

Collaboration: Managing Communications

5

“To create a professional learning community, focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for results.”

—RICHARD DUFOUR

An important aspect of building community is establishing positive rapport with parents. One of a teacher's most important tasks is to communicate with the parents about their students. Research consistently reveals that when parents are involved in their son or daughter's education, the student, of any age, benefits. Teachers who effectively and frequently communicate with parents increase the chances that parents will:

- become meaningfully involved in their son/daughter's education
- reinforce classroom instruction
- support the teacher's management system.

POINTS OF INQUIRY

- How will you design your classroom Back to School Night and Open House to initiate positive working relationships?
- What will you implement to sustain ongoing communications with parents to benefit student achievement?
- In what ways will you establish and maintain collegial collaborations?
- How will you design a system of support to accommodate the diverse needs of your students?

Parent Interactions

“When teachers show they care enough to communicate with parents about their child, they gain an ally in helping the child be a success.”

—MATT BROWN

Welcoming Classroom Events

Most schools host one or two events at the onset of the school year to acquaint the students and parents with the teacher, classroom, and curriculum. Typically the Back to School event is held before the first day of school, and includes parents and students. Within the first month after the students have been attending, the Open House takes place and is usually designed for parent attendance. Check with your school and district for specifics related to these events.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Some schools conduct a “Meet the Teacher” or “Back to School” event just prior to the opening of school.

You may want to distribute a Back-to-School Kit, which includes:

- the school newsletter;
- information about the parent-teacher organization;
- a list of supplies needed for school;
- the class schedule;
- a school map;
- the lunch menu for the month;
- a form that provides parents’ home and work information;
- an emergency form;
- a “Getting to Know Your Child” questionnaire;
- a volunteer card.

view POINT

Students will enter your classroom throughout the year. To assist their families in adjusting to a new school, make extra Back-to-School Kits.

Room Roam

Allow students and parents time to orient themselves with the classroom. The Room Roam activity can help provide guidelines. Be available for questions and introduce yourself to each student and parent. Use this time to begin your positive interactions.

Sample Back to School Activity

Room Roam

1. Find your desk. It has your name on it.
2. Make name tags for you and your parents.
3. Find the fish tank. Count the number of fish in the fish tank.
4. Find the Birthday Chart. When is your birthday? Write it on the Birthday Chart.
5. Find the Tooth Graph. How many teeth have you lost? Put that number on the Tooth Graph.
6. Find the "Me" bulletin board. Draw your portrait and write your name on it. Then put it on the "Me" bulletin board.
7. Find the information desk. Have your parents complete the information forms in the Back-to-School Kit.
8. Make a new friend.



OPEN HOUSE

Successful Open Houses allow you to inform parents about the learning activities the students are experiencing and describe the instructional program. It is also an opportunity to expand your knowledge of the students and their parents. Typically, the parents attend an assembly for school-wide information and then attend a 15–20 minute orientation in their son's or daughter's class. This allows parents an opportunity to "get a feel for" their child's class and their teacher.

To encourage attendance, it is important to formally invite parents early, and remind them of the day and time.

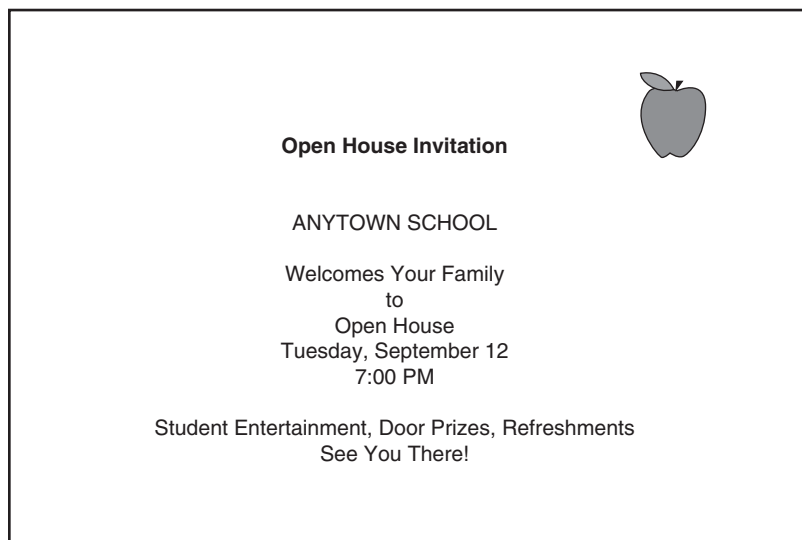
You may want to hold a competition between your classes or grade level competing for the most parents attending. The winning class receives a pizza party, a free period on Friday or a "one-time-only" homework pass.

Listed below are several activities that can be organized for Open House. Implement your choices based on grade level and content area.

Teacher Greeting Wear a name tag and greet parents at the door. Highlight something about each student as they come in. Introduce yourself to the parents you haven't met before.

Mentor Voices

► "Introduce yourself to parents and establish a relationship before challenges develop."



Sample Open House Invitation

Parent Notes and Name Tags All students make their parents' name tags. Have students write a welcome note to their parents or have a work sample on their desks or tables.

Teacher Presentation This presentation should be brief and positive. Address issues such as daily schedules, classroom rules and expectations, learning centers, homework assignments, and special activities. Remember to dress professionally, and smile.

Handouts Provide a handout that summarizes the content of the presentation. Remember, the handout may need to be translated into other languages. This can also be given to parents who may have been unable to attend.

Student Demonstrations If your school encourages student attendance, you can have students engage in group songs, choral readings, or curriculum overviews. They can create these themselves as a class assignment, or the presentation can be something you have chosen for them. Knowing that their child has a specific role may encourage more parents to come.

Reviewing Teaching Approach There are many approaches to teaching. Parents appreciate knowing how and what their children will be taught this year in your classroom. Highlight your grade level curriculum guide, student standards, and your instructional strategies.

view POINT

Using the contact form allows you time to research information needed to respond meaningfully to parents' concerns.

