In world driven and connected by social media, school curriculum is shifting to include lessons on digital citizenship, online safety and information literacy. Teachers are finding ways to use social networking sites as pedagogical tools for diverse subject areas and creative ways to connect students and content. Moreover, companies are building upon the social media model by creating internal social networking products geared for schools, students and parents. All of these extend the classroom past its physical space and its traditional timeframe. Social networking sites (SNS) become an extension of the classroom, and take educators’ professional passion to a much larger audience. The purpose of this article is to look at how schools are using open social networking sites to communicate with stakeholders, and the type of communication most used: one-way or two-way communication. The schools’ Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites showed mostly one-way communication with reminders about upcoming events, congratulatory and celebratory messages, and photographs of students and teachers. The content did not inspire much in the way of retweets, comments or shared messages. Authors offer recommendations for ways districts can encourage two-way communication to create conversations and extend the professional passion of education through SNS.

In a study of nonprofits, including educational organizations and their Facebook pages, Waters, Burnett, Lamm, and Lucas (2009) found that more one-way communication was used, as opposed to leveraging the inherent interactivity available in social networking. The attempts at “interactivity” in Facebook were simply providing an email address the audience could contact. This is still one-way communication.

Nonprofits using Twitter for stakeholder communication fell into three communication functions in a 2012 study. Almost 60 percent of the tweets delivered information, about 25 percent were categorized as community building and the remaining ones were classified as action, asking followers to do something (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). While some dialogue occurred (in the community building function), publishing information, or one-way communication, dominated. Fortune 500 companies are not faring any better in using the power of SNS for dialogic com-
munication, according to a 2014 study. Most of the companies evaluated did not use two-way symmetrical communication in social media, especially on Facebook (Lee, Gil de Zúñiga, Coleman, & Johnson, 2014).

In social networking, multi-way communication is possible. For example, on Twitter, a tweet is like a text message to a large audience where others can reply or retweet (forward the message to his or her followers). This multi-way forum allows stakeholders to communicate with each other and the organization. Stakeholders can tag information to categorize and reference ideas and content, further expanding conversation and initiating true discourse. For school districts, this means parents, volunteers, students, teachers, and community leaders are part of a large, and hopefully, dynamic dialogue. Two-way and multi-way communication provide dialogue. Briones, Kucha, Liua, and Jinb (2011) interviewed 40 American Red Cross employees for insight on the organization’s social networking. They found that two-way communication benefits the organization through faster service, more media coverage and useful feedback from stakeholders.

If the two-way model is the process, then the product is dialogue; dialogic communication focuses on interaction when a relationship exists (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Kent and Taylor offered five principles for creating dialogue through the World Wide Web: the dialogic loop, useful information, encouraging return visits, ease of the interface, and conservation of visitors. Social networking sites have made a few of these principles favorite designation by stakeholders.

**Social Networking in Education**

Schools use open social networking sites and closed internal proprietary networks like My Big Campus and Edmodo to create “Facebook-like” interfaces for students and parents. Teachers deliver content and continue class discussions outside of the traditional schoolhouse. Much of the literature looks at how instructors are incorporating open social networking components into traditional face-to-face classes with articles about increased student engagement (Bull et al., 2008; Sturgeon & Walker, 2009), social learning (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009), connections to faculty (Hanson, Drumheller, Mallard, McKee, & Schlegel, 2011), and privacy issues for both teachers and students (Lin, Hoffman, & Borengasser, 2013). Research has looked at superintendents and principals use of SNS for their organizations (Cox & McLeod, 2014a; 2014b). Findings suggested that social media offered principals and superintendents greater interaction and stronger connections with stakeholders. Principals interviewed said they saw a move from one-way communication to two-way communication, and provided “deeper, richer exchanges” (Cox & McLeod, 2014a, p. 13). They engaged stakeholders in discussions, solicited opinions, and listened to conversations not available to them through newsletters and former communication tools.

Stakeholders in education are numerous, but the student and parent are paramount. The greatest impact on a child’s learning is the extent of parental engagement in the child’s education (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Technology has transformed that three-way relationship between parents, schools and learners. School websites explaining the modern math curriculum, or direct tweets to parents showing classroom work activities, can provide vital information for parents, allowing them to start a conversation with their child about their learning that goes beyond the traditional end-of-the-day grunt. A child, in turn, can direct parents to artwork on a Facebook photo gallery, for example, with the public nature of the work providing extra motivation (Ward, 2014).

Given the opportunities and power social networking sites have to share professional passion about education and our schools, this article poses the following research questions:

R1. How are institutions in the Effective Schools Project using social networking sites for communication with stakeholders?

