

The Importance of Home/School Communication

When a student has a disability that affects their ability to communicate, parents are often in the dark about what has happened during their child's school day. This lack of knowledge about successes, challenges, curriculum and even simple happenings can create tension between families and teachers.

Research based benefits of effective home/school communication:

- Increased trust between teachers and parents
- Higher and realistic parent expectations
- Increased parental support/involvement for school initiatives and programs
- Higher degree of commitment by parents to helping children improve
- Improved test scores
- Improved grades
- More positive student attitudes
- Less high risk behavior
- Higher staff morale
- Enhanced relationships between school and community
- Increased donations of goods, materials and services to the school
- Improved parental opinion of and regard for the school/teacher

Tips to create meaningful home/school communication:

- *Ensure that your communications are understood by the family* - communications are most effective in a family's home language.
- *Start the year off on a positive note* by sending a letter of introduction to the parent and student.
- *Invite dialogue.* Rather than telling parents what they should do, open a conversation about an important topic related to the curriculum.
- *Begin and end communications on a positive.* Any difficulty/problem should be covered in the middle.
- *Monitor the tone and body language of face-to-face interactions.* Help parents to see that you like their children, want the best for them and value their input.
- *Empathize.* Show families that you understand and respect demands on their time, finances, and family dynamics.
- *Beware of ghosts.* Everyone brings "ghosts" of past schooling experiences to the table. If you are successful in building respectful and trusting relationships, parties need to name the ghosts and move beyond them.

Example modes and methods of home school communication:

Effective communication may require multiple modes and methods, and teachers should choose methods that best suite their needs and the needs of the families that they serve. Be mindful that not all families utilize the internet and/or email. Here are a few options:

Home/School Communication Notebook

This notebook goes back and forth between home and school each day. Daily notes will be filled out by the teacher and/or aide at school, and then by the parent at home. The form should be developed with input from both the parent and the teacher, and should include information that the student can't readily relay to parents or teachers. The notebook could also contain the school calendar, the daily schedule, the weekly schedule, and contact information for the school team. If the notebook should contain information about behavior challenges, it should also contain behavior successes.

Recorded messages

Voice recorders (e.g. Step by Step Communicators) are inexpensive and portable, making them an easy tool to use for communication between home and school. The teacher or aide can record a short message about the day. The parent can record a short