

School
**COMMUNITY
NETWORK**

Just Connect[®]



EDUCATION

Parents & Learning:
A Workshop for Teachers



School Community Network

Core Beliefs

A school community rests upon mutual respect, strong relationships, shared responsibility, and focused attention to students' learning. Its core beliefs are that:

- all parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
- all teachers are inspired by professional standards and personal conviction to see that their students succeed.
- student success is bolstered when parents, teachers, and other members of the school community work in unison in their behalf.
- school leaders are the prime movers in establishing and nurturing the processes and practices necessary in intentionally strengthening the school community.

Outcome Goals for a School Community

1. Reading & Literacy. Every student, and students of all ages, will learn to read well, read often, enjoy reading, and achieve literacy through a focused alliance of family support and powerful classroom instruction.
2. Self-Directed Learning. Every student will become a self-directed learner through teaching that incorporates study skills and learning strategies, homework practices that build effective study habits, and school and family guidance that encourages self-directed learning.
3. Respect & Responsibility. Every student will develop a sense of responsibility and respect for self and others that fosters social and emotional well-being through consistent direction and support from the family and the school.
4. Community. The school will function as a community of its members – students, their families, teachers, administrators, school staff, and volunteers.

Further Resources Available

<http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/> - School Community Network website

<http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/resources/> - Parent and School Resources, including Parent-Child Activities in English and Spanish, searchable databases, and more

<http://www.indistar.org/action/Community.html> - Indicators in Action - School Community Course, 5 professional development modules with video clips of effective practices in action (Courses on Instruction and Leadership are also available)

<http://www.centeril.org/personalcompetencies/> - Personal Competencies - Supporting the teacher's ability to influence a student's learning and personal competencies (cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and social/emotional) by virtue of their personal knowledge of and interaction with the student and the student's family.

Presenter Guide

Parents & Learning

What Can Educators Do?

2 ½-Hour Workshop for Teachers

This research-based workshop for teachers discusses the most significant variables that affect learning and focuses on one of them – the home environment. *Parents & Learning* covers the “curriculum of the home,” the parent-child interactions and patterns of family life that influence children’s school learning. *Parents & Learning* highlights the role of the teacher in encouraging these positive home practices that contribute to school success.

Please note that “parent” (wherever used throughout) includes any family member or guardian acting in the parental role for a student.

Workshop Objectives

1. Enhance teacher effectiveness in preparing parents to address the curriculum of the home.
2. Examine ways to connect schools and families to ensure student success.
3. Develop next steps for each teacher for connecting with parents in a way that builds the “curriculum of the home” and facilitates communication with the teacher and the student.

Materials Needed for the Workshop

Presentation Materials

- ◆ PowerPoint for the workshop
- ◆ Pens
- ◆ Markers
- ◆ Chart Paper
- ◆ Easel
- ◆ Masking Tape
- ◆ Components for Butterflies if this activity is used (see Presenter’s Guide page 13 for Butterfly Activity)

Participant Materials

- ◆ *Parents & Learning* Participant Materials (Copy for each participant)
- ◆ Sign-in Sheet
- ◆ Evaluation form for each participant

Parents & Learning**Workshop Agenda**

- A. Sign-In
- B. Welcome & Introductions
- C. Warm-Up
- D. Workshop Objectives
- E. Research and Background – Small Group Review
- F. Successes and Obstacles – Whole Group Discussion
- G. Curriculum of the School – Charting Activity
- H. Curriculum of the Home – Charting Activity

BREAK

- I. Curriculum of the Home – Identifying Strategies
- J. Parent Involvement – Discussion
- K. School-Home Communication – Discussion
- L. Next Steps: Communicating with Parents
- M. Review Workshop Objectives
- N. Wrap-Up and Evaluations

Parents & Learning
Workshop Sign-in Sheet

Date: _____ School: _____

Name	Position

Parents & Learning Workshop Participant Evaluation

Date: _____ School: _____

A. Please circle a number to rate each feature of the workshop:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Friendliness of the presenters(s)	1	2	3	4
Knowledge of the presenters(s)	1	2	3	4
Clarity of the presentation	1	2	3	4
Organization of the workshop	1	2	3	4
Usefulness of the materials	1	2	3	4
Content-what you learned	1	2	3	4

B. What did you find most helpful about the workshop?

C. What suggestions would you recommend to improve the workshop?

Thank you for participating in the workshop and completing the evaluation!

Presenter's Guide

A. Sign-In

Be sure all the participants sign-in so you have a record of who attended.

B. Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)

The principal may welcome the participants and introduce the presenter. The principal (or the presenter) may also introduce the topic by saying: "In a nutshell, this workshop will review the research on the aspects of a home environment that most influence the child's learning in school and provide practical suggestions for how teachers can help parents provide that environment."

Please note to participants that "parent" (wherever used throughout) includes any family member or guardian acting in the parental role for a student.

C. Warm-Up Activity (5 minutes)

The presenter will plan a warm-up activity that takes about 5 minutes.

D. Workshop Objectives (1 minute)

1. Enhance teacher effectiveness in preparing parents to address the curriculum of the home.
2. Examine ways to connect schools and families to ensure student success.
3. Develop next steps for each teacher for connecting with parents in a way that builds the "curriculum of the home" and facilitates communication with the teacher and the student.

E. Research and Background (16-24 minutes plus 3 minutes to introduce the activity and organize the groups)

In this activity, teachers, in groups, review the Research on Parents and Learning section in the participant materials. There are 10 topics covered in this section. Depending upon the number of workshop participants, divide them into 5 or 10 groups of 2 to 6 teachers each. If you have 5 groups, assign two topics to each group. If you have 10 groups, assign one topic to each group.

Give each group 3 index cards for each topic they are covering and a pen or marker.

Topics

- ◆ The curriculum of the home
- ◆ The parent/child relationship
- ◆ The routine of family life
- ◆ Family expectations and supervision
- ◆ Homework
- ◆ School/home communication
- ◆ Parental involvement
- ◆ Parent education
- ◆ Family/school relationships
- ◆ Families and communities

Instructions to Groups: Read the information on your topic. Discuss the topic. Arrive at three points for each topic that the group considers most helpful to teachers in working with parents. In 6 minutes [if each group has one topic; or 12 minutes if each group has two topics] we will ask you to report out your points for each topic. We will allow one minute for each topic the group reports out.