Contact Form Open House is a night to meet and welcome all families. Unfortunately, some parents may try to monopolize your time to deal with more personal issues. If parents try to engage you in an individual conference, you can firmly and politely redirect them by offering a contact form to complete.



Sample Quilt

School/Class Policies Check with front office for any universal message that the administration and/or department may want on the board for all parents to read, such as the tardy policy. You may also want to distribute the school or class handbook, identifying school-wide policies or classroom expectations.

Class Quilt Students and the teacher draw and label pictures of themselves. Arrange pictures in a quilt-like fashion. This creates a strong sense of classroom community and can be showcased at Open House.

Refreshments Serve light refreshments. Ask for parent contributions or request funding from the parent organization.

Door Prizes Hold drawings for door prizes, such as children's books, markers, fancy pencils, or items with the school logo. Teachers can encourage parents to complete an information card and drop it in a fish bowl. The teacher draws one or two cards per class and gives away items.

PARENT VOLUNTEERS

Many parents and grandparents look forward to volunteering in their child's classroom, or even are available to help from home. Distribute volunteer cards to know which types of activities parents would be willing to assist with. Cards can also be used for drawing door prizes at Back to School or Open House.

Volunteer Options

Celebration Planners Help by planning and managing classroom celebrations throughout the year. One parent may wish to take the lead for each party. These parents and grandparents usually make a two- to three-hour time commitment about four times a year.

Parent Tutors Work with students in small groups, or tutor one-to-one. This type of parental role requires parents who are willing to make consistent weekly commitments. These parents and grandparents should be willing to spend time planning and debriefing with the teachers.

view POINT

Whatever parent jobs you decide on, be sure to help parents and grandparents complete their tasks successfully the first time. For example, it will be necessary to demonstrate how to use the copier, work the laminator, or place a book order.

Parent Helpers Help classroom through options such as preparing learning activities or creating bulletin boards. These parents and grandparents should make monthly or bimonthly time commitments.

At-Home Helpers Support classroom teacher through options such as preparing games, creating bulletin boards, or organizing and managing book orders. These parents and grandparents need to respond to time deadlines, but may work at home to complete tasks.

Field Trip Helpers Accompany students and teachers on field trips. Help manage student behavior and assist teacher.

ORGANIZING VOLUNTEERS

Keeping track of your parent help requires a little organization. After you have collected your parent volunteer forms, condense the information for your easy reference and keep it easily accessible to contact parents when a volunteer activity is needed.

GUIDELINES FOR PARENT VOLUNTEERS

Once you have determined what capacity parents or grandparents are interested in, it is time to conduct “Job Alike” workshops. If you have two or three parents who wish to be “Parent Helpers” or “At-Home Parent Helpers,” ask them to meet with you for a time period after school. At this time you can review the specifics of certain tasks you will be asking them to complete.

Beyond sharing the “how-to-do-its,” it is also time to review school policies and discuss any questions they might have.

- Do they need to sign in at the office?
- Do they need to wear name tags?
- Where do they park?
- Can they bring younger children?

view POINT

Research has consistently demonstrated that parent involvement is positively correlated to student achievement. The teacher’s role should be to encourage and manage parental participation in many ways.

view POINT

It is important to remind parents about maintaining students’ confidentiality.

VOLUNTEER CARD

Parent Name/s _____

Student's Name _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____

Cell Phone _____ E-mail _____

I would be willing to:

_____ Coordinate classroom celebrations

_____ Work in classroom with students

_____ Work in classroom on assigned tasks

_____ Work at home on assigned tasks

_____ Other _____

Please list any other ways you would be willing to assist our class.

KH
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Sample Volunteer Organization Chart

Parent Helper	Phone #	Parent Helper	At-Home Helper	Celebration Planner	Parent Tutor	Notes
Mrs. Smith	(602) 555-6210				✓ M*	Fall Curriculum
Mr. Turner	(602) 555-8355	✓ T* 11:00				Likes to do graphics and science
Mrs. Valdez	(602) 555-4385	✓				Computer tech
Mrs. Marks	(602) 555-6153			✓		Art appreciation
Mrs. Pratz	(602) 555-7865	✓ T*		✓ F*		Field trip sponsor
Mrs. Jones	(602) 555-2386		✓			Speaker

* Denotes day parents are available to work

Ongoing Contacts

Communicating with parents can be done most effectively if done proactively. Classroom publications should be designed to review student learning activities or directly inform parents about specific concepts.



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view POINT

In some schools the principal will need to approve all communications. In other schools, principals only want a copy of your letter. Be sure to inquire about the policy at your school.

view POINT

To be sure the first-day communiqué is read by parents, include a detachable and returnable portion for parent signature and responses.

NEWSLETTERS

Newsletters can be an effective home-school communication tool. When sent out regularly, parents will begin to expect them and what type of information they provide. Be sure to represent yourself professionally by sending out an error-free newsletter with an appealing format. Your written communications will make a lasting impression. Have a colleague or your mentor edit your work for grammar, spelling, and, most importantly, a positive “tone.” For example, “Students need to wear comfortable clothes to school,” not “Students should not wear dress clothes to school.”

First-Day Communiqué During the opening day of school you have a perfect opportunity to introduce yourself, establish expectations and routine procedures, and ask for parental support. The first-day communiqué to the parents should introduce you as the teacher, describe some feature of the learning activities the students will experience in your class, review classroom expectations, and encourage parents to contact you if they have questions. Your communiqué might refer to the school newsletter or handbook, which often includes information about school hours, bus schedules, attendance policies and procedures, and cafeteria information. It can also introduce features of upcoming weekly newsletters.

Parent Perspective Questionnaires can provide valuable information that will help you meet your students’ needs. This survey could be sent home with the student on the first day of school or completed at Back to School or Open House.



