

Parent-Teacher Partnerships

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Parent-Teacher Partnerships

- Goals:
 - To provide a broad overview of a process for creating constructive parent-teacher partnerships.
 - To provide selected findings and sample practices.
- Module is filled with information and 14 study group activities from which to select
- Consider me a resource to address concerns for your school context

Four A's: A Guide to Develop Parent-Teacher Partnerships

- Approach: The framework for interaction with parents
- Attitudes: The values and perceptions held about parent-teacher relationships
- Atmosphere: The climate for parent-teacher interactions
- Actions: Strategies for building shared responsibility for students' reading progress and success



Approach

- Think of students in your class last year – those who were readers and those who struggled.
- On a scale of 1-10, how important, in your experience, is family engagement with learning to students' reading success?

Hart and Risley's Study

- Observed parent-child interaction in 42 families who differed in terms of income
- They found:
 - Children in professional families heard, on average, 2,150 words per hour, whereas children in working class (1,250) and welfare (620) families were exposed to many less words.
 - The cumulative language experience for children by age 3 differed in amount and kind, and these differences were highly correlated with children's reading/language performance at ages 9-10.



Entwisle and Alexander's Study

- Followed kindergarten children in the Baltimore Schools
- They found:
 - Low income children made comparable grade equivalent gains in reading and math during the school year as do middle income children.
 - Differences were due to experiential learning and home resources during the summer.
 - The gap widened across school years due to the differential effect of out-of-school learning.



Ask yourself:

- How do families help you do your job better?
- Be more successful in reaching your goals?
- How do you think of the roles parents and teachers' play relative to students' becoming readers?

M & M's: Creating a Successful Learning Environment

- Be a good role **model**.
- **Motivate** your child.
- **Monitor** your child's performance.
- **Maintain** contact with teachers.



A host of research findings. . .

- Student benefits: grades, test scores, attitudes toward schoolwork, behavior, academic perseverance, homework completion, attendance
- What parents do to support learning predicts scholastic ability better than who families are.
- Creating consistent messages about learning across home and school helps increase the probability students will perform their best.



Parents and Teachers as “Partners”

- *A student-focused philosophy* – collaborate for the learning progress of the student
- *A belief in shared responsibility* – both in-and out-of-school time impacts achievement
- *Quality of the relationship* – how parent and teacher work together in meaningful ways
- *A preventive, solution-oriented focus* – create conditions that encourage and support student’s reading and engagement

Attitudes

- Dialogue Time: What is the role of attitudes in productive family-school connections?
 - (Right side of room) - What teacher attitudes help build constructive relationships with parents?
 - (Left side of room) - What parent attitudes help build constructive relationships with teachers?

Collaboration is evident when parents and teachers:

- ❑ Listen to one another's perspective.
- ❑ View differences as strengths.
- ❑ Focus on mutual interests.
- ❑ Share information to co-construct understandings.
- ❑ Respect the skills and knowledge of each other by asking for opinions and ideas.
- ❑ Plan together and make decisions that address the needs of parents, teachers, and students.
- ❑ Refrain from finding fault – no problematic individuals; rather a problematic situation that requires our attention.
- ❑ Celebrate “our” successes.



New Beliefs and Principles about Families Help Foster Relationships

- All families have strengths, and their assets, not deficits, are emphasized.
- Parents can learn ways to help their children if they are provided with the opportunity and necessary support.
- Parents have important information and perspectives about their children that are needed by teachers.
- Schools and families influence each other.
- A no-fault, problem solving model is necessary – blame is not attributed to the family or school because there is not a single cause for any presenting concerns.

A challenge facing teachers. . .

- *“It is the school’s job. I don’t have time.”*
- Strategies for helping parents make education a priority in the home are emerging:
 - Deliver a persistent message about the importance of in and out-of-school time
 - Keep and sustain a focus on the salience of education – find a feasible way for all families to be engaged in supporting their children’s reading.
 - Emphasize both academic and motivational home support for learning.
 - Families do not need to be fixed; they need to be supported.

Atmosphere

- Pretend you have an index card. Write one thing that helps parents feel welcome at school. If I collected the cards and sorted them into one of six categories:
 - Communication
 - Trust
 - Quality of relationship with teacher
 - Problem solving orientation
 - Physical appearance
 - Other

Where does your idea best fall?



Of 27 choices, the “top 10” were:

- ❑ Experience when talking with their child’s teacher
- ❑ The relationship between their child and his/her teacher
- ❑ Meetings with school personnel to address concerns
- ❑ Overall “feeling” in their child’s class
- ❑ Overall “feeling” in their child’s school
- ❑ Relationship between families and teachers at the school
- ❑ Parent-teacher conferences
- ❑ Cleanliness of the school
- ❑ Initial contact when families first enter the school
- ❑ How differences of opinion or conflict are handled

Power of Solution-oriented Language

- Expressing concerns must invite parental input
 - *“I am concerned about how little work Tess is doing”*
vs. “I’m not at all pleased with Tess’s progress.”
- Communication must:
 - Help parents view their children as learners,
 - Enhance parental beliefs that they can be helpful and make a difference, and
 - Enhance parents’ comfort level at schools and with educational issues.