REPORT OUT: Ask each group to report to the group as a whole on its three points for each topic reviewed. Keep the reports short and punchy and remind them of the 1 minute per topic. Applaud after each report.

F. Successes & Obstacles (20 minutes)

You will need 2 or more sheets for easel paper, some markers, and tape for this activity. It is important that this activity is used to focus participants, not as a vehicle for educators to vent frustration and deal with barriers.

SUCCESES: Ask participants to give examples of the most successful encounters they have had when attempting to engage parents. Discuss this as they bring it up and summarize what made it successful while writing that down on the easel paper.

Hang the easel paper somewhere in the room for later.

After participants have supplied the list of successes for you to post move on to obstacles.

OBSTACLES: Have the participants share the biggest obstacles that they have encountered when attempting to engage parents. You should summarize what they say and write the summary on another piece of easel paper as they say it.

Hang the easel paper somewhere in the room for later.

End this portion by stating that this workshop will share some strategies educators can use to assist and encourage parents to be involved in their child's education. The workshop will examine the curriculum of the home and effective tools for assisting parents – all with a focus on why all this is important for a child to be successful.

The end result of this activity is: The establishment of the baseline for the presenter as to what teachers view and have encountered as obstacles to effectively working with parents and to also acknowledge their successes in the same area.

For the participants, it is a focusing activity that brings current, relevant situations to the forefront to get them engaged in the topic at hand. Again, this will be referred to at the end of the workshop to see what strategies shared address obstacles listed and even possibly what strategies can be used to build on teacher success.

G. Curriculum of the School – Charting Activity (5 minutes)

Discuss and summarize the participants' comments on one sheet of easel paper. Hang easel paper somewhere in room.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the "curriculum of the school" and where do you find it?
2. Who determines and manages the "curriculum of the school"?

H. Curriculum of the Home – Charting Activity (5 minutes)

Discuss and summarize the participants' comments on one sheet of easel paper. Hang easel paper somewhere in room.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the "curriculum of the home" and where do you find it?
2. Who determines and manages the "curriculum of the home"?

NOTE: Help educators see the challenge we face when trying to link the Curriculum of the School and the Curriculum of the Home for the benefit of the student. Difficult, yet doable!

BREAK (10-15 minutes)**I. Curriculum of the Home – Identifying Strategies (30 minutes)**

Note: for an alternate to the activity below, see The Butterfly activity explained on the next page.

Research tells us that identifiable patterns of family life contribute to a child's ability to learn in school. To the extent that educators can help parents provide this "curriculum of the home," they can improve their students' prospects for success in school.

Quickly review the Curriculum of the Home topic in the Research on Parents and Learning section in the participant materials.

Then focus on one item: "Daily conversation about everyday events."

Ask the group the following questions and discuss.

1. Why would daily parent-child conversations be important to a child's school success?
2. Why is it hard for parents?
3. What can you do to help parents understand the importance of genuine, daily conversation with each child, and how can you encourage them to provide it?
4. What can you do for the child whose parents ultimately will not provide this kind of interaction?

Now divide teachers into groups again. The same groups as before will work.

Ask the groups to each select two items from the Curriculum of the Home list. Then each group will answer these three questions among themselves:

1. Why would this aspect of the "curriculum of the home" be important to a child's school success?
2. Why is it hard for parents?
3. What can you do to help parents understand the importance of this item and to practice it?

Explain that after 10 minutes, each group will report their answers for one of their items to the whole group.

Allow 10 minutes for discussion. Then quickly report out. Applaud after each report.

Presenter's Instructions for the Butterfly Activity

An Alternative Activity for Curriculum of the Home—Identifying Strategies

The Butterfly

(This activity can be used in the “Curriculum of the Home – Identifying Strategies” portion of Parents and Learning in lieu of the activity above.)

- ◆ Prepare colored shapes (6 tear drop shapes that will make up the wings of the butterfly) in advance for this activity using card stock, poster board, or other appropriate material.
- ◆ Each small group will address ONE of the following elements from the Curriculum of the Home, answering the question “What can we do?” regarding their assigned element. The three elements are:
 1. To help improve the Parent/Child Relationship
 2. To help improve the Routine of Family Life
 3. To help assess Family Expectations/Supervision
- ◆ Appoint a group leader to write their suggestions on their “wing” sections.
- ◆ Position the wing pieces on a flipchart with double sided tape or other adhesive as each group reports their suggestions.
- ◆ When all wing sections are positioned on the board, position the oval body section on the board to complete the butterfly. Add the antennae and other pieces (head and body) to complete the visual.

J. Parent Involvement – Discussion (10 minutes)

In groups, develop a definition of “parental involvement” (or “family engagement”). Share.

Review the topic Parent Involvement in the Research on Parents and Learning section of the participant materials. Distinguish between the curriculum of the home and a parent’s involvement with the school. Discuss which involvements with the school are essential to a child’s school success and which are optional depending upon the parent’s interests.

DISCUSS: How can activities that bring parents to the school be used effectively to promote the curriculum of the home?

K. School/Home Communication – Discussion (15 minutes)

ASK THE GROUP: How does the school, and how do you as teachers, communicate with parents?

Write the responses in a list on the easel paper.

Once you have a list of 8 or 10 items, ask: Which of these methods of communication would you classify as “providing information” and which as “two-way communication”?

Review the items in the Communication section of the Research on Parents and Learning. Note that each can be two-way communication.

- ◆ Parent-Teacher-Student Conferences
- ◆ Report Cards
- ◆ School Newsletter
- ◆ Happy-Grams or Good News Notes

- ◆ Open Door Parent-Teacher Conferences
- ◆ Parent Bulletin Boards
- ◆ Home Links from the Classroom
- ◆ Assignment Notebooks

The end result of this activity is: The goal of this discussion is for the participants to realize that there is a difference between informing parents and communicating with them. Actively communicating with parents will keep that home/school relationship alive and growing and, as a result, positively impact student achievement.