R2. Do schools in the Effective Schools Project employ more one-way or two-way communication through their social networking sites?

**Method**

Through three case studies, researchers examine how three districts in the Effective Schools Project are using social networking sites to share their professional passion for education. The three districts were selected to give distinctive cases, with different locations (urban vs. rural), sizes, and types of schools. One month’s worth of content (mid-November to mid-December) was analyzed for all SNSs touted on the districts’ website, and the districts’ schools
that are part of the Effective Schools Project. Researchers used an open coding (Schram, 2006) methodology, looking for themes and trends, as well as viewing the content through the lens of one-way and two-way communication. Examples of one-way communication would be sharing news releases or photos from events—“pushing” information to the stakeholders. Two-way communication would be displayed through asking questions on their SNS to gather feedback, responding to questions posed to the school, hosting real-time chats online, or seeking engagement from stakeholders.

Case 1
On its website, this independent school district in north central Texas promotes its Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Edmodo and RSS feed. An unused blog function is buried on the communication page of the district site. The district’s Facebook page showcases photos, videos and links to district news releases. About two to three posts are made each week. Sometimes, multiple posts are made in the same day. Content alerts followers to news and updates, along with posts thanking various school partners and highlighting student accolades. In one instance during the month reviewed, a stakeholder asked a question and the district promptly responded with a Facebook comment. This was one of a few instances of dialogic communication. Asking people to tag photos was another instance of engaging feedback, but it is not as engaging as the platforms will allow.

Stakeholders use the “like” function (a one-click response) more than the comment feature. One news release and photograph garnered 171 likes, from the more than 2,500 people connected to the page. One post gathered 24 comments, but that was atypical. Most received no comments and others had two to four comments. Comments were overwhelmingly positive and used ample exclamation points to show excitement. Fans of this page who are commenting are engaged supporters, on Facebook at least.

The district’s Twitter feed has the same posts as the Facebook page, with a few hashtags added. The Twitter presence has about half of the following of the Facebook page. In the past two months, only two messages were ones the district retweeted from others to its followers. The Twitter feed is a news feed primarily, operating with a one-way model of communication. Individual tweets are receiving only one or two retweets or earning a p and down, occur on this site. It is likely YouTube is used more as a storage platform to be able to share videos on other SNS.

The YouTube page for the district features a handful of videos, with one receiving more than a thousand views, but others fewer than 10 views. Very little interaction, like comments or thumbs up and down, occur on this site. It is likely YouTube is used more as a storage platform to be able to share videos on other SNS.

The district’s communication plan contains a mission statement outlining two-way communication as the goal. While this may occur in other communication methods, the one month’s worth of content analyzed in this study was mostly one-way communication. Individual campuses also used more one-way communication in their content. The high school showed some community-building type messages, congratulating sports teams, band and extracurricular activities. They were celebratory in nature. Other messages were announcements about college night and activities. Posting happens in bursts, with a flurry of activity and then a hiatus. Posts also tended to fall into a stagnant formula. Likes are moderate, with very few comments. Comments are short and positive, with a “way to go” theme.

One elementary school excelled at curating content. While still one-way communication, the Facebook posts encouraged reading programs with persuasive graphics and tips from other sources. In an example of two-way communication, one post simply asked, “Are you reading?” and received three responses. Another asked followers to “vote” and garnered 15 comments and 60 likes. Other messages issued thank you and kudos to students and teachers. This page also used the share feature in Facebook to promote the district Facebook page’s posts. Photography was a major component of nearly every post.

Other elementary schools in the district used Facebook to disseminate reminders to parents and pictures of students engaged in learning activities. One used the Facebook page as a way to digitally distribute fliers. One-way communication serves its purpose, the distribution of information to stakeholders. Social networking provides a powerful outlet for two
-way and multi-way communication that this district could better leverage for sharing professional passion about their students, teachers and other stakeholders.

Case 2
As one of the fastest growing school districts in Texas, this independent school district recognizes the need to encourage, enhance, and emphasize communication with its stakeholders. In fact, its yearly improvement plan yielded two key communication points centering on the use of technology and social media to allow for a collaborative approach to foster productive partnerships: 1) increase community engagement, awareness, and knowledge of the district’s education process, and 2) create and facilitate opportunities to enhance the home-school connection, shoring familial and educational relationships to promote student success.

To meet the goals, the district and its individual campuses use established social media as well as independent and proprietary sites to engage the community. While the end-products may be the same—increased sense of community and support, transparent and collaborative communication, and improved awareness and celebration of educational successes—the manners in which these goals are achieved vary from district to campus level.