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Sample Parent Questionnaire

I am looking forward to being your child's teacher. Since your child's learning, happiness and health are so important to me, I am asking you to answer the following questions and return. I look forward to getting to know both you and your child better.

Name Jennifer Vandush Age 6 Date of Birth 1/21

Parent/Guardian Name/s Claudia and John Vandush

Home Phone (480) 555-4287 Work Phone (480) 555-5376

E-mail JVandush@email.org

1. How will your child be transported to and from school? School bus
2. How is your child's overall health? Good, but she does have asthma.
3. Are there health concerns that I should know about? Food allergies? Colds? Ear infections? No
4. List any medications your child takes regularly. Inhaler as needed.
5. How many hours of sleep a night does your child usually get? 9 hours
6. List the names and ages of your other children.
Brian 7 years old
Amanda 3 years old
7. What activities does your child enjoy the most? Jennifer enjoys sports. She likes computer games and playing with her friends.
8. What languages are spoken in the home? English
9. What are you child's favorite TV shows? Movies? Sailor Moon /Dr. Doolittle
10. What is the title of your child's favorite book? I Spy
11. Are there other concerns or things that I should know about? No

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

I am looking forward to being your child's teacher. Since your child's learning, happiness and health are so important to me, I am asking you to answer the following questions and return. I look forward to getting to know both you and your child better.

Name _____ Age _____ Date of Birth _____

Parent/Guardian Name/s _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____

E-mail _____

1. How will your child be transported to and from school? _____

2. How is your child's overall health? _____

3. Are there health concerns that I should know about? Food allergies? Colds? Ear infections? _____

4. List any medications your child takes regularly. _____

5. How many hours of sleep a night does your child usually get? _____

6. List the names and ages of your other children. _____

7. What activities does your child enjoy the most? _____

8. What languages are spoken in the home? _____

9. What are your child's favorite TV shows? Movies? _____

10. What is the title of your child's favorite book? _____

11. Are there other concerns or things that I should know about? _____



Weekly Newsletters One-page newsletters need to be sent weekly. They should:

- be reader-friendly and conversational;
- review briefly the high points of student learning;
- preview the goals and activities planned for the coming week;
- recognize parents who have helped support classroom learning; for example, parents who accompanied the class on a field trip;
- provide announcements;
- be sent home consistently on one particular day of the week; Mondays are generally best;
- have consistent sections each week so parents know where to look for specific information.

The following page offers an example of a weekly newsletter, and includes easy-to-read and relevant classroom information.

Monthly Newsletters By third grade, students can begin to write regular columns in newsletters. Monthly newsletters created with teacher and student input enhance a sense of community. They provide parents with an opportunity to preview the curriculum and classroom projects for the upcoming month, and review recent learning. Monthly newsletters are generally two to three pages in length. They can include features such as: From a Kid's Eye View, Dear Teacher, Monthly Calendar, and Curriculum Overview to inform parents in a fun and interesting manner.

Teachers can involve students in the following way:

1. The teacher assigns groups of students to cover featured sections of the monthly newsletter.
2. Students gather resources needed.
3. Writing teams write and peer edit each other's work.
4. The teacher provides feedback and assists for computer input, formatting, and final editing.

view POINT

English may not be the parents' first language. Therefore, a teacher should attempt to have all written communication translated into the language appropriate for the student's parents.

view POINT

When you send home newsletters, be sure to file in a section of your teacher notebook or lesson plan book. This practice provides you a complete and immediate record of correspondence, and provides easy access for coordinating curriculum with parent communication for the following year.



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Sample Weekly Newsletter

ALONE WE CAN DO SO LITTLE; TOGETHER WE CAN DO SO MUCH. -HELEN KELLER



DATES TO REMEMBER:

- September 23: Open House from 6:00PM to 8:00PM
- September 27: State Capitol Field Trip
- September 30: Early Release at 12:30PM

WORDS OF WISDOM:

Every day, an old man walked up the beach with a pail, picking up starfish that had been washed in by the tide and throwing them back into the sea. One day a young boy stopped the old man and asked, "Why do you throw the starfish back? It doesn't matter. They will only wash up on the shore again tomorrow."

The old man picked a starfish out of his pail, threw it as far as he could into the sea, and replied...

"It mattered to that one."

- Author Unknown

Schoolhouse of Honea

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4

SEPTEMBER 23

A Week at a Glance

This past week the students have participated in various learning activities.

Math: We reviewed multiplication and division facts 1 through 12. The students are really understanding the concept and ready to move to the next step.

Reading: Students read from two different cultural versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* and compared multiple aspects of the story. We also began reading *Esperanza Rising* during teacher read-aloud time.

Science: We began an introductory unit on the planets and students began researching a planet of their choice.

Social Studies: We are coming to a close on the judicial system unit. This week students engaged in a mock Senate session. Thanks to the parents who assisted in the organization of this great learning experience.



A Look to the Future

This week's learning opportunities include many new concepts and ideas.

Math: We will continue practicing multiplication and division, as well as begin learning how to multiply double-digits.

Reading: In our reading textbook, we will be reading and comparing two cultural versions of *Cinderella*. We will continue reading *Esperanza Rising* during teacher read-aloud.

Science: Students will continue researching their planet and then sharing their knowledge. They will begin making a plan for their solar system diagrams.

Social Studies: We will be taking a field trip to the State Capitol this week as culmination to the judicial system unit.



People to Know

Classroom

Teacher: Ms. J. Honea Rm 13
Direct Line: 480-555-0013
Email: jhonea@school.org

Teacher's Aide: Ms. L. Andrew

ELL Aide: Ms. S. Martin

Resource Teacher:
Ms. H. Smith

School Office

Principal: Mrs. B. Haily

Office Assistant: Ms. J. Higgins
Direct Line: 480-555-0000

Nurse: Mrs. N. Hall
Direct Line: 480-555-0072

Attendance Line:
480-555-0071

Classroom Wish List



- ✓ Styrofoam balls (various sizes)
- ✓ Metal hangers
- ✓ Elmer's glue
- ✓ Tempera paint
- ✓ Boxes of tissues
- ✓ Hand sanitizer

Thanks to Mrs. Hardy for supplying snacks this week and next week. The students and I greatly appreciate them.