L. Next Steps: Communicating with Parents (15 minutes)

Now we are going to take some of the information just discussed and use it to arrive at each teacher's next steps.

Briefly review the Communicating with Parents section in the Participant Materials. Note that there are suggestions for parents and suggestions for teachers.

Now ask each teacher to complete the Next Steps: Communicating with Parents form. Allow 5 to 10 minutes. Then ask teachers to share some of their plans.

M. Revisit the Objectives for the Workshop (2 minutes)

Take another look at the objectives and the obstacles listed at the onset of the workshop. Ask the participants if the objectives have been met and if they are walking away with some ideas, materials, and resources to address the obstacles they listed.

N. Wrap-Up and Evaluation

Make summary remarks.

Hand out the evaluations. Thank the group.

Smile, you are done.



Participant Materials

Parents & Learning

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Research on Parents and Learning

by Sam Redding, *Academic Development Institute*

NOTE: This reprinted booklet was published in 2000. However, the SCN's Wise Ways® briefs include more recent research confirming each of the findings reported below. See www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org

1. THE CURRICULUM OF THE HOME

Identifiable patterns of family life contribute to a child's ability to learn in school.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research on the curriculum of the home isolates specific patterns of family life that correspond with a child's success in academic learning. Specifically, studies have positively linked certain family practices with a child's learning. These family practices are listed here under three headings that will each be elucidated in later sections of this booklet.

The Parent/Child Relationship

- Daily conversation about everyday events;
- Expressions of affection;
- Family discussion of books, newspapers, magazines, and television programs;
- Family visits to libraries, museums, zoos, historical sites, cultural activities; and
- Encouragement to try new words, expand vocabulary.

Routine of Family Life

- Formal study time at home;
- A daily routine that includes time to eat, sleep, play, work, study, and read;
- A quiet place to study and read; and
- Family interest in hobbies, games, activities of educational value.

Family Expectations and Supervision

- Priority given to schoolwork and reading over screen time and recreation;
- Expectation of punctuality;
- Parental expectation that children do their best;
- Concern for correct and effective use of language;
- Parental monitoring of children's peer group;
- Monitoring and joint analysis of screen time/content; and
- Parental knowledge of child's progress in school and personal growth.

APPLICATION

When a child comes to school prepared by attitude, habit, and skill to take the fullest advantage of the teacher's instruction, the teacher's own effectiveness is enhanced. Because we know that children learn best when their home environment includes the patterns of family life itemized above, it becomes the school's task to assist parents in providing a positive curriculum of the home. Encouragingly, the family practices included in the curriculum of the home are possible in nearly every home, regardless of the parents' level of education or socioeconomic status.

REFERENCES

Applebee, Langer & Mullis (1989); Bloom (1964, 1981); Davé (1963); Dolan (1981); Graue, Weinstein & Walberg (1983); Keeves (1972); Marjoribanks (1979); Walberg (1984); Wang, Haertel & Walberg (1993); Wolf (1964).

2. THE PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Children benefit from a parent/child relationship that is verbally rich and emotionally supportive.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Language development begins at birth and centers on the child's interactions with his or her parents. Several parent/child interactions are important in preparing the child to learn in school: talking to the infant, listening attentively to the child, reading to children and listening to them read, talking about what the parent and the child are reading, storytelling, daily conversation, and letter writing. It is difficult to separate verbal interactions from the emotional and affective bonds that accompany them. For that reason, the parents' expressions of affection are included with verbal activities as essential to the parent/child relationship. Also important is a constant demonstration by parents that learning is a natural part of life – joyful in its own right, part of the family experience, and especially exhilarating when encountered through discovery at such places as museums, zoos, and historical sites.

APPLICATION

All families talk about everyday events, don't they? Perhaps, but there is great variation in the quality and quantity of that interaction. Is the underlying tone of the conversation positive, supportive? Does the conversation flow in both directions – between parent and child? Do both parties listen as well as speak? As children grow older, the time spent in conversation with parents may decline. Daily touchstone routines, such as a relaxed dinner time, provide continued opportunity for family conversation.

A consistent emotional bond between parent and child, seen in expressions of affection, renders the child more psychologically equipped to meet the stresses and challenges of life outside the home, especially in school. Affection is also a social lubricant for the family, cementing relationships and helping children develop positive attitudes about school and learning.

When families talk about books, newspapers, magazines, and television programs/digital content, children's minds are treated to the delight of verbal inquiry. The drama of unfolding events and the clash of differing opinions open doors to intellectual pursuit for children. Curiosity is kept alive. Stimulating the child's desire to discover, to think through new situations and to vigorously exchange opinions, is fostered also by family visits to libraries, museums, zoos, historical sites, and cultural events.

Vocabulary is the building block of thought and expression. All small children love to try new words. In some families, exploration with words is encouraged; in fact, it is an ongoing source of family pleasure. But some children are exposed to ridicule when they mispronounce or misuse a new word; their love for words may be extinguished, and they may feel constrained to cling to a limited vocabulary.

Parents can be taught, through role-playing techniques, to be good listeners with their children, to extend meager daily dialogue into rich family conversation, and to play word games that promote an interest in vocabulary. They can also be encouraged to visit museums and other stimulating places and to engage their children in the excitement of discovery. Parents can even learn the importance of affectionate contact with their children, especially at times when the child may be fearful or anxious – when leaving the home in the morning and when going to sleep at night, for example.

Busy families can fall out of the habit of daily conversation. Asking parents to spend at least one minute each day in private conversation with each child, primarily listening to the child tell about his or her day without distraction from other family members or screen time, will demonstrate how rare and precious such moments can be. Sharing these experiences with other parents, in small-group settings, amplifies their impact.

REFERENCES

Becher (1984); Kellaghan et al. (1993); Rutter (1990).

3. THE ROUTINE OF FAMILY LIFE

Children do best in school when parents provide predictable boundaries for their lives, encourage productive use of time, and provide learning experiences as a regular part of family life.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Studies find that the routine of family life, the daily interactions between parents and children, the types of hobbies and recreational activities the family enjoys, all have a bearing on children's readiness for school learning. When children from low-income families do things with their parents on weekends, have dinner as a family, and engage in family hobbies, they make up for some of the disadvantages of poverty, and their school performance improves.

