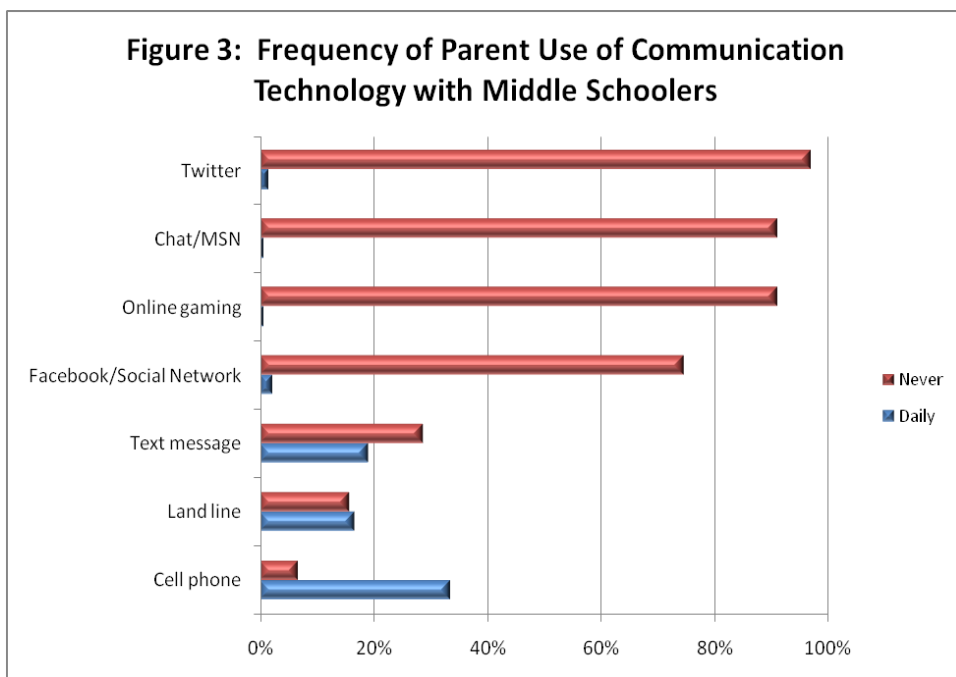


Frequency of Parent Use of Communication Technology with Students

Respondents were asked how often they communicate with their child using communication and web-based technologies. Again, the Figure 3 highlights the extremes – parents who report using these technologies daily and those who say they never use them.

- Figure 3 shows that cell phones are the most common way parents communicate with their students followed, somewhat surprisingly, by text messaging.
- Approximately a third of the parents communicate with their child via cell phone daily.
- About one in five parents use daily text messages to communicate with their children, while nearly 30% never use this communication vehicle.
- Large majorities of parents say they never communicate with their children using Twitter, chat services, on-line gaming, or social network sites.

No significant differences across demographic groups were noted for this question.