Announcements

- ☆ Open House is tonight from 6-8. Come visit our classroom to see what your child has been learning.
- ☆ Our *Star Student of the Week* is Joseph Gall. He is a hard worker and a good friend to classmates.
- ☆ I will be out on Monday and Tuesday of next week to attend a professional training on implementing our new reading program.

District Office

Superintendent: Dr. J. Weiss

Asst. Superintendents:
Mrs. G. Layen
Mr. H. Johan
Dr. L. Batey

Office Assistant: Mrs. R. Coop
Direct Line: 480-555-6613

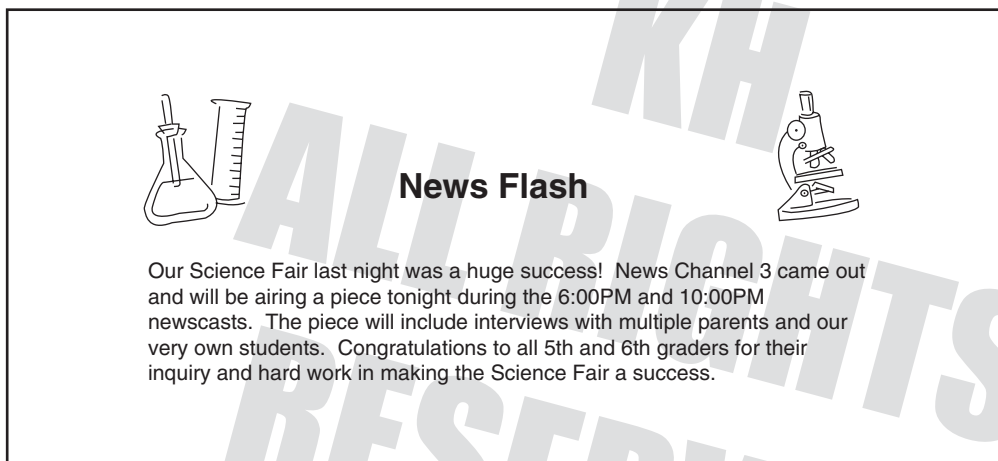
This activity has several positive features:

- It serves as a closure-summarization activity.
- Students have an opportunity to practice writing a brief, journalistic text.
- Students work together to edit and improve their own and others' writing skills.
- Each student in the classroom is co-author of two articles.
- Parents receive frequent communication about classroom activities from students' perspective.
- Students have a regular and authentic opportunity to publish their work for others to read and appreciate.

view POINT

Parents respond more consistently when they receive frequent communiqués from the classroom teacher.

News Flashes There are times when events occur or announcements must be shared that require immediate publication. News Flashes are very brief, but still cover the Who, What, Where, When, and Why.



The image shows a sample news flash for a science fair. It features a central title "News Flash" flanked by illustrations of a flask and test tube on the left, and a microscope on the right. Below the title is a short paragraph of text. A large, semi-transparent watermark "KH ALL RIGHTS RESERVED" is overlaid across the entire image.

— Sample News Flash

PHONE/E-MAIL LOGS

Personal interactions are opportunities for parents and teachers to share information about a student's needs in two-way verbal or written communication. A powerful tool for communicating with parents is the telephone. Unfortunately, phone calls have traditionally been reserved for "bad news." Whenever possible, however, the phone should be used as an instrument of good news. Successful teachers have found that brief, positive, frequent telephone conversations help to establish strong partnerships with parents. When parents receive a phone call regarding something positive, they immediately sense the teacher's enthusiasm for teaching their son/daughter and are more likely to become involved in classroom activities and support the teacher.

In today's technological society, e-mails are often a preferred method of communication. Remember, however, that your tone is sometimes lost within written communication, so re-read what you have written to make sure it reflects your message. In addition, many schools and individual classroom teachers maintain websites for ongoing and up-to-date information and communication. All correspondence to parents should be documented. The example below shows ways to manage and maintain records of phone conversations. E-mails can be printed and filed in the student's parent communication file or stored in an on-line folder.

Sample Phone Call Log

Student Name Robert Romero Parent Name/s Mrs. Rodriguez

Phone 555-7272

Date Feb. 2nd Regarding Student has been absent for 3 days

Action Robert has chicken pox; he will be out at least 4 more days. Older brother will pick up get well card from class and deliver work.

Date March 3rd Regarding Academic progress

Action Robert is having great success with reading, especially in paired reading. Is hesitant to write during writer's workshop. Teacher will send home writing briefcase and have parents write a story with Robert.

Date April 12th Regarding Writing progress

Action Robert is showing more comfort and confidence with his writing. He shared a story he wrote with his parents to the class today.

PHONE CALL LOG

Student Name _____ Parent Name/s _____

Phone _____

Date _____ Regarding _____

Action _____

Date _____ Regarding _____

Action _____

Date _____ Regarding _____

Action _____

Date _____ Regarding _____

Action _____



view POINT

Conferences are physically, intellectually, and emotionally demanding. You may wish to bring nutritious snacks and beverages to sustain your energy.

CONFERENCES

Successful conferences are the result of careful planning and organization. A successful conference means that parents and teachers have:

- shared information about the student and both have a better understanding and appreciation of the student's needs and abilities.
- developed a mutual trust and respect for each other and will continue to work together for the benefit of the student.

Conference Planning and Scheduling Begin scheduling conferences at least two weeks prior to the first conference dates. To do this, you will need to make sure that you:

- arrange conferences so parents can attend early in the morning, after school or in the evening;
- allow 15–20 minutes per conference and schedule at least five minutes between conferences;
- establish a first-response, first-scheduled policy;
- allow a choice of three time slots in order of preference so that parents may schedule conferences at convenient times. Parents are more likely to attend if they have a choice of time;
- include a response confirmation sheet.