How time is used is an important consideration in the homes of high-achieving students. While the parents encourage their children's independence, they do so with a constant eye on how successfully their children are managing their freedom. They praise productivity and accomplishment. They challenge their children to use time wisely. Children in these homes are accustomed to calendars, schedules, grocery lists, 'to do' lists, household chores, reading, studying, and playing mentally challenging games. One study found that high-achieving students spend about twenty hours each week outside of school in constructive learning activities, often with the support, guidance, or participation of their parents. These activities might include homework, music practice, reading, writing, visiting museums, and engaging in learning activities sponsored by youth organizations.

APPLICATION

When the family sets aside time each day for children to study, rather than asking children to study only when required to do so by their teachers, the children learn that studying is valued by the family. Studying and learning become a natural part of family life. Children do their best when they operate within the boundaries of the family's settled routine. Some activities are daily touchstones; they define the flow of time and enable children to attend to activities of high priority, such as studying, reading, and talking with family members. Eating meals at about the same time each day, going to bed at about the same time, and studying and reading at about the same time will establish a productive and healthful rhythm for children's lives. Children also need a predictably quiet and well-lit place to study and read. They benefit from family interest in hobbies, games, and other activities that exercise the mind and engage the child in interaction with other people. A daily routine that includes a time to study and read, a home environment that provides a quiet place to study, and family activities that include games and hobbies which engage children's minds and provide interaction with other family members characterize a home where children are prepared by habit and value to learn in school.

REFERENCES

Benson, Buckley & Medrich (1980); Clark (1983, 1990).

4. FAMILY EXPECTATIONS AND SUPERVISION

Parents set standards for their children, and these standards determine what children view as important.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Studies find that children do better in school when their parents set high but realistic academic standards for them. Parents of good learners also place importance on verbal interaction; they question their children to prompt further thought and expression, they challenge them to use new words, and they expect them to speak with precision. Families with high expectations for their children's school performance also provide consistent guidance and support for schooling. They are aware of their chil-

dren's progress and interested in the academic route their children are plotting. Researchers find that a strong work ethic contributes to success in school. Also important is a family attitude that accomplishments result from effort rather than innate ability or "playing the system." Further, children benefit when their parents are attentive to their whereabouts, know their friends, monitor their screen time and content, and maintain contact with their teachers.

APPLICATION

Several exercises can be employed to help parents understand the standards and examples they are setting for their children. One exercise is to simply sketch a typical weekly schedule of the child's activities beyond the school day. When does the child usually study? Read? Play with friends? Watch television or play on the computer/mobile devices? Examining the schedule gives a clue to the relative priority the family is giving to each activity.

Parents often look to teachers for guidelines. The expectation that children spend a minimum amount of time studying and reading each day (perhaps ten minutes for each grade level) is such a guideline. The dangers of television and screen time may be exaggerated, but when children watch screens more than ninety minutes a day, school performance falls off. At some point the amount of time given to television is being robbed from a more productive activity, such as reading or studying.

Parents sometimes need to be reminded that children benefit from varied activities, including recreational and social activities, and that schoolwork need not replace these activities. Studying and reading, however, should come first. Parents can help their children develop their own schedule each week, allowing them to set aside time for fun if they have first allotted adequate time for study.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge for a parent is to know when a child is doing his or her best. Setting high but realistic expectations is easier said than done. When it comes to schoolwork, however, a good approach is to consider the child's study habits and attitude toward school rather than focusing solely on the child's marks. This is not to say that marks are unimportant; but marks can be deceptive. Some children achieve reasonably high marks with little effort, and fail to develop good study habits as a consequence. Other children work hard but never achieve the highest marks; they may be doing their best and their dedication to their learning deserves praise. Comparing siblings is a particular pitfall for parents.

A simple rule for parents is that they always know where their children are, what they are doing, and who they are with. Being sure to meet their child's friends and knowing the names and addresses of the friends' parents is a good prerequisite for allowing a child to spend time with a peer. Regular communication with their children's teachers is equally important.

REFERENCES

Bradley, Caldwell & Elardo (1977); Gordon et al. (1979); Hess & Shipman (1965); Keeves (1975); Stevenson (1990).

5. HOMEWORK

Students learn best when homework is assigned regularly, graded, returned promptly, and used primarily to rehearse material first presented by the teacher at school.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Homework, properly utilized by teachers, produces an effect on learning three times as large as family socioeconomic status. Homework is effective in student mastery of facts and concepts as well as critical thinking and formation of productive attitudes and habits. Homework has compensatory effects in that students of lower ability can achieve marks equal to those of higher ability students through increased study at home. Homework is also a significant factor in differences in achievement test scores.

In addition to its positive effect on academic achievement, homework:

- establishes the habit of studying in the home;
- prepares the student for independent learning;
- can be a focal point of constructive family interaction;
- allows the parents to see what the student is learning in school;
- competes with screen time rather than with constructive activities in most homes;
- extends formal learning beyond the school day;
- enables the student to reflect on material and become more intimately familiar with it than is often allowed in a busy, sometimes distracting school setting; and
- provides the teacher with a frequent check on the student's progress.

Research is helpful in establishing expectations for teachers in the effective use of homework. A study of the effectiveness of homework in mathematics, for example, concluded the following:

- required homework is more effective than voluntary homework;
 - having no homework assigned at one grade level adversely affects performance at subsequent grade levels; and
 - homework is most effective when returned promptly by the teacher with comments and a grade.
- Other studies attest to the importance of the teacher grading and placing written comments on homework. Daily homework assignments have been found superior to less frequent assignments.

APPLICATION

The effects of homework do not increase proportionately with the amount assigned, but rather with the frequency (or regularity) of its assignment, the nature of the assignment, and the teacher's attention to the student's work. Homework is most effective when it is:

- frequent;
- directly related to in-class work;
- used to master rather than introduce new material;
- graded and included as a significant part of the report card grade; and
- returned to the student soon after it is collected, and marked with comments particular to the student.