Initial Phone Call about a Concern

- Begin with a statement of concern.
- Describe the specific behavior that necessitated the call.
- Describe the steps you have taken to solve the concern
- Get parental input.
- Present your plan to the parent.
- Express concern in our ability to solve the concern.
- Inform parents about follow-up contact from you.

Canter & Canter, 1991

Actions

- Approach, attitudes, and atmosphere are the “backdrop” for the actions to be taken to develop shared responsibility for children’s reading progress.
 - Approach – Parents are essential
 - Attitudes – Equality, parity, and perspective taking (golden rule counts!)
 - Atmosphere – How can we work together to address a concern or shared goal?
- Actions are different than activities

Actions to Enhance Home Support for Learning

- 11 actions are provided as guidelines or a template for creating a home support for reading program.
- Apply literature on effective parent-teacher partnerships and draws from *STARS: Sit Together and Read Something* (Christenson, 2001).
- Modify to fit your school context!

Action 1

- ✓ Be proactive! Reach out and make a friendly, positive introductory contact before any specific reading or student concern arises.
 - “Before School Starts” Greeting
 - Goal Setting and Positive School Message
 - Sharing Student Talents (*STAR Talent*)

Goal Setting and Positive School Message

- ❑ Individually or at orientation night
- ❑ Share goals for the child's performance: Teacher, Parent(s), and Student. Note consensus.
- ❑ Ask parents to provide children with an important message: *Your teacher cares about you and believes I am important for helping you to learn to read. We have agreed to work together to make this a great school year.*
- ❑ Establish a way to contact each other.

Action 2

- ✓ Invite parents to partner and explain the conditions under which learning to read is most optimal for students.
 - *STARS* Invitation
 - Obtain parental input on how to create a “reading star”
 - Reading Success = Reading in School + Reading at Home + Parent-Teacher communication
 - Partnership for Children’s Reading (school wide)



Action 3

- ✓ Create a plan for home support for reading. Offer parents the opportunity to react to and modify the plan to fit their situation.
 - Name your reading effort/program.
 - Use the empirical base in reading to design varied options for parents (shared book reading, vocabulary development, phonics).
 - Design simple, routine activities.
 - Goal is to involve all parents in some way.



Action 4

- ✓ Consider holding a curriculum night where students present the evidence based reading practices.
 - Students demonstrate what parent and child would do together.
 - Attendance is higher when students are featured, sessions are offered at multiple times, daycare and transportation are offered, and importance is linked to children's learning.
 - Home visits for non-attendees.

Action 5

- ✓ Consider creating a “success for all” approach – or classroom goal on reading and an atmosphere that celebrates students’ reading improvement and progress.
 - Set individual student goals
 - Use parent-teacher-student partnership agreements
 - Place students “in charge” to complete home activities
 - Establish class goals based on overall improvement, followed by rewards



Action 6

- ✓ Allow parents to make modifications and/or select from several options for the home support for reading program.
 - Majority use standard program
 - Modify for unique situations
 - Value is persistence - always deliver a non-blaming message that out-of-school reading time influences children's reading progress
 - Key: Expect participation but do not mandate how

Action 7

- ✓ As the program is implemented, maintain a focus on the progress and performance of the child when communicating with the parent.
 - Good news phone calls/ *STARS* postcards
 - Contact parent at the first sign of a concern
 - Meet to re-plan: *“I am concerned about Erica’s reading progress. Let’s decide what else we can do, as I know Erica can make faster progress.”*
 - Consider including the student in the meeting.

Action 8

- ✓ Maintain relationships with parents through two-way communication. Provide information and obtain their feedback about how your reading effort is working.
 - Provide progress reports on a regular basis (4-6 week assessments)
 - “Please let me hear your ideas. It is with your help that I can make this classroom the best learning environment for Dewan.”

Action 9

- ✓ Maintain a check on your attitudes especially if parents are not implementing the program.
 - Portray attitudes that are encouraging – *I know we can solve this together. I know we can find a reasonable way for Tarnika to get extra reading time outside of school.*”
 - Problem solve with parents – who is the designated surrogate?



Action 10

- ✓ Strive for a standardized reading effort, but also employ “extras” for unique situations.
 - Modify home activities
 - Provide specific resources
 - Find a role for each parent – academic or motivational support



Action 11

- ✓ Be realistic.
 - Quandary: Some families believe they have very little to contribute to their children's reading and learning.
 - Key: Control what we as educators can:
 - Convey a persistent message.
 - Keep interaction focused on a genuine interest in improving the child's reading.
 - Link parents' efforts to their goals for their child.
 - Make regular, ongoing contact with parents, providing friendly reminders.



Additional Information and Support

- 79 page module on the web
- Leadership Team
- Contact information:

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