When a majority of parents have returned their request, phone the parents who have not responded (this saves a great deal of frustration and “paper tag”). After you have scheduled everyone, publish a confirmed schedule listing all appointments; this reminds parents and reaffirms the importance of everyone's participation. A sample scheduling letter is provided on the following page.

Preparing for Progress Review Conference Students of all ages are highly complex, social individuals who must function appropriately in two different worlds: school and home. Parents need to understand how a student uses his/her social skills to become a productive member in the classroom community. Likewise, teachers need to understand the student's home life and recognize its significant influence on a student's behavior, interests, and ability to learn.

Parent/teacher communications reach their full potential when parents and teachers share information about the student from their unique perspectives, value the student's individual strengths and needs, and work together for the benefit of the student. The best opportunity teachers have for engaging parents in this interaction is during the parent/teacher conference. Conferences, which feature a positive two-way exchange, are the result of careful planning and organization. There are generally two types of parent/teacher conferences, the pre-established conference that reviews the student's classroom progress, and spontaneous conferences that deal with a range of specific concerns that occur throughout the school year.

The Progress Review Conference is an opportunity for both partners to share information about the student's social interactions, emotional maturity, and cognitive development in school and at home. One way to help a parent prepare to be an active member during the conference is a pre-conference questionnaire. The parent questionnaire also gives the teacher a preview of parent concerns. This allows the teacher time to collect information to be better prepared for the conference. The chart on page 200 provides a format for a pre-conference questionnaire.

Sample Scheduling Letter

Hello,

I am looking forward to talking with each of you during Parent/Teacher Conference Week, November 1–5. Please sign up for the three time slots that are most convenient for you. To assure you receive the time slot that is best for you, please send in the response form as soon as possible.

Please note that, because of parent-teacher conferences, students will be released at 12:00 PM. on Thursday, November 4th and all day Friday, November 5th.

Student's Name _____ Teacher _____

Parent's Name _____ Phone _____

Place a 1, 2 and 3 by your first three choices of conference times.

Tuesday AM	Wednesday AM	Thursday PM	Friday AM
7:40 _____	7:40 _____	2:00 _____	7:40 _____
8:00 _____	8:00 _____	2:20 _____	8:00 _____
		2:40 _____	8:20 _____
		3:00 _____	8:40 _____
		3:20 _____	9:00 _____
		3:40 _____	9:20 _____
		BREAK	BREAK
		4:20 _____	10:00 _____
		4:40 _____	10:20 _____
		5:00 _____	10:40 _____
		5:20 _____	11:00 _____
		5:40 _____	11:20 _____
		6:00 _____	11:40 _____
		6:20 _____	BREAK
		6:40 _____	1:00 _____
			1:20 _____
			1:40 _____
			2:00 _____
			2:20 _____
			2:40 _____
			BREAK
			3:20 _____
			3:40 _____
			4:00 _____
			4:20 _____
			4:40 _____

PRE-CONFERENCE QUESTIONNAIRE EXAMPLE

Greetings,

To help us make the most of our parent/teacher time, I am sending this questionnaire to help facilitate our progress review conference. Please read and complete the questions. If you have any other concerns, list them on the questionnaire and we will discuss any of your inquiries during our time together. Please return by: _____.

Child's Name _____

Parent/Guardian Completing Form _____

1. How would you describe your son/daughter's attitude towards school?
2. What school activity does your son/daughter most enjoy?
3. What school activity does your son/daughter least enjoy?
4. How do you think you can help your son/daughter learn?
5. Are there any unique situations or challenges you want to share to help me understand your son/daughter better?

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

(Teacher Name)



Sharing Student Progress During the Progress Review Conference the teacher will, of course, share information about the student’s academic progress. Beyond test scores, portfolio artifacts, and academic progress, however, most parents also want to know about their son/daughter’s social interactions and classroom behavior.

To keep the conference focused and allow time to review all aspects of the student’s performance in 15 minutes, it is important to use a structured format during the progress review conference. The structure increases the chance that both the teacher and parent concerns are adequately discussed.

Four-Step Conference Plan Following a conference plan will allow for a more productive and focused conference. In some cases, depending on who initiates the conference, parent or teacher, the order of input may be reversed, or be more of a fluid interchange of questions and responses.

1. *Opening*—The teacher’s opening statements help establish a foundation for a proactive conference. Use this time to identify conference objectives and set a positive tone. Positive statements need to be sincere. For example, “Lydia is eager to learn.”
2. *Parent Input*—“First, I am going to ask you to share with me what you have observed about Lydia this year that makes you feel good about her learning, and also what questions or concerns you have about her progress.”

(It is important for parents to focus on their son/daughter’s academic and social strengths when they meet with you. It is also important for you to know what the parents view as their son/daughter’s major academic or social concerns.)

3. *Teacher Input*—“Now, I will share some of Lydia’s work with you and my observations about her progress. We’ll discuss ideas that will continue to encourage her learning.”

(The success of the parent/teacher relationship depends upon the teacher’s ability to highlight the student’s academic/social strengths and progress. When areas of concern are discussed, it is important to provide examples of the student’s work or to review the observational data to illustrate the point. Often the issues the parents reveal are directly related to the teacher’s concerns. Whenever possible, connect these concerns. This reinforces the feeling that the teacher and the parents have the same goals for helping the student grow. It is essential to solicit the parents’ views and suggestions for helping the child, and also provide concrete examples to help the student improve.)

4. *Closure*—“Finally, we’ll summarize the conference by reviewing the home and school activities that will best help Lydia continue to progress.”

(To make sure both teacher and parents have reached a common understanding, it is necessary to briefly review the main ideas and suggestions for action that were discussed during the conference.)

view POINT

Occasionally, a parent might want to know how another student in your class is progressing. It is important for you to remember that this is confidential.