Schools facilitate parents, students, and teachers in their efforts with homework by establishing a school-wide standard for frequency and quantity of homework. For example, some schools expect about ten minutes of homework each school night for first-graders, and elevate the expectations by an additional ten minutes for each year of school. This is a good way to gradually and consistently develop homework habits.

REFERENCES

Austin (1976); Elawar & Corno (1985); Keith (1982); Page (1958); Page & Keith (1981); Paschel, Weinstein & Walberg (1984); Walberg (1984).

6. SCHOOL/HOME COMMUNICATION

Children benefit from communication between their parents and their teachers that flows in both directions.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Students do best when parents and teachers understand each other's expectations and stay in touch with one another regarding the child's learning habits, attitudes toward school, social interactions, and academic progress. The school, through the leadership of its administration and the school's policies and programs, can create an atmosphere conducive to communication and provide convenient opportunities for communication. Teachers are most inclined to initiate communication with parents when they perceive that administrators value such communication, their colleagues are supportive of parental involvement, and the parents seem appreciative of the outreach. Communication between the school and the home is most effective when it flows in both directions, and schools should distinguish between efforts to inform parents and opportunities to communicate with parents.

APPLICATION

The following examples of school/home communication provide convenient and effective communication between parents and school personnel.

Parent/Teacher/Student Conferences

Prepare an agenda for parent/teacher/student conferences that encourages the participation of all three parties. Let parents know the agenda in advance of the conference. Include such questions as: How would the parents describe the child's study habits at home? Does the child read at home?

Report Cards

Report cards are typically used by teachers to inform parents about the child's progress in school. But report cards can become two-way by including the parents' report of the child's progress at home with such school-related topics as: willingness to do homework; reading for pleasure; moderation of screen time; and attitude toward learning. The cards might also encourage parents to note specific concerns or request conferences.

School Newsletter

Many schools publish newsletters. To encourage two-way communication, ask parents to write articles for the newsletter. What tips can parents give for helping kids with homework? What family activities would parents like to share? Has the family visited a museum, historical site, or other place of educational value?

Happy-Grams

Print pads of Happy-Grams for teachers to send notes to parents complimenting students for specific achievements and behaviors. Because teachers also appreciate notes of kindness, distribute pads of Happy-Grams to parents. Print blank Happy-Grams forms in the newsletter. Parents can clip the forms from the newsletter and send notes to teachers.

Open Door Parent/Teacher Conferences

Designate a certain time when teachers are available for walk-in conferences. Some schools set aside thirty minutes before school each morning (or on certain days of the week) when all teachers are available to parents.

Parent Bulletin Board

Place a bulletin board, especially for parents, at the main entry to the school. Parents can conveniently check the board for notes about parent meetings, suggestions for helping children with homework, notices about family activities and calendars of important events.

Home Links from the Classroom

Parents like to know what their child is learning at school. A weekly take-home that lists a few topics covered at school that week is helpful. The take-home may also include examples of parent/child activities that would be related to what is being learned at school.

Assignment Notebooks

A notebook in which students record each day's assignments (and perhaps also keep track of the marks they earn) is helpful in keeping students on track. When parents are asked to view, date, and initial the notebook and the teacher routinely examines the notebook, a good student/teacher/parent communication link is established.

REFERENCES

Epstein (1987); Epstein & Dauber (1991); Hauser-Cram (1983); Swap (1993).

7. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parental involvement includes parents' involvement with their own children, involvement with parents of other children, and involvement with their children's school.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

"Parental involvement" is an all-encompassing and imprecise term that includes everything from the parent's child-rearing practices at home to the parent's participation in events held at school. Included in the child-rearing practices may be those aspects of parenting that have particular application to the child's performance in school (the curriculum of the home), as well as more general practices of feeding, nurturing, and caring for children. Included in the category of events held at the school would be everything from attendance at athletic competitions to participation in parent/teacher conferences and completion of extensive parent education courses.

A commonly accepted typology of parental involvement includes the following categories:

- parenting (caring for and nurturing the child);
- communicating (maintaining a flow of information between parent and school);
- volunteering (helping at the school);
- learning at home (supporting and supplementing the instruction of the school);
- decision-making (part of the school's decision-making structure); and
- collaboration with the community at large (representing the school in partnerships with other organizations).

Researchers point to impediments to parental involvement:

- Defining too narrowly the scope of parental involvement to include only attendance at formal meetings and other activities held at the school, assigning too little importance to the parent's relationship with the child at home.
- Low expectation on the part of school personnel, for example assuming that single parents or low-income parents are not able to provide the support and guidance their children require.
- Lack of preparation for teachers to enable them to involve parents in ways that facilitate school learning.
- Occupational obstacles that make it difficult for parents to be available at times convenient to school personnel.

- Parental attitudes about or experiences with schools that make them resistant to contact with school personnel.

APPLICATION

Because a school may expect only limited access to and influence over most parents, it should carefully select the ways it expects parents to be involved. In general, parents' involvement in curriculum-of-the-home activities with their children is more beneficial to the children's school learning than involvement with activities at the school. A parent's relationship with other parents in the child's school, and the parent's communication with the child's classroom teacher are, however, important to the child's success in school. And the quality of the school may depend upon the willingness of some parents to be at the table when institutional decisions are made. The typology shown here can provide the school a good framework for developing a range of parent involvement programs and activities.

REFERENCES

Carr & Wilson (1997); Epstein (1995); Yap & Enoki (1995).

8. PARENT EDUCATION

Programs to teach parents to enhance the home environment in ways that benefit their children's learning take a variety of forms and may produce substantial outcomes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Parent education includes home visits by parent educators, group sessions led by previously trained parents, and workshops and courses taught by experts. The home-visit model is typically directed at parents of preschool children and includes explanations of the child's developmental stage and examples of appropriate parent-child activities. Parent group sessions enable parents to learn in a small-group setting, carry out activities with their children between sessions, and discuss their experience with other parents. When led by other parents rather than teachers or experts, these parent groups are collegial and non-threatening. Workshops and courses conducted by experts—educators, psychologists, or pediatricians, for example—have the advantage of research-based content and access to professional knowledge. Research shows that programs that teach mothers to improve the quality of cognitive stimulation and verbal interaction produce immediate effects on the child's intellectual development. When parents learn systems for monitoring and guiding their children's out-of-school time, the children do better in school. Schools that teach parents ways to reinforce school learning at home find that students are more motivated to learn and attend school more regularly. Parent education programs enhance teacher-parent communication and the attitude of parents toward the school. Efforts to encourage family reading activities result in the children's improved reading skills and interest in reading. Programs that include both parents and children are more effective than programs that deal with only the parents. Home-visit programs are most effective when combined with group meetings with other parents.

