



Joellen Killion is deputy executive director of National Staff Development Council.

# Turn parents into partners

**T**eachers say interaction with parents is one of their greatest sources of stress. Most teachers want more parent involvement in their children's education and want parents to demonstrate the importance of education. Occasionally, some teachers wish for less parental involvement. Teachers know that working together with parents in active partnership is key to students' academic success.

Parents and teachers have the same goals: success for every student. Parents think less about all students and more about their children as students. Parents want teachers who are willing to see each student as an individual, who recognize each student's strengths, and are willing to communicate with parents about what is going on in the classroom. In today's technology-rich era, parents and teachers have more ways to communicate including e-mail, text messages, fax, and phone, yet the structures of families and communities make it increasingly more challenging for parents and teachers to communicate. Parents will have no reservations about reaching out to teachers when it is convenient for them. Their primary motivation is to support their child's education.

Remembering that they share the same goals parents do is important to teachers. Teachers sometimes find parents intrusive especially if they are contacting teachers beyond the workday. Yet, teachers want parents to be involved in their students' education, to show interest in their schoolwork, ensure that they complete their homework accurately and thoroughly, and help students understand the importance of an education. They want parents to help in the classroom, yet not to meddle in what is going on. The line is a fine one.

Teachers have a responsibility to establish

## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders appropriately.



clear parameters and expectations for parents. While some of these may seem difficult, parents will appreciate the clarity.

Here are 10 tips for building successful parent-teacher partnerships so that all students learn.

### **1. Find strengths in all students and communicate those to each student's parents.**

When parents know that teachers see their student as they do, they will have greater confidence in the teacher. Students have both strengths and areas for growth, yet communications should

**For more information about NSDC's Standards for Staff Development, see [www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm)**

focus on the strengths.

**2. Clarify expectations.** Teachers will want to be precise about what they want parents to do to support students' learning. For example, teachers can specify whether they expect or want parents to review or assist with homework, help with projects, etc. When teachers give parents specific tasks that are time-bound, specific, and focused, parents are better able to complete them.

**3. Communicate frequently via classroom newsletters, e-mails, or phone calls so that parents feel connected and can ask appropriate questions about their child's class work.** Parents can be more supportive of classroom learning when they know the key concepts students are expected to learn in lessons and units and important dates for assignments, projects, events, or tests. Teachers can provide parents with a list of questions to ask children about their schoolwork.

**4. Remember that family situations differ dramatically.** What one family is able to do is not what another might be able to do. The challenge is to understand how families differ. Parents want to help, yet what constitutes help for one family will not be the same in another. Be flexible and understanding with expectations to accommodate the difference among families.

**5. Enroll parents in their child's learning.** Help parents know how to support the content or processes of learning. Parents will be glad to lend a hand provided what is being asked of them is within their time and comfort zones. Make the tasks short and interactive. Focus on those things that are difficult for you to accomplish in school and that need family and community reinforcement, such as responsibility, respect, character education, etc.

**6. Assign homework some of which can be interactive.** Homework is a must today for practicing and refining learning. Teachers don't assign homework as often as they might because they know that too many students do not complete it. Yet, increasingly, students need more time for practice and for application of their learning and that means extending their learning time by providing homework.

**7. Invite parents to visit the school and classroom.** Parents of young children will be

eager for an invitation to visit. Parents of older children will not. Regardless of the age of their child, parents want to know that they are welcome to visit the classroom with advance notice.

**8. Set parameters.** Help parents learn how to respect your non-work time by setting and communicating parameters for parent communication. Parameters might include evening time when it is acceptable to call and when it isn't, how you prefer to be contacted to talk about students, when you are available and when you are not during the school day, and what to do if there is a problem and they can't reach you or feel that they need to speak to someone else.

**9. Keep the student out of the middle.** Students are not reliable go-betweens for either parents or teachers. Direct communication is best. Parents worry that teachers may take something out on their child if there is a problem between the teacher and parent. This can never be the case.

**10. Be professional.** Parents may be uncomfortable speaking to their child's teachers because they feel inadequate. Use language that is appropriate for parents, clear, specific, and free of "educationese." Parents appreciate being spoken to as adults rather than students. Teachers might catch themselves sounding as if they are speaking to students rather than adults.

When communicating with parents is not as easy as making a call in the evening, teachers can reach out to school district and community services for help. School districts typically offer resources to help teachers connect with parents when language or other access challenges arise. These services might include parent advocates, parent resource centers, social workers, and translators. Teachers can tap into community resources as well. Sometimes, community services, churches, and housing units have advocates who can help teachers reach parents.

For all teachers, building healthy relationships with students is an important part of their work. This work extends to building healthy relationships with parents as well. Reaching out to parents is an important part of teaching. When parents and teachers share the same goals for students' academic success, communicate frequently, and support one another, students benefit. ♦



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