CONFERENCE PLANNER

Student Name _____ Parent Name/s _____

Conference Date _____ Time _____

Other Teachers Present _____

1. Welcome and Positive Statement _____

Review Conference Steps—After I review our conference objectives, I will ask you to review _____ progress, sharing with me both academic/social strengths and areas of concern. Next, I'll review work with you and discuss academic/social strengths and areas in which we will want _____ to grow. Finally, we will discuss the main points we discussed today and review the strategies that will help _____ make progress.

2. Parent Input—What have you observed about _____ this year that makes you feel good about his/her learning?

What are your main concerns? _____

3. Teacher Input—I would like to share some observations about _____ work and review the areas of strengths and the skills that need to be refined.

4. Closure—Let's review the things we talked about that will facilitate continued success.



STUDENT – PARENT – TEACHER CONFERENCES

Another innovation in conferences is the inclusion of the students. The students participate equally; sharing their work, discussing areas that he/she has noticed improvement, and establishing academic and/or social goals. This type of conference requires the student to be an active participant in selecting what work will be featured in the portfolio. In addition, the teacher must help students develop the skill to evaluate their own performance.

Since a three-way conference may be a new experience for parents, it is important for the teacher to establish guidelines for parents and students. A letter sent home explaining the format of the conference and discussing each person's role is essential. Parents are encouraged to ask open-ended questions, such as:

- “What did you learn about the most?”
- “What did you work the hardest to learn?”
- “What do you want to learn about more?”

Questions such as these encourage students to analyze their own learning, and also help them to set new goals. Parents should not criticize the child's work or focus on any negative aspect of any material that is presented during the conference. Negative comments, particularly from parents, will only inhibit learning and dampen excitement about school.

Classroom Scenario

The following is a brief excerpt of a three-way conference at the last conference of the year. Notice that Manuel does most of the talking:

Mother: Manuel, what have you worked hardest to learn?

Manuel: My writing. I can do it faster and all of my friends like reading my stories now. I draw really good illustrations—everybody likes them.

Teacher: Manuel, can you read your parents an excerpt from a favorite story you wrote?

(Manuel reads the pre-determined portion of his story with great confidence. He reads with great fluency and intonation. His parents smile, and are impressed with their son's comical pictures.)

Teacher: Manuel, what else have you been working on?

Manuel: My math facts. I know them all and even helped Shelly and Robbie put together the math facts board.

Father: Manuel, what do you want to learn next year?

Manuel: I want to read more chapter books. I want to get my own library card. I want to learn more math facts, you know, like Maria (his older sister) can do. I want to write more books and publish them in the school library.

Mentor Voices

“Be open, and welcome parent involvement.”

Setting the Scene The day of conferences has arrived. You have scheduled parents and have organized the student portfolios, completed report cards, and completed conference format forms. To complete your preparation, consider organizing the waiting and conference areas.

view POINT

In your waiting area, include some of the products the students have created, such as group reports, stories, or a classroom photo album.

view POINT

You may need to have a language translator at some conferences; contact district or school office for suggestions.

Waiting Area On the days of the parent/teacher conferences, you will want to consider providing a waiting area for parents, as even the most carefully planned schedule can go awry. Obviously, it is important that your full attention be focused on the parent/s you are currently meeting. Therefore, if possible, the waiting area should be visually and auditorially set apart from the regular classroom.

Conference Setting To encourage positive interaction and promote two-way dialogue, you may consider conducting the conferences at a “neutral” location, such as a table located in a private section of the classroom. Conducting the conference at your desk, with you sitting directly across from the parents, may convey an adversarial message.

Proactive Statements Sometimes the information you must share about a student is difficult for the parents to hear. How you convey this type of information can “make or break” a conference. Negative statements may cause parents to become defensive and stop listening. Parents will more likely continue to listen if the teacher focuses on the positive and takes a proactive stance. For example, “Joe can pass the class if . . .” rather than “Joe will fail the class unless. . . .” The following examples provide a negative statement, samples of more positive ways to express the same points, and examples of supporting details.

Sample Conference Communication

Teacher Concern	Illustration of Negative Statement	Proactive Replacement Statement	Supporting Details
Not completing class work	<i>He wastes half the morning fooling around.</i>	<i>He has so much energy and curiosity that he is sometimes challenged in keeping focused on his work.</i>	<i>He talks to his friends and looks to see what others are doing.</i>
Insecurity	<i>When something is hard or difficult for him, he won't even try.</i>	<i>He is a good worker when he is familiar with the material. He needs to apply the same habits to unfamiliar material.</i>	<i>When the work is difficult, he asks to leave the room, tears the paper, or throws his book on the floor.</i>
Poor social skills	<i>If he does not like you, you know it. He makes fun of students who are not in his group.</i>	<i>He is very perceptive; he can identify with other people's strengths as well as their weaknesses. This gives him an edge that he sometimes uses to tease other students.</i>	<i>He knows what makes others uncomfortable and self-conscious (weight, height, braces); he points it out to them (calls them fat, shorty, tinsel teeth).</i>

Managing Frustrated Parents Unfortunately, even the most prepared and tactful teacher will at one time or another deal with a frustrated or hostile parent. Generally, these parents are upset because they believe their son/daughter is not being treated fairly or given enough attention. The following scenario illustrates specific types of hostile behavior. The goal in all cases is to diffuse the parent's anger/frustration and begin to develop solutions to improve or resolve the problem. Illustrative examples of what steps you might take to ease the conference to more productive grounds are provided. Teachers can use both verbal and nonverbal communication to respond to the parent's inner feelings by acknowledging the validity of the parent's concerns.

Occasionally a parent is so angry and verbally abusive that the present conference cannot accomplish anything constructive. If several attempts to refocus the conference have failed, the teacher needs to calmly end the conference by acknowledging that the challenges seem to need more resources to support their discussion and that it should benefit all parties to reschedule another time when the principal and/or other resource personnel may join the discussion.

view POINT

It is important for the teacher to recognize that unreasonable hostility may have origins beyond the student's problems at school. Rescheduling the conference allows tempers to cool and time for the teacher to further investigate possible reasons for the parent's aggressive behavior.