APPLICATION

The obstacles to school-sponsored parent education can be daunting. Some parents are not receptive to the good intentions of parent education providers, and recruiting participants for parent education programs can be a frustrating process. Teachers usually have quite enough to do caring for their students; working with parents can be seen as an added burden. So the twin problems of parent education are: (a) providing personnel to organize and deliver the parent education programs; and (b) attracting parents to the programs.

Home-visit models are labor-intensive and therefore expensive. But because they are directed at the parents of preschool children, they have the advantage of a parent clientele that is very receptive to

parent education. Taking the program to the parents at their home makes home visits convenient for parents, places the educator in the natural setting of the home, and enables the parent educator to focus on one family at a time.

Small-group sessions led by previously trained parents are inexpensive, encourage parental attachment to the school, and allow parents to share experiences and assist one another. On the other hand, attracting parents to sessions offered outside the home requires substantial attention to recruitment.

Strategies for schools and teachers:

- Partner with other organizations that can affect parenting in the preschool years through home visits and other efforts: pediatricians, public health, community organizations, and churches, for example.
- Make a specific list of what the school wants from parents according to the age group of the child, then organize parent education around this list.
- Publish, inform, monitor, support, and assist with homework policies.
- Use parents to organize, recruit, and lead other parents.
- Consider field-tested, proven models and curricula.
- Focus on the curriculum of the home.

REFERENCES

Clarke-Stewart & Apfel (1978); Becher (1984); Epstein (1987); Gray & Wandersman (1980); Rich (1985); Walberg & Wallace (1992); Wallace & Walberg (1991).

9. FAMILY/SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

Because families vary in their relationship to schools, schools must use different strategies to engage all families in the learning lives of their children.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Family/school relationships may be viewed as corresponding to three historical phases of economic development. In the first phase, typical of agricultural societies, but also of some families in all societies, the family lives at a subsistence level, relying on children for work (or, more commonly in modern States, for emotional comfort). In this situation, the family may limit the educational potential of the child, and the school's role is to expand the possibilities for the child's development. In the second phase, common to the industrial economy, the goals of the family and the school converge, with both institutions seeking the improvement of the child's ultimate economic situation. In the third phase, that of post-industrial affluence, parents find the demands of child-rearing competing with the pursuits of their adult lives. They expect the school to fill the void.

APPLICATION

In modern societies, we find all three types of families described in the previous paragraph. Placing any family in a category can be an injustice to that family, but characterizing common family situations and strategies for engaging them can be instructive.

Distressed Families

Some families, usually those living in poverty, are severely pressed by the demands of everyday life. They often possess limited parenting skills, lack social contacts, and have access to few models of good child-rearing practices. They may be intimidated by teachers and see the school as a bearer of bad news. They are likely to perceive that they are targets of discrimination. Parent education programs

that show them how to relate to their children are helpful, but first they need genuine, personal expressions of goodwill from school personnel and other parents. They must be engaged within a non-threatening, positive, and supportive social context, often provided by other parents rather than by school personnel.

Child-Centered Families

The child-centered family understands the necessity of schooling to the economic betterment of their children. These families often fear that the school is inadequately attentive to their children. They are frustrated by what they perceive as negative social influences, and they may cast aspersions upon other parents, whom they see as lax and uncaring. On the other hand, these parents are willing to work for their children's school, provide leadership among parents, and serve as surrogate parents for neglected children. They are best engaged by giving them constructive roles in the school and opportunities to work with other parents. The challenge for the school is to channel the efforts of child-centered parents toward activities that benefit the academic and personal development of their own children and of other children. Child-centered parents make wonderful leaders for parent education programs.

Parent-Centered Families

Busy professional parents value schooling but are sometimes so absorbed by their careers and personal interests that they are disengaged from close involvement in their children's lives. To compensate, they place their children in the best schools, thus entrusting their children to what they see as competent, hired professionals. They do the same in other aspects of their children's lives, providing experiences for their children through programs and services they employ. These talented, well-connected parents possess financial resources, education, social contacts, and professional skills. They must be re-engaged with their children by means that are nearly spiritual. Their conversion comes through the heart. If directed into intimate relationships with their children, they are reminded of the satisfaction that they deny themselves by relegating child-rearing responsibilities to others.

REFERENCES

Coleman & Husén (1985); Redding (1991); Taylor (1994).

10. FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

When the families of children in a school associate with one another, social capital is increased, children are watched over by a larger number of caring adults, and parents share standards, norms, and the experiences of child-rearing.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In many societies, bonds of community no longer envelop the families of children who happen to attend the same school. This means that parents do not necessarily associate with one another away from the school, and their contact with one another in connection with the school is very limited. As a consequence, children spend their school days sitting next to, influencing, and being influenced by other children, yet the parents of these children do not know one another. Many children spend a great portion of their out-of-school hours alone or with other children, not under the supervision of caring adults. Children benefit when the adults around them share basic values about child-rearing, communicate with one another, and give the children consistent support and guidance. Social capital, the asset available to children that resides in the relationships among adults in their lives, depends upon face-to-face association of these adults. A school that views itself as a community of its constituents (school personnel, students, families of students), rather than an organization, is more likely to encourage the social interactions that lead to the accumulation of social capital.