For the district, public awareness, celebration of success, and transparency are the critical components of stakeholder engagement. Pairing commonly used social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook with internally maintained outlets such as a video archival site and superintendent-hosted podcasts, the district is able to connect its built-in vested audience of parents and community partners through technology-based platforms to carefully crafted messaging to elevate support. Using a variety of messaging vehicles allows the district to cater content delivery based on audience preference. That is, some prefer Facebook and website announcements, while others may prefer Twitter and podcasts to keep up with the latest happenings in the district.

This variation in taste is illustrated by an informal audit of the district’s social media presence. This district subscribes to two major SNS, Twitter and Facebook. Both outlets boast a fairly impressive following with more than 10,000 followers and more than 2,700 tweets, and about 8,000 likes and 600 visits, respectively. Activity for the current month revealed 65 tweets, most of which feature links to the district’s webpages for press releases. Several posts are retweeted, but mostly by district campuses rolling out announcements. The Facebook page offers similar information, indicating that the district is providing the same information just on a different channel. This is a direct reflection of the goal to utilize technology-based communication opportunities to increase the community’s knowledge of and engagement with the district’s initiatives and efforts. Nonetheless, while these efforts utilize SNS as vehicles for information, they remain one-way in the practical application of information; providing a link to a press release with little to no engagement persists as a one-sided distribution of information despite the community-based, interactive forum.

This particular district seems to have encouraged campus-level use of social media but doesn’t appear to have provided a templated use of it. That said, some of the campuses were more frequent, fluent, and successful in their adoptions than others. For the purposes of this audit, the five campuses that were evaluated each utilized Facebook and Twitter, with one exception, which added Instagram to its communication strategy. As can be expected, the campuses that updated their pages regularly attained a larger following; relationships are forged on interaction and comfort (Rimm-Kaufman, 2014). Further, those that customized the content to reflect student population and personalization garnered the greatest benefit and achieved a more successful implementation of the district’s goal to “enable families to become an integral part of the learning environment through connectivity to school learning and information resources.” Generally, the campus level social networking showcased one-way communication, some simply retweeting the district’s messages.

The bio post for the one school with an Instagram feed announced its intentions to “use social media to engage our community.” More than 450 posts have been made, primarily featuring student accolades, presentations, and learning in action. While the pictures are often cross-posted on Facebook and Twitter, the Instagram account includes a much deeper and richer representation of student life at this campus, as it goes far beyond the posed pictures by featuring examples of student classwork and exemplar learning. The pattern of engagement remains the same as
with the other social media outlets (likes with few comments).

Case 3
This school district’s motto is that education is a team effort. The ISD’s pledge is to help each student achieve his or her academic potential and stressed the importance of continuous educational improvement for students. This continuous improvement includes creating a culture of student-centered learning, which strengthens relationships with students, parents, and the community. The ISD’s student enrollment is 500. The elementary school has a Twitter account, while the high school has various Twitter accounts. These accounts can be accessed through the “parent” portal on ISD’s homepage, and the Twitter handles are labeled by student graduation years (i.e. 2016 and 2017), and by the various extracurricular activities at the high school campus.

The elementary improvement plan, which promoted continuous improvement with evaluation measures, was focused on communication with parents through the district web site, parent portal, and social media accounts. These communicative mediums need to be utilized on a monthly basis according to the plan, for parents to access school resources, news, and student information. The secondary improvement plan, which promoted continuous communication between students, parents, and stakeholders, stressed the importance of using the district web site and social media accounts to increase the attendance at both academic and community events, while decreasing the number of parent phone calls that deal with routine questions about athletic schedules and time changes. Both improvement plans, stressed the importance of educating the educator on areas of tech integration, and how to bring out supplemental activities using classroom technologies to create a user-friendly experience for both the teacher and the student.

Ten Twitter accounts were analyzed. The elementary school had 122 followers; the second most active account was the graduating Class of 2017 with 68 followers, followed by a high school science organization with 20 followers. The ISD’s Twitter accounts are laced with posting from educational agencies and gurus and retweets from other on-campus organizations. The retweets are mostly covering homework assignments and due dates, STAAR testing information, parental forums, concession work schedules at football games, and final athletic scores. Through its various Twitter accounts, the ISD is getting school-related information out to its followers; however the largest follower base is with the high school at 235, followed by the elementary school at 122, and the high school band at 123.

The majority of the postings for the 2013-14 school year, were done during the first two months of the school year. The elementary school posted 28 tweets and the high school 8 tweets from mid-November to mid-December. The high school Twitter account has the most followers; however the high school is not disseminating information at the rate of its elementary school counterpart.