Classroom Scenario

Managing Frustrated Parents

Parent: My son's math has not improved since he was placed with you.

(Teacher should ignore direct "attack." Instead, focus attention on the student's problem.)

Teacher: I'm concerned about his math, too. Let's focus on what we think his academic difficulties are and how we can work together to help him.

Problem-Solving Interactions At the elementary level, the progress review conference is generally scheduled after the first and the third grading periods. However, this is not the only time teachers may need to meet with parents. The following case study illustrates how the teacher and parents worked together to help identify and resolve a specific problem in the home that was creating tension in school life.

Scenario

Problem-Solving Interactions

Maria—Six-and-a-half-year-old Maria Kelly had started her first grade at Broadway School as a happy young girl. She knew all of the alphabet sounds and symbols and was using invented spelling to write in her journal. Maria attended kindergarten at Broadway School the year before so she had a number of friends both at school and home. Maria smiled easily and enjoyed doing her schoolwork until the middle of October. At this time Maria showed more emotional sensitivity, had difficulty selecting a book and reading during DEAR (Drop Everything And Read), and did very limited writing during Writer's Workshop time. Several days after Maria's behavior suddenly changed, her teacher, Ms. J., called her parents.

Mr. and Mrs. Kelly, Maria's parents, came to school the following day. Ms. J. described the change in Maria's behavior and asked the parents if they had any ideas about what may have caused the change in Maria. They revealed that since the first week of October, Maria's grandmother, who had become widowed that summer, moved into the Kelly's house. Since the grandmother was still grieving, both Mr. and Mrs. Kelly were spending a great deal of time in the evening consoling her. Ms. J. asked if Maria's evening or bedtime routines had been altered since her grandma had moved into the house. After thinking for a moment, both parents admitted they had been spending most of their time either talking to Grandmother or talking to each other about her psychological health and financial situation. Before Grandmother moved in, they had regularly watched TV with their daughter and had an established bedtime routine of storybook reading. They had both noticed that even though they were sending Maria to bed at the same time, they often found her awake when they went to bed a couple of hours later.

At that point in the discussion, it was becoming clear to the Kellys and Ms. J. that at least part of Maria's challenge was related to not getting enough sleep and having a change in her home environment. They reasoned that she might be having difficulty falling asleep because her normal bedtime routines had been disrupted. Mrs. Kelly also felt that Maria, an only child, might be feeling somewhat displaced at home and uncertain of the recent family dynamics.

Ms. J. asked the Kellys what they thought they could do to help Maria deal with her feelings and to adjust to the new situation in their home. Both Mr. and Mrs. Kelly felt they needed to resume Maria's normal bedtime routine immediately. The Kellys wanted Ms. J. to keep them informed of Maria's behavior. Ms. J. suggested that she could send home a personal note with Maria each day for the next two weeks. The Kellys were grateful to Ms. J. for bringing Maria's behavior to their attention. Ms. J. was pleased that the Kellys would be attending to Maria's sleep needs and were very willing to begin to resolve the contextual problems.

best PRACTICES

In a study of 234 ethnically diverse parents of school students, the parents rated the importance of knowing what their children were learning in school and the importance of helping their children with academic work. Drummond and Stipek found that parents rated the importance of involvement in their child's academics higher when a teacher recommended that they help.

In addition, the study indicated that parents perceived the school as a viable source of information. Therefore, teachers need to be committed to communicating with parents about their children's learning.

Drummond, K.V., Stipek, D. (2004, January). Low-income parents' beliefs about their role in children's academic learning. *The Elementary School Journal*, 104(3), 197-213.

Questions for Reflection

evaluation ? QUESTIONS

PARENT INTERACTIONS

- How will you plan for Open House or Meet the Teacher?
- How will you encourage parent participation at Open House?
- How will you share information about your teaching philosophy?
- How will you share information about your instructional approach?

ONGOING PARENTAL CONTACTS

- How will you organize and design a plan for ongoing communication with parents?
- How will you document parental interactions?
- How will students share their learning with their parents?
- How will you communicate with language-minority parents?
- How will you schedule for conferences?
- How will you gain parents' perspectives of student progress and instructional needs?
- How will you design your conference time?
- How will you determine whether or not you will incorporate the student in the conference?
- How will you decide what information you will share with parents?

- How will you design your classroom Back to School Night and Open House to initiate positive working relationships?
- What will you implement to sustain ongoing communications with parents to benefit student achievement?

Collegial Relationships

“The plain truth is that the more we can work as a team and as teammates, the more probable our individual and joint success.”

—THE MASTER TEACHER

School Community

Building positive relationships among your colleagues is critical to your overall job satisfaction and to maximizing the effectiveness of your school community.

The relationships you develop with administrators, mentors, grade level or department colleagues, and committee team members will help frame your professional practice. The resources available through these individuals will also lighten your load.

Mentor Voices

➤ "Collaborate with other teachers, and gain ideas and information from them."

It is important to note the importance of reciprocation in these relationships. This includes your willingness to contribute to the professional tasks that influence the school community and to be open to feedback and input from your valued colleagues.

SUPPORT FROM AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO ADMINISTRATION

One of the goals of school and district administration is for all teachers to embrace the school community. Develop a respectful working relationship with your administration. Being competent and accountable in your professional role enhances your ability to solicit assistance when needed.

Your administrator will support you in a variety of ways, for example, by setting up a mentoring relationship or directing you to systems of support.

MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

A mentoring relationship is one of the most valuable collegial relationships. Whether or not you are assigned a mentor or mentee, take initiative to engage in this impactful partnership by seeking a mentor or mentee, even in a more informal way.