APPLICATION

A school is capable of forming and nurturing community among its constituents — school personnel and the families of its students. A framework for building a school community will include ways to articulate commonly held values about education, draw parents together with other parents and with teachers, and enable the school to function as an institutional champion of the families' educational desires for their children. Elements of a program to enhance community in a school would include:

- Representation: Parents are included in decision-making groups at the school.
- Educational values: Parents and teachers together articulate the educational values common to the school, and the school's goals and its expectations of students, teachers, and parents flow from these shared values.
- Communication: Two-way communication between the home and the school is afforded through a variety of means, including parent/teacher/student conferences, telephone conversations, notes, and assignment notebooks.
- Education: Education programs for teachers and parents are provided in order to constantly improve everyone's ability to help children succeed.
- Common experience: All students, and often their parents and teachers, are engaged in collective events or connected to common strains in the educational program that unite them and allow them to share common educational experiences.
- Association: The school arranges opportunities for groups of school-community members to associate with one another, particularly for reasons relative to the purposes of the school. For example, groups of parents with other parents, groups of parents and teachers, younger students with older students, and intergenerational mentoring between students and adult volunteers (including "grandparents").

When a school decides to reach out to the community to tap resources, it is wise to first determine its students' unmet needs, then approach community organizations to negotiate the delivery of services that might meet these needs. Student needs not easily met by the school's own resources might include: basic family needs (clothing, food, housing, child care); health needs (vaccination, examination, dental care); behavioral therapy; recreation; tutoring; psychological testing; mentoring; equipment for disabilities; respite care; opportunities relative to special talents or interests (scientific, musical, artistic, athletic, literary). Once student needs have been listed and matched with a catalogue of community resources, students and their families can be systematically connected with appropriate services.

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Parent – Teacher Communication

Parent and Family Communication with Teachers

Based on work by Eva Patrikakou, Roger Weissberg, Mary Hancock, Michelle Rubenstein, and Jennifer Zeisz
Laboratory for Student Success

Good communication between home and school is important to keep you in touch with your child's educational needs and success. Answer the following questions to see how you can improve your communication with your child's teacher.

1. Do you get the information you need at the beginning of the school year? Do you:
 - ◆ Go to the school/classroom open house or orientation night?
 - ◆ Have the teacher's phone number (and/or email) and know convenient times to call?
 - ◆ Read the school handbook so that you understand school rules?

2. Do you let the teacher know that you want to be informed regularly about your child's schoolwork and behavior? Do you:
 - ◆ Give the teacher your cell and/or work phone numbers and a convenient time or preferred method to reach you?
 - ◆ Tell the teacher that you want to hear about both negative and positive issues with your child?
 - ◆ Read and respond to all notes and other communications?
 - ◆ Ask about class rules, routines, and what students will be learning?
 - ◆ Talk to the teacher as soon as you have a question or concern about your child?

3. Do you let the teacher know that you want to be involved in your child's education? Do you:
 - ◆ Go to parent-teacher conferences and other school meetings?
 - ◆ Ask the teacher how you can help with schoolwork at home?
 - ◆ Volunteer to help the teacher in class or with special events?
 - ◆ Ask the teacher when you can visit the classroom?
 - ◆ Mark your calendar with special school activities and events so that your child is prepared for both of you to attend together?
 - ◆ Work with the teacher to clarify your child's academic and behavioral goals for the year?
 - ◆ Share information about your child's accomplishments at home or in extracurricular activities?

4. Do you act like a partner with the teacher for your child's education? Do you:
 - ◆ Tell the teacher that you want to work together to solve problems?
 - ◆ Let your child know that you support the teacher's classroom rules and work goals?
 - ◆ Contact the teacher to let him/her know about things at school that your child likes?
 - ◆ Communicate with the teacher when you have questions, concerns, or suggestions to improve your child's learning experience?

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- ◆ Ask for suggestions about activities you can do with your child at home to build on what he/she is learning?
 - ◆ Show respect for the teacher and school?
 - ◆ Thank the teacher for his/her effort?

If you answered “YES” to these questions, congratulations! You have open and positive communication with your child’s teacher. Here are some more tips to help you build on this strength.

More tips to enhance parent-teacher communication:

- Write a note on your child’s homework to let the teacher know if the work was easy or difficult.
- Make an appointment so that you have time to talk with the teacher if you have a concern, and let the teacher know what you want to talk about.
- Talk about your concerns in a positive, problem-solving way. Avoid blaming or criticizing the teacher – especially in front of your child.
- Let your child know about talks you have had with his/her teacher. Children should see that open communication between home and school is a good sign of teamwork.
- Talk to your child regularly about your expectations for school work and future education.
- Praise your child’s efforts and hard work, supporting a growth mindset and intrinsic motivation, and ask the teacher questions about how these are supported in school as well.
- Tell the teacher about any major changes in your child’s life (death in family, birth of sibling, divorce, etc.) that may affect his/her schoolwork.
- Show the teacher your appreciation when he/she does something special for your child.

Teacher Communication with Parents and Families

Based on work by Eva Patrikakou, Roger Weissberg, Mary Hancock, Michelle Rubenstein, and Jennifer Zeisz
Laboratory for Student Success

All written communication to parents/guardians should use simple, familiar language and short sentences. Be direct and avoid using educational jargon and long explanations.

If possible, use “attention grabbers” – upbeat graphics, bold headings, borders or boxes around special items, etc. Students can decorate invitations and letters going to their parents – this will help ensure that parents see your communication.

Always communicate respect for and appreciation of parents and families. Talking down to parents will put a quick stop to two-way communication. Be sensitive to cultural differences. Have your notes translated to the first language of your students’ families. Integrate bilingual materials into displays and written communications. Be persistent. Use a variety of methods to communicate your important information to families. See which format (note, newsletter, phone call, meeting, etc.) works best for different kinds of information. Use alternative methods to follow-up with hard-to-reach families.

Send a welcome letter

Send a welcome letter to families well before the school year starts to help them get their children ready for a new classroom. This letter may also be sent to the parents of students transferring into your class throughout the year. In it you should include:

- Basic subjects and major goals for the year
- Materials needed for class
- How and when to contact you (phone number and most convenient times to reach you, email, class website, etc.)
- Your expectations for students’ work and behavior
- Suggestions for ways parents can be involved in homework
- A sincere invitation to share concerns, visit class, and provide support

Remind parents to read the school handbook

You may want to highlight school policies and programs pertinent to your students (procedures regarding absences and tardiness, weather emergencies, afterschool activities, etc.). Ask parents to discuss this information with their children.