All of the on-campus organizations tweeted the majority of their organization’s information on activities, deadlines, and trips during the fall semester, with only a handful of tweets during the one-month window. There is no evidence of dialogue or two-way communication. Some tweets contained vital information that stakeholders can rely on, like hazardous weather conditions and school power outages. The hazardous weather conditions were updated daily, with bus routes, late starts and cancellations. Two instances of student tragedy were mentioned and followers were asked to wear certain colors and artifacts in support of the two students and their families.

The content is mostly retweets from “following” accounts of educational agencies, pundits, educational research institutions, and through the various ISD accounts. So the original content comes in the form of school programs, internal games to promote learning, and classroom craft or science projects, showcased through videos or pictures uploaded to Twitter. The ISD displays its various school plays, outreach programs, and internal educational initiatives, to engage students and parents with hands-on learning activities. Some examples of original content are images of sticky notes filled with words that symbolized dedication and commitment on behalf of the ISD teaching staff. Another example is the an award that is given out once a week to a deserving elementary school teacher. One post for an upcoming parent forum showed with an image of modeling clay, with the caption, “parents will be using this stuff...big fun!” Through these images and videos, the follower can witness that the
campus is staying active in circulating content.

Pictures and videos were largely missing. The elementary school only uploaded two pictures during the month studied. The high school did not upload a picture or video. Similarly, the on-campus organizations as a group only showcased three pictures. The elementary school mean average for Twitter postings of videos or pictures was every five days. The Class of 2017 Twitter account uploaded a new image or video on average, every seven days. The high school band only uploaded two pictures.

The Independent School District’s Twitter accounts are lacking in consistency, original content, and two-way communication with students, parents, and the district community. The purpose of the campus improvement plans of both the elementary and secondary school are lost. There is a lack of communication involvement on the ten Twitter sites that encompass the ISD social media system. There are no replies or rebuttals of any tweets found on the ISD’s varying Twitter accounts. Only tweets are present. This is an avenue that needs to be utilized more, so that students, parents, and the community, can actively engage with educators and administrators to formulate an environment where active learning is not only happening within the confines of a classroom, but within the greater community.

Discussion

The three Effective Schools Project districts and schools studied in this piece are using social networking sites for communication with stakeholders like a modern-day newsletter—sending news, pictures and videos with little to no encouragement for stakeholder responses. The districts and campuses focused on Facebook and Twitter, with some use of YouTube and Instagram. Posting was erratic on some sites with bursts and then periods of inactivity. Photography was well used to accompany posts and illustrate campus activities.

To answer the second research question, schools in the Effective Schools Project employ more one-way communication through their social networking sites, and exhibit very few instances of two-way communication. This is consistent with finding from other studies of nonprofits (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012) and corporations (Lee, Gil de Zúñiga, Coleman, & Johnson, 2014).

To prepare for effective SNS implementation, it is vital to understand the fundamental difference between being present online versus establishing true presence (Poore, 2014). The three districts in this study have their feet in the social media pool, but it is not enough for schools to have a Twitter page or Facebook feed. That does not yield instant engagement. And, simply posting the cafeteria menu, sports schedules and cross-posting the stories already found on their district web pages is similarly ineffective. It is like taking a worksheet, scanning it in, and making it available for print out only—that is not integrating technology; it is just repackaging content. Instead, schools need to reach out to audiences through differentiated messages and platforms and encourage discussion and re-posting by featuring platform-specific content that appeals to students and parents.

Salient distinction in online presence and profile is crucial (Poore, 2014). Online presence is simply the act of being online and interacting with others socially, while one’s online profile presents a consistent and coherent professional identity to the world. True presence requires a partnership, a conversation, a community. Two-way communication requires more thought than a monologue. Two-way communication means asking stakeholders what they think, believe and feel, and being prepared to handle responses that stretch the district’s current practices. A symmetrical two-way communication model means treating stakeholders as partners, asking their feedback and valuing their opinions for a mutually beneficial relationship. Social networking makes that relationship transparent for all to see. While it might seem risky to ask parents or students what they think about a particular topic, the two-way model offers a way to build and maintain relationships.

The community’s support of and belief in the district is imperative for the establishment of productive partnerships, yet it is at the campus level that parents and students demonstrate true passion. Parents have an innate fascination in the daily activities of their children’s school. The age-old “what did you do at school today, honey?” that is asked at every dinner table cements their interest, yet has been historically defeated by the shoulder shrug or guttural “Nothing.” Proper implementation of SNS can bypass this showdown by providing families with insider access to the daily happenings of the classroom via
pictures, real-time tweets, and embedded video, which can reveal students actively learning, capturing their excitement and ah-ha moments, and celebrating their achievements and accomplishments.

