

Teacher communication with parents consistent with racial stereotypes

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Teachers communicate with parents not just based on a student's academic performance and behaviors, but also based on parents' racial and immigrant backgrounds, finds a study by NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

"The patterns of communication we saw are consistent with stereotypes that teachers may subscribe to different racial and ethnic groups," said Hua-Yu Sebastian Cherng, assistant professor of international education at NYU Steinhardt and author of the study published in the journal *Teachers College Record*.

One of the most important ingredients for academic success is communication between [parents](#) and teachers. Prior work has established that [immigrant parents](#) and parents of color often communicate less with schools than native-born white parents. However, in most studies, the focus has been on parents contacting schools and not the reverse. It also remains unclear how schools and teachers perceive certain barriers, such as lack of English proficiency, as obstacles to communicating with parents.

Given these gaps in knowledge, this study sought to better understand patterns of communication between classroom teachers and the parents of immigrant [students](#) and students of color, and whether these patterns are influenced by characteristics of students, teachers, and parents.

Cherng analyzed a nationally representative sample of U.S. high school

sophomores from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002. The study asked teachers whether they communicated with a student's parents about several topics: a student's failure to complete homework, disruptive behavior in school, and accomplishments. To investigate whether subject matter of teachers shapes interactions between teachers and students, Cherng analyzed responses from both English and math teachers.

Even after considering teachers' own perceptions of students' academic work and behavioral issues and parents' English ability, the study finds that differences persist in terms of teachers contacting parents from different racial/ethnic and immigrant backgrounds.

Math teachers contacted a higher proportion of parents of third-generation Latino and Black students over disruptive classroom behavior than of parents of third-generation White students. For example, parents of Black students were more than twice as likely as parents of White students to be contacted by math teachers over negative behavior, reflecting stereotypes of Black and Latino students as disruptive youth.

In addition, Cherng found that both math and English teachers contacted fewer immigrant Asian American parents (parents of first- and second-generation Asian American students) regarding homework and behavioral issues. These patterns persisted even when Asian American youth were struggling.

Sharing accomplishments was the most common form of teacher-parent communication. However, teachers were less likely to contact immigrant parents and parents of color with news of accomplishments when they perceived parents not to be involved in their children's schooling.

Teachers were less likely to contact immigrant Latino and Asian parents with news of their children's accomplishments: only 30 percent of [math](#)

[teachers](#) contacted parents of first-generation Latino and second-generation Asian American students with news of accomplishments, compared to nearly half of teachers contacting parents of third-generation White parents.

"These findings support the notion that Asian American students are perceived by teachers to be 'model minorities'—the image that all Asian American students excel academically and are in less need of attention or intervention," Cherng said.

Cherng concluded that these patterns of communication align with existing racial stereotypes. He recommends that education policy be cognizant of the disparities in teacher-parent communication and suggests incorporating more diversity training in teacher preparation programs and professional development for [teachers](#) and school administrators.

Provided by New York University

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