Encourage families to attend the school open house or orientation

If your school does not sponsor such an event, hold one for your classroom. Publicize the open house on school bulletin boards and with community outlets such as grocery stores, banks, etc. Mail invitations to parents well in advance. Be prepared to review the information in your “welcome letter,” but recognize that the open house is a social event. Parents will want to get to know their children’s teacher, other parents, and the classroom in a relaxed atmosphere. Have displays and examples of last year’s student work to give parents an idea of your teaching style.

Give parents a chance to express their needs and priorities

Encourage families to share with you their goals about their child’s education. Ask them to express their priorities about their child’s academic and behavioral performance. Provide them with ways to enhance their child’s learning at home and extend the classroom curriculum in the home environment and beyond. Ask parents the best ways (e.g., phone calls, class texting service, etc.) to communicate with them on a regular basis.

Ideas for Positive Two-way Communication

1. Start a weekly or bi-weekly newsletter

Start a weekly or bi-weekly class newsletter. While this may seem an impersonal method of communication, it can be personalized in several ways: (1) pick a student to decorate the border and be the newsletter artist of the week; (2) feature an “academic star” and a “class citizen” of the week and note their recent efforts; and (3) include student and parent contributions on a regular basis.

The tone of the newsletter should be positive, highlighting recent accomplishments and interesting experiences of the class. The newsletter is a proactive way to inform parents of upcoming events and activities. It may also include a few tips for parents about helping with homework and boosting reading skills. To encourage parents to be involved, add a few questions for a “reader opinion survey” – post the results the next week.

2. Greet parents personally as they drop off or pick up their children

This may require you to come in a little early so that you are organized before students arrive. Communication with parents in this informal manner helps increase the comfort level of two-way communication. It also reinforces the idea that parents and teachers know each other and are working together for the benefit of students. This is not a good time to discuss problems, but it may be an opportunity to set an appointment.

3. Try to contact parents by phone at least once each quarter

A positive phone call or text messages acknowledging a student’s improved work or continued effort, thanking a parent for helping out on a class project, or personally inviting a parent to a special event will increase parents’ comfort in approaching you.

4. Create a Family Bulletin Board

By creating a Family Bulletin Board in your classroom you can notify parents of upcoming events, display pictures from special occasions, and offer suggestions for parenting and home learning.

5. Send students home with a Weekly Work Folder

Weekly Work Folders should be given to students every Friday containing their completed homework assignments, in-class work, and any tests or quizzes. Staple a blank sheet to the inside cover of the folder so that you can write a quick message to parents and allow space inviting them to respond.

6. Recognize academic and behavioral achievement

Achievement certificates should be able to be taken home and displayed. These certificates can be formatted and copied in advance so that you can simply write in the child’s name and achievement. Certificates can also be used to thank parents for their efforts.

7. Messaging and mobile applications

Many services are now available to allow educators and parents to communicate via text (SMS) and/or via mobile apps, either individually or in groups, while also protecting the privacy of the senders and the student’s information. More and more families have access to mobile devices. These services are convenient ways to enable two-way communication, and some even offer translation services for families whose primary language is not English. Some also allow the sharing of photos or videos taken in the classroom. As with any other form of communication, make sure to begin the year with a cheerful and inviting message, and it is important to recognize at least one positive accomplishment of children when creating progress notes. Families want to hear about their child’s good work!

Consult your district's technology policy first. Again, many services are available, and this list does not indicate endorsement, just a quick sampling of products:

- <https://www.classtag.com/>
- <https://www.remind.com/>
- <https://www.classmessenger.com/>
- <https://kikutext.com/>
- <https://www.classdojo.com/>
- <https://www.edmodo.com>

8. Develop a parent feedback form

Parent feedback forms can assist parents in monitoring their involvement in important areas, such as praising their children, getting children to school on time, helping with homework, volunteering in the classroom, etc. These forms are also a good way to provide parents with additional ways they can get involved in their child's learning.

9. Communicate personally with parents at least once a month

A quick "home-note" can encourage parental involvement by suggesting home learning activities. Clearly mark a parent response portion of each note to encourage two-way communication. Ask parents to comment or answer one or two questions relevant to the content of your note. Seek parents' input and feedback about the most effective ways to communicate with each other. Share information with other educators about successful parent involvement and communication approaches.

NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS--WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Teacher's Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Set up a "sent-home portfolio" and keep samples of all materials sent home. Display the portfolio at parent-teacher conferences and open houses.

- I do this now.
 I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)
 No plan to implement this method.

2. Contact students prior to the beginning of a school year to welcome them to the classroom.

- I do this now.
 I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)
 No plan to implement this method.

3. Contact parents prior to the beginning of a school year to welcome them to the classroom.

- I do this now.
 I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)
 No plan to implement this method.

4. Provide students and parents with contact information and share information about my communication practices.

- I do this now.
 I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)
 No plan to implement this method.

5. Gather parents' contact information and communication preferences.

- I do this now.
 I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)
 No plan to implement this method.

6. Gather information from parents about their goals and expectations regarding children's academic achievement and social development.

- I do this now.
 I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)
 No plan to implement this method.

9. Utilize information gathered from parents to inform your communication practices.

- I do this now.
 I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)
 No plan to implement this method.

10. Share general information about classroom policies, practices, schedules, and routines with parents and students.

- I do this now.
 I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)
 No plan to implement this method.

11. Clarify the roles parents, teachers, and students will play in establishing a partnership and supporting two-way, home-school communication.

I do this now.

I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)

No plan to implement this method.

12. Develop a standard format to organize and transport home-school communications.

I do this now.

I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)

No plan to implement this method.

13. Contact parents to share a personalized and positive comment about child's academic performance or social behavior.

I do this now.

I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)

No plan to implement this method.

14. Keep parents regularly informed about children's academic and social progress.

I do this now.

I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)

No plan to implement this method.

15. Keep parents regularly informed about classroom activities and events.

I do this now.

I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)

No plan to implement this method.

16. Encourage parents' response and input regarding communication practices and materials.

I do this now.

I plan to start doing this by: _____ (date)

No plan to implement this method.

Summary Notes

Jot a few notes to capture your ideas and plans for improving communication with parents. Include ideas that may not be reflected in the items above.

Contact Us
to Just Connect®

www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org