Even in the smallest unit of a classroom, social networking can encourage two-way communication. Instructors seeking to harness the power of collaboration and creativity have found interactive discourse to elevate understanding and mastery of concepts. The learning environment has shifted to embrace the social constructivist theory that “learning is a collaborative, participatory process in which the creation of knowledge and meaning occurs through social interaction: we learn best in interaction or when working with others” (Poore, 2014, p.17).

Recommendations
The three cases offer a backdrop for lessons learned and recommendations. Suggestions can be implemented at the district, campus and individual classroom levels. Incorporating students into the process would provide a layer of real-world experiences for the social media natives.

1. Conduct a communication audit on your social networking presence at least annually. A communication audit simply looks at the collective messages published or produced by an organization. You will be able to look for trends and themes, key messages and shortcomings. You could even ask another ESP school to review your social media messages and you could review theirs for an outsider’s perspective.

2. Create editorial calendars or plans with content ideas. This makes posting for your stakeholders more purposeful and works toward your goals. Planning different types of messages in advance will help the content creator from going to the same well day after day, and falling into the habit of only one-way communication. Build opportunities for discussion into the plan. Students in English classes could help develop content ideas and discussion prompts to practice their writing skills. History lessons about the campus could turn into posting fodder, and visuals could come from lessons on creating graphics, photography and art.

3. Embrace two-way communication; it is the hallmark of engagement. Ask questions. Ask for feedback. Ask for a vote. Ask for support. Respond quickly when stakeholders approach the district, campus or class online. Social networking platforms are built for multi-way communication, but organizations have been slow to use them consistently in this manner. Interactivity is key.

One-way communication: We are so proud of the bowling team. Congrats!!!
Two-way communication: Our bowling team won first in the regional competition. Share your good wishes below. Extra points if you can use a bowling-related term, or a pun.

One-way communication: Today our school turns 50!
Two-way communication: Today our school turns 50!
What is your favorite NAME OF SCHOOL memory? Or, share your best school portrait.

One-way communication: Our students are learning about grammar to celebrate National Grammar Day.
Two-way communication: Our students are learning about grammar to celebrate National Grammar Day. What is your grammar pet peeve? Extra points for posting a picture of your favorite grammar fail.

One-way communication: a video message from your principal.
Two-way communication: a synchronous Twitter chat where stakeholders can tweet with your principal in real-time.

4. Market your social networking sites as platforms for two-way communication. If stakeholders know that you want feedback, or that you will respond to questions, they will be more likely to join the conversation. Post a round-up of the social media outlets for your district on the district website. Add the social media icons to your printed materials, and mention them on your on-hold messages.

5. Use social networking sites as a way to listen to stakeholders. Sometimes, you may not like what you hear, but in building and maintaining relationships, the organization should value stakeholder feedback. Hashtags are ideal for listening. Even a district without Twitter, can ask stakeholders to use hashtags for making feedback searchable.

6. Encourage teachers to utilize...
Social networking sites, as extensions of their classrooms to revolutionize homework by moving away from static, one-sided demonstration of knowledge to application of creative thought via multi-way communication. In younger classrooms or districts with limited access, this can be scaled down to include the concepts without actual technology: Facebook/Fakebook posters, table-top Twitter, Post-it Note exit tickets posted to a Twitter Wall. This “baby step” allows for introduction of digital citizenship and acclimation of social networking framework, rules, and possibilities. For more technology-advanced environments, connected classrooms can scaffold learning through Hashtag Homework, Instagram scavenger hunts/demonstrations, and Twitter Creative Writes. Incorporating social networking sites in these manners transforms the standard classroom lecture from teacher-centered education to student-driven learning. A variety of exemplar lessons and SNS integration strategies can be found (Link withheld for blind review - authors will provide a site with links.)

Social networking sites, as part of an overall communication plan, can help build relationships with stakeholders. The goal is to build a community based on effective, interactive communication. There is no “silver bullet” as far as preferred platform. To engage stakeholders, we must provide a “menu of offerings” to pick and choose from to best meet needs, styles, and accessibility. Social networking sites are channels to “develop relationships. These include engaging donors, providing teachable moments, informing the community about services, developing a broader view of the community, and getting more people involved” (Briones, et al. 2011, p. 41). Social networking can document, disseminate and dialogue the driving change from the heart that educators with professional passion exude.

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