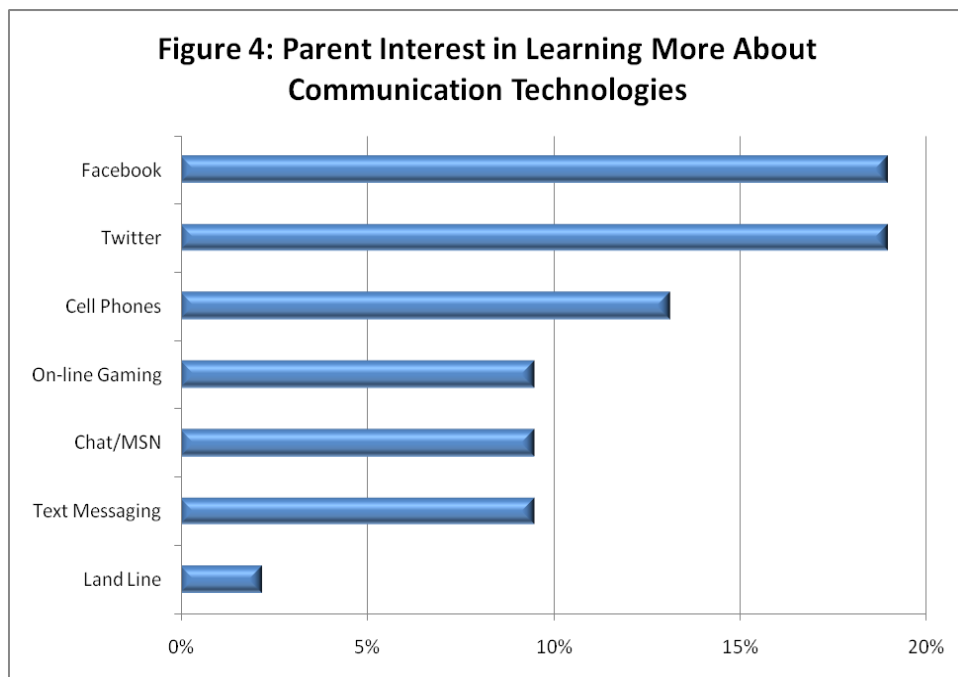


Parent Interest in Learning more about Communication Technologies

In this question, parents were asked what communication technologies they are interested in learning more about. Overall, parents expressed a greater amount of interest in learning about Facebook and Twitter than any of the other communication technologies asked about in the survey.

- Nearly 20% of parents said they are interested in learning more about Facebook and Twitter.
- Thirteen percent of parents are interested in learning more about cell phones
- Less than 10% are interested in learning more about on-line gaming, MSN, and text messaging.

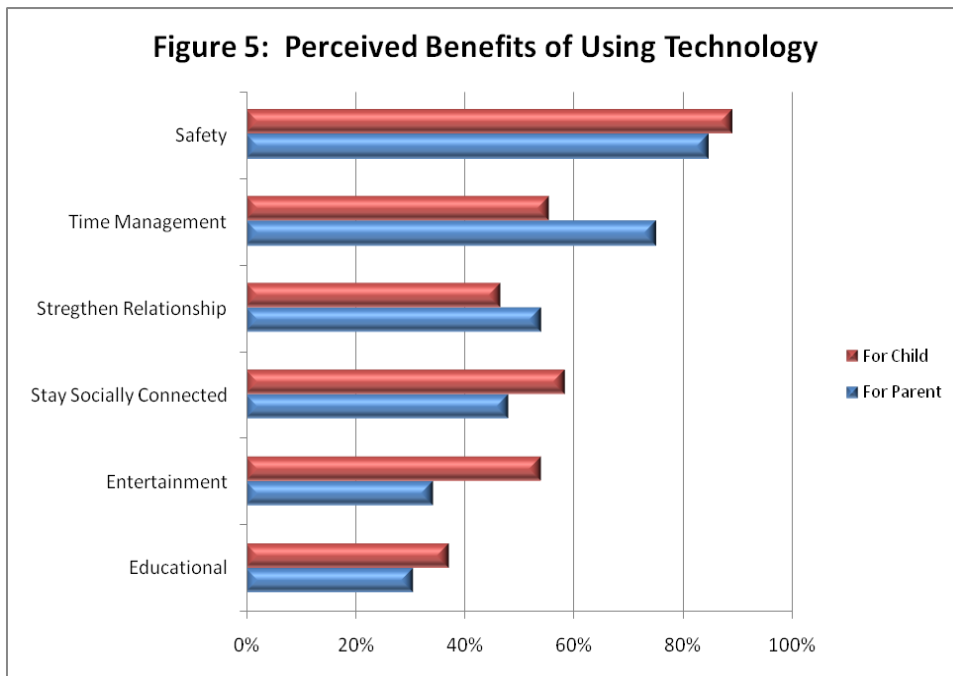
The only significant demographic difference for this question is that older parents (45 years and older) are four times as interested than younger parents (44 years and less) in leaning more about text messaging.



Perceived Benefits of Using Communication Technology

This question focused on the benefits of using the various forms of communication technology for both parents and students.

- The respondents said that safety is the main benefit for both parents and students.
- Parents believe these technologies are much more important to their children than to themselves for social connection (58% for middle schoolers versus 48% for parents) and entertainment (54% for students versus 34% for parents) were strong benefits for the student.
- Parents believe that time management was a substantially more important benefit of these technologies for themselves (75%) than for their students (55%).
- About half the parents said that these technologies help them build stronger relationships and a similar proportion said this was important to their children.
- Roughly one-third of parents said these technologies were important sources of entertainment for themselves and their students.

