



Teachers' Desk Reference: Practical Information for Pennsylvania's Teachers

Communicating With Parents

As a classroom teacher, you realize the importance of parents* in the role of education. They are a valuable asset to their child's educational success and to the classroom as a whole. To take advantage of what parents can bring to your classroom, you must first develop effective parent-teacher communication.

While your expertise is in education, parents are the experts on their children's likes, interests, strengths, and needs. Establish open communication with families of your students by building on that expertise.

Benefits of Parent-Teacher Communication

When parents are valued members of the team in planning, preparation and communication, it leads to positive outcomes for all, especially the student. Parent-teacher communication is a key element in student success. With this essential element in place, common goals for student achievement can be accomplished. In addition, students will witness the collaboration between their teachers and parents, emphasizing the importance of their education.

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Research on Parent Involvement

Student achievement, attendance, and graduation rates increase when parents are involved in their children's education. Research** clearly points to a strong correlation between parent involvement and student achievement. When schools implement intentional and intensive parent engagement strategies, there is a significant rise in student achievement scores.

Strategies for Communication

Engage parents by asking them questions about their child. Some examples include:

- What are your child's academic and social strengths?
- What motivates your child?
- Does your child have something to which he will respond (e.g., music, peer acknowledgement)?
- Does your child read at home? What types of material does she enjoy?

Emphasize your need for input about their child, assistance in the classroom, support for homework, activities throughout the year, and have an open-door policy on questions and answers. For instance,

* Parents refers to guardians or primary caregivers.

** See *Enhancing Parent Involvement: A Practical Guide for Pennsylvania's Schools Supporting Students With Disabilities* at www.pattan.net.

when you plan your lessons, consider how parents can contribute – either in the planning or in the implementation of the lesson. Can they provide the class with a personal experience or perspective on the topic? Perhaps a grandparent fought in a war and can share firsthand knowledge with a social studies class. Or a student's mother works in a lab and can assist in a chemistry lesson. Perhaps a parent or other family member can help you with a newsletter or your webpage to provide families with insight on your class's activities and success stories.

Set the tone for ease of communication between home and school. If it is more convenient for you to check emails at the end of the school day, communicate that to parents. Let them know the approximate time of day and the method in which you will respond to their correspondence (e.g., phone call, email). If it is an urgent matter, let parents know the best way to reach you (e.g., calling the main office). Make sure you are reaching all families in a manner that is accessible and easy for them. Some families may not have internet access, so establish communication procedures at the beginning of the school year with each family.

Elements of Communication

Elements of positive, productive, parent-teacher communication include the following:

Get off to a good start: Introduce yourself with a welcome postcard, an email, or a phone call.

Maintain consistent contact: Use tools such as newsletters, a class blog, notes home, or a home-link folder. Make sure all communications, whether written or verbal, use good grammar and demonstrate professionalism. Proofread all written communication, so you are modeling what you teach. Eliminate use of educational jargon. Communicate using clear, concise language that represents everyday conversation. Be aware of

language barriers and if interpretation is needed for your correspondence.

Build communication as an open, two-way street. When parents contact you with concerns or questions, respond as soon as possible. Be sure to have child-specific information any time you contact a parent.

Contact parents personally: Contact each child's parent at least once during every marking period. Set a precedent for calling or sending notes home about the positives. Invite parents to attend award ceremonies. Celebrate successes of both academic and social nature. Focus on the positive while you address concerns.

Provide opportunities to participate: Solicit a room parent, mystery reader, and classroom volunteers. Elementary school students welcome having their parents involved. Even if middle and secondary students act embarrassed, it sends them the message that their parents care and are still active in their education, which is appreciated.

Be flexible and creative: While some parents are eager to give of their time, others may need encouragement. Often schedules exclude families from participation in school functions. Allow for flexibility when and where meetings can take place. Offer early morning or early evening appointments. If a face-to-face meeting is not feasible, offer to have a phone conference. Meet the parents at a mutually-convenient time and place, especially since their child's success is what you are both trying to achieve.

Your job as an educator will be enriched if you keep these communication tips in mind. Utilizing parents as allies and keeping the lines of communication open will make for a richer school year and help your students achieve their potential.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Tom Wolf
Governor



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