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COMMUNICATION

Parent–Child Interaction



Parent–Child Interaction

Nothing we do is more important than encouraging interactions between parents and their children that focus on studying, reading, and responsibility. Compacts, policies, and activities do not improve children’s lives unless they result in changed behaviors. When parents interact with their children at home in ways that support their children’s learning at school, this is the most important of all *parental involvement*.

Reading School–Home Links are one way to focus parent–child interactions on reading. There are other ways. Look at Reading School–Home Links and then discuss other ways to encourage parents to spend time with children to build reading habits, study habits, and respectful, responsible behavior.

Reading School–Home Links

Reading School–Home Links are take-home activities for K–3 students to complete with the assistance of their parents or other caregivers. Each “Link” is a one-page letter to the parents which explains a key, reading-related skill the children are learning at school and provides activities to be completed at home. The teacher selects the Link that most closely fits what the child is currently learning at school. Three or more Links per week are sent home.

The national version of Reading School–Home Links, first developed by elementary school teachers and then field-tested and refined by the U.S. Department of Education, are aligned with national reading standards. Several states have also aligned the Links with their state standards. The Links are available in English and in Spanish, and are available as free downloads online:

<http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/CompactforReading/index.html>

Book Links are also included with the Reading School–Home Links. The Book Links encourage interactive reading at home. They direct the child to think about a special aspect of book reading. Every Book Link activity asks the child to record the title and author of one book the child has read during the week with the family, as well as complete an activity relating to literature. Teachers may use the Book Links to supplement the Reading School–Home Links.

Reading School–Home Links and Book Links should not replace the teacher’s usual homework. They are a perfect complement to other homework, and for best results, they should be checked by the teacher and returned to the student. They may then be placed in a student portfolio, which is provided with the materials. Reading School–Home Links provide an added dimension to regular homework in that they:

- encourage reading-related interactions between parents and children,
- reinforce reading skills students are learning at school, and
- communicate to parents what students are learning at school.

Because each teacher selects Links to coincide with what is being taught at the time, the Links keep parents informed of what children are learning at school and reinforce what children are learning at school. The “interaction,” then, is between the school’s curriculum, the child, and the parent.

Reading School–Home Links are typically first implemented at the beginning of the school year.

If your school includes K–3 classrooms, Reading School–Home Links may be for you.

Other Ways to Promote Parent–Child Interactions

Other grades can plan another way to promote parent–child interactions related to your school community’s goals. There are many ways to encourage parents to spend time with children to build reading habits, study habits, and respectful, responsible behavior. A few examples:

1. Teachers give homework assignments that require students to interview their parents.
2. Schools include parents in their shared reading projects: Parents read and discuss with their children the books that the students are reading at school. Note: The Book Links that are included with the Reading School–Home Links may provide ideas for engaging parents in discussions with their children about books.
3. Students maintain assignment notebooks that parents review and sign.
4. At the end of a school day, the teachers ask students to write a sentence or two about what they learned that day and take it home to discuss with their parents.
5. Every student in the class writes on a strip of paper a brief statement describing something good about one student. The teacher reviews the statements (just in case) and then puts the strip in a paper bag. That night, the student opens the bag with his/her parents and reads the statements. Through the school year, each student gets a turn at being the “spotlight student.”

Of course, teachers may individually promote parent–child interactions in a variety of ways. What could be planned as a “common experience” that includes parent–child interactions?

A common experience is an event shared by all teachers and students, and can include families.

Discuss how you might encourage parent–child interactions. The principal will suggest how teachers are best engaged in this activity. How will you monitor the results? How will you reach every family? Perhaps this is a challenge to take to the faculty and see what they suggest. Plan a “common experience” that includes parent–child interactions. This could include, for example, a Family Reading Night or Family Math Night. Be creative!

Use the worksheet on the next page to come up various ideas of Common Experiences that include opportunities for parent-child interactions and are linked to learning. List the theme and objectives for each event, who on the School Community Council will attend to responsibilities necessary to carry out the plan, and a timeline for completion. Don’t forget to include an evaluation, giving parents a chance to share with the Council what they liked about the event and what could be improved for the next one.

A Common Experience to Encourage Parent–Child Interaction

Theme	Objectives	Responsibilities	Timeline



Resources for Parent–Child Interaction

The following information is from *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies (p. 97).

Family Learning Activities

Even events that seem to be linked directly to learning (such as family reading nights or a science expo) could have a closer focus on achievement. A useful sequence of activities goes something like this:

- Explain what skills students are learning in class.
- Demonstrate a learning activity for parents and explain how the activity will develop those skills. Ask parents to act out the parts.
- Give materials to each family, offering advice as they use them.
- Help parents assess children’s progress on the activity and steer children to the next steps.
- Lend materials to use at home.

Henderson, Anne T., Mapp, Karen L., Johnson, Vivian, R., & Davies, Don. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family–School Partnerships*. New York, NY: The New Press.

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