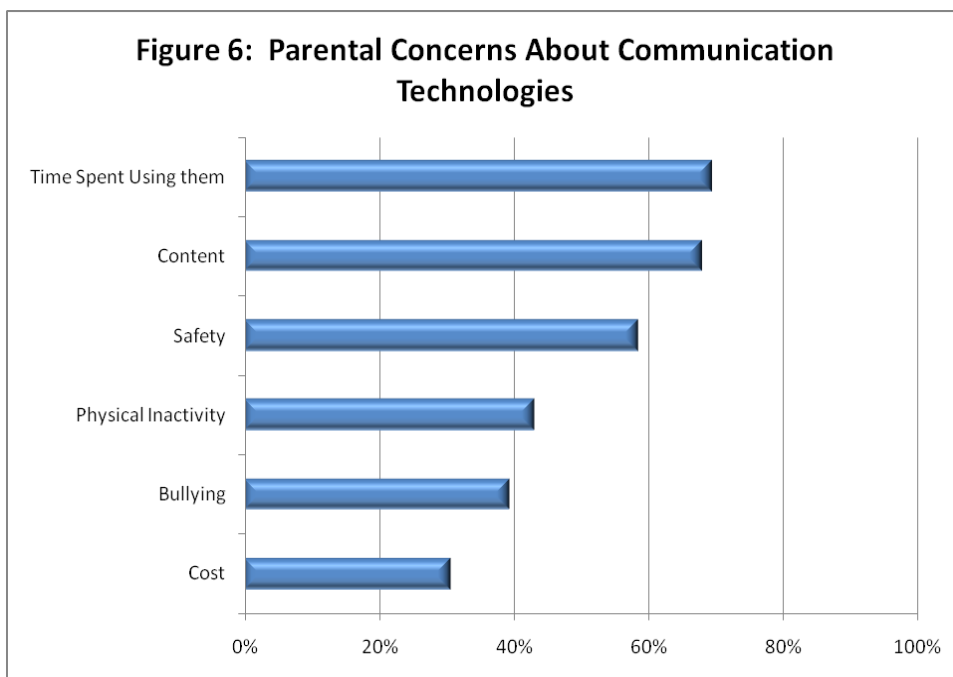


Two significant demographic differences to note are:

- Women, compared to men, are more likely to say that safety and scheduling/time management are benefits of these communication technologies for their child.
- Younger parents see safety and entertainment as greater benefits to these technologies than older parents.

Parental Concerns about Communication Technologies

In this question, respondents were asked, “Does anything about your child’s use of communication and web-based technologies concern you? If so, what?” The results show that time spent using the technologies, as well as the content of these technologies were both major concerns to nearly 70% of parents. Nearly 60% of respondents also said that safety was a concern. Perhaps surprisingly, only about 40% of parents were concerned about physical inactivity and on-line bullying. Cost was a concern for 30% of the respondents. Additional comments show that parents are also concerned about the negative impact of these technologies on their child’s social skills, interest in books, as well as interest in the outside world.



Several significant demographic differences exist for this question:

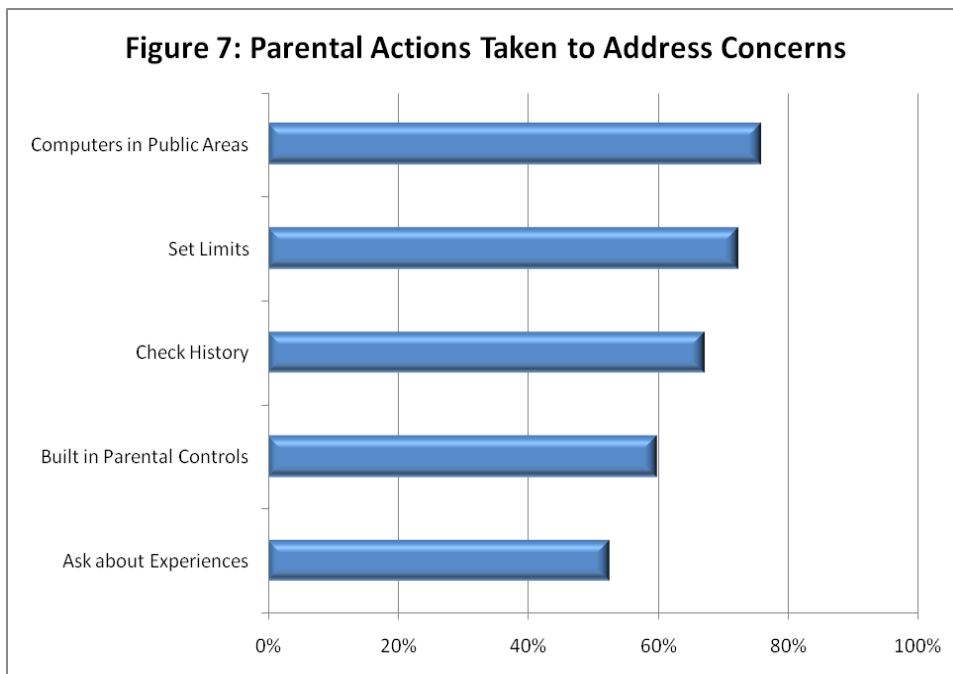
- Women are more likely than men to say that safety is a concern about their child’s use of communication and web-based technologies.
- Older parents (45 years or more) are more concerned about physical inactivity/health of their child than younger (44 years or less) parents.
- Older parents are also more concerned about the content of these technologies than younger parents.
- More educated parents (4-year degree or more) are more concerned about safety, content, and the amount of time their child uses technologies than parents with less education (less than 4-year degree).

Parental actions taken to address concerns

Respondents were asked what they have done to address concerns about using communication and web-based technologies.

- About 75% of respondents said they keep the computers in a public area, while a similar percent said they set limits on the amount of time spent using such technologies.
- Two-thirds of parents said they check the history of use.
- Sixty percent said they have built in parental controls, while nearly 55% said they ask their child about communication technology experiences.
- Comments on the survey show that parents also observe their child while using such technologies, or have their child's passwords to such accounts.
- In addition, parents discuss safe use of technology.

No significant demographic differences were noted for this question.



Conclusions

The goals of the survey were threefold:

1. To better understand how middle school students and their parents are using communication technologies (cell phones, Facebook, etc.),
2. what concerns parents' may have about these technologies,
3. and parents' interest in workshops to expand their facility with these new forms of communication.

This conclusion will summarize the key findings for each of these three goals.

How Middle School Students and their Parents are Using Communication Technologies

A majority of middle school students communicate with their parents and friends via cell phone or land line and text messages.

Parents reported that comparable proportions of their children use these same technologies (cell, landline, texting) with their friends. Nearly two-thirds of all parents said their middle-schoolers also use Facebook or similar social networking sites with their friends. A substantial majority of parents said their children text message daily.

Concerns Parents may Have About these Technologies

Time spent using technologies, the content, and safe use of these technologies are concerns for a majority of responding parents.

Parents' Interest in Programs to Expand their Facility with these new Forms of Communication

One in five respondents are interested in learning about Facebook and Twitter, while less than 15% are interested in learning about cell phones and even fewer are interested in learning about on-line gaming, chat/MSN, text messaging, and land line.

Appendix A - Student use of Communication Technologies Comments

Question 1. Does your child use the following communication and web-based technologies?

h. Other:

- e-mail (3x)
- Class work
- iPod web
- Notes
- Webcam
- YouTube

Question 2. Which of these best describe how often your child uses the following communication and web-based technologies?

h. Other:

- e-mail (4x)
- Class work
- Internet surf
- Webcam

Question 3. Which of these best describe how often you communicate with your child using the following communication and web-based technologies?

h. Other:

- e-mail (2x)
- face to face
- webcam

Question 4. What communication technologies are you interested in learning more about?

h. Other:

- None (2x)
- Tele-presence (Cisco) Video conference
- Web Development

Question 5. What benefits do you see in using these communication technologies for yourself and your children?

g. Other:

- social activism

Question 6. Does anything about your child's use of communication and web based technologies concern you? If so, what?

g. Other:

- Exchanging of pictures in the future
- Lack of interest in books and other things outside
- Lack of social skills
- Social skills and common sense

Question 7. What, if anything, have you done with your child to address concerns about using communication and web-based technologies?

f. Other:

- Discussions of history of technology, uses of technology for positive and negative means, and what are the danger signs to watch for. What to do if...(role playing)
- Do not allow
- Frequently observe while in use
- Give us passwords/full access
- Have their passwords
- We have safe usage talks frequently. We have not allowed him to join Facebook yet.