Qualifications of an Effective Mentor

- Master classroom teacher
- Interpersonal skills
- Advocate for support of mentee
- Facilitator skills

Recommendations for Mentor/Mentee Match

- Consider grade and subject level
- Consider the physical proximity of mentor and mentee
- Consider both teachers' schedules

Log your interactions, and reflect for professional growth and development.



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INTERACTIONS CONTACT LOG

Date	Beginning Time	Ending Time	Total Time	Contact Initiated by Beginning Teacher or Mentor Teacher	Type of Contact One-on-One/Phone Call/E-mail/Journal/ Drop-in Visit/Classroom Observation/ Conference/Other

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EXPECTATIONS BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

In order for a school community to accomplish all that needs to be done, such as school improvement and extracurricular activities, educators must be involved in tasks beyond the classroom. Keep a running record of your collaborations, activities, and the follow-up needed, to ensure your committed professional responsibilities.

It is an expectation of teachers that they dedicate time to collaborate for achievement and create the various events that make their school an inviting, positive, inclusive place to learn. Decide your area of expertise, and participate in the writing committee, or help organize a school function. Not only do students benefit from these activities, but you will discover that you will too!

Grade Level or Department Teams Your grade level or department team will come to be a close group of colleagues. These are the people you will work with on a regular basis. Be sure to reciprocate the support they provide by contributing to the work effort of the group.

Sample Grade Level/Department Team Involvement

Leadership Opportunities within Grade Level/Department Teams

- Grade Level or Department Chair
- Textbook and Resource Materials Manager
- Curriculum Articulation Member
- School Improvement Team Liaison
- Classroom Management Articulation Representative
- Student Assessment Articulation Representative
- Inventory Manager
- Social Facilitator

Committees Your school and district will organize several committees in which you can participate. Choose one that aligns with your interests and schedule.

Sample Committee Involvement

Academic-Related Committees	Community-Building Committees
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ School Improvement■ School Policies and Procedures■ Grade Level Specific Focus Groups■ Student Standards Alignment■ Curriculum Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Back-to-School■ Fall Festival■ Health and Wellness■ Parent Advisory Board■ Community Engagement

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATIONS LOG

Date _____ Contact initiated by: _____ Position/Role: _____ Person contacted: _____ Position/Role: _____ Purpose: _____ _____ _____	Follow-Up
Date _____ Contact initiated by: _____ Position/Role: _____ Person contacted: _____ Position/Role: _____ Purpose: _____ _____ _____	Follow-Up
Date _____ Contact initiated by: _____ Position/Role: _____ Person contacted: _____ Position/Role: _____ Purpose: _____ _____ _____	Follow-Up

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Sponsorships Many extracurricular activities for students require a teacher sponsor. This type of commitment, although requiring concentrated time, allows you to build your relationships with students and get to know them better. Consider your strengths and interests when choosing an activity to sponsor.

Sample Sponsorship Involvement

Academic-Related Sponsorships	Activity-Related Sponsorships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ecology ■ Chess Club ■ Technology ■ Literary Publications ■ Academic Decathlon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Athletics ■ Fine Arts ■ Student Council ■ Peer Mediation ■ Extra Mile Service

Support Personnel

SCHOOL OR DISTRICT PERSONNEL

There are several professionals who are considered support personnel who will also assist your efforts. Not every school or school district will employ all the personnel listed. However, some assistance will be available within any given school or district. Support personnel include:

- Special education teachers
- Reading and Title I teachers
- School psychologists
- Counselors
- School staff
- Social workers
- Nurses
- ESL/ELL teachers
- Speech or language specialists
- Physical and occupational therapists
- Vocational teachers and coordinators
- Specialists for the hearing or visually impaired
- Media specialists

EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT TEAMS

Educational support teams have been implemented in many school systems to help you solve instructional and social/behavior problems. Using a number of different names, including “building assistance team” or “school-wide assistance team,” the team typically consists of multiple educators, elected by their peers, who provide assistance to teachers in meeting the needs of all students in their classrooms. Check for district-level and school-identified support teams in your education community.

best PRACTICES

Briscoe and Peters conclude that collaboration among teachers plays an important role in assisting teachers to reflect on their teaching. The results of the study indicate that collaboration facilitates change because it provides opportunities for teachers to learn both content and pedagogical knowledge from one another, encourages teachers to be risk takers in implementing new ideas, and supports and sustains the processes of individual change in science teaching.

Briscoe, C., & Peters, J. (1997). Teacher collaboration across and within schools: Supporting individual change in elementary science writing. *Science Education*, 81, 51–65.

Questions for Reflection

evaluation? QUESTIONS

COLLEGIAL RELATIONSHIPS

- How will you get to know key personnel?
- How will you obtain curriculum resources from the librarian or media specialist?
- How will you co-plan curriculum with grade level or department members?
- How will you build your relationship with your mentor?
- How will you communicate classroom successes with your administrator?
- How will you decide which classroom challenges to take to your administrator?

- In what ways will you establish and maintain collegial collaborations?
- How will you design a system of support to accommodate the diverse needs of your students?

SUPPORT PERSONNEL

- How will you learn district-level resources?
- How will you become familiar with school-level support resources?

Self-Assessment of Professional Growth

Name	Date				
Grade Level/Content Area					
Parent Interactions	Low				High
To what degree do I have the knowledge needed for designing my classroom Back-to-School Night and Open House?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
To what degree do I have the skills needed for designing my classroom Back-to-School Night and Open House?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Ongoing Parental Contacts	Low				High
To what degree do I have the knowledge needed for sustaining ongoing communication with parents?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
To what degree do I have the skills needed for sustaining ongoing communication with parents?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Collegial Relationships	Low				High
To what degree do I have the knowledge needed to establish and maintain collegial collaborations?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
To what degree do I have the skills needed to establish and maintain collegial collaborations?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Support Personnel	Low				High
To what degree do I have the knowledge needed to design a system of support to accommodate the diverse needs of my students?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
To what degree do I have the skills needed to design a system of support to accommodate the diverse needs of my students?	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>



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