Appendix B - Quantitative Summary of Responses by Question

Student Use of Communication Technologies – Parent/Guardian Questionnaire

On behalf of UW Extension County Educators, the University of Wisconsin – River Falls Survey Research Center is collecting input from parents of middle school students about use of communication and web-based technologies. The Extension office plans to develop programs to meet the needs of citizens in western Wisconsin with respect to these technologies.

Like this: Not like this:

Fill the circle that most closely describes your perspective toward the following statements:

1. Does your child use the following communication and web-based technologies?	To communicate with <u>You</u>			To communicate with <u>Their Friends</u>		
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Yes	No	Don't know
a. Talk on cell phone/smart phones	88%	12%	0%	79%	21%	0%
b. Text message	74	25	1	79	21	0
c. Use Twitter	3	95	2	2	94	4
d. Use Face book/other social network site	38	62	0	63	34	2
e. Chat/Use MSN	16	82	2	35	60	6
f. Talk on land line (conventional phone)	87	13	1	79	21	1
g. On-line gaming	18	80	2	35	61	4
h. Other (specify):	22	50	28	15	65	21

2. Which of these best describe how often <u>your child</u> uses the following communication and web-based technologies?	Never	Once a Month or Less	Once a Week	2 – 6 Times a Week	Daily	Don't Know
	a. Talk on cell phone	6	10	10	26	47
b. Text message	18	4	2	10	66	0
c. Use Twitter	88	1	1	1	1	8
d. Use Face book/other social network site	33	6	10	20	24	7
e. Chat/Use MSN	57	7	6	11	7	12
f. Talk on land line (conventional phone)	6	9	26	36	21	1
g. On-line gaming	54	7	7	18	9	6
h. Other (specify):	48	6	9	6	3	27

3. Which of these best describe how often <u>you</u> communicate with your child using the following communication and web-based technologies?	Never	Once a Month or Less	Once a Week	2 – 6 Times a Week	Daily
a. Talk on cell phone/smart phones	7	10	19	30	33
b. Text message	29	12	17	24	19
c. Use Twitter	97	0	1	0	1
d. Use Face book/other social network site	75	10	9	4	2
e. Chat/Use MSN	91	5	1	2	1
f. Talk on land line (conventional phone)	16	6	27	35	17
g. On-line gaming	91	4	4	1	1
h. Other (specify): _____	91	3	0	0	6

4. What communication technologies are you interested in learning more about?	Mark all that Apply
a. Cell phone/smart phones	13
b. Text message	9
c. Twitter	19
d. Face book/other social network site	19
e. Chat/Use MSN	9
f. Talk on land line (conventional phone)	2
g. On-line gaming	9
h. Other (specify): _____	3

5. What benefits do you see in using these communication technologies for yourself and your children?	Mark all that Apply	
	Yourself	Your Children
a. Safety (being able to get in touch with my child)	85	89
b. Strengthen parent/child relationship	54	47
c. Scheduling/time management	75	55
d. Educational	31	37
e. Stay socially connected	48	58
f. Entertainment	34	54
g. Other (specify): _____	4	3

6. Does anything about your child's use of communication and web-based technologies concern you? If so, what?

Mark all that Apply

- a. Physical inactivity/health 43
- b. Cost 31
- c. Safety 58
- d. Amount of time spent using them 69
- e. Content 68
- f. Bullying/harassment 39
- g. Other (specify): _____ 3

7. What, if anything, have you done with your child to address concerns about using communication and web-based technologies?

Mark all that Apply

- a. Built in parental controls (included or purchased with communication and web-based technologies). 60
- b. Keep computers in public areas, such as the living room or home office. 76
- c. Check use history. 67
- d. Ask my kids if they or any of their friends have had experiences online that make them uncomfortable. 53
- e. Set limits (time frame, when, where these technologies can be used). 72
- f. Other (specify): _____ 4

Please tell us some things about you:

	Male	Female				
6. Gender:	37	63				
	Under 35	36-44	45-54	55-64	65+	
7. Age:	7	49	41	3	0	
	Less than High School	High School	Some College	2-Year College Degree	4-Yr College Degree	Grad/Prof Degree
8. Education:	1	5	14	11	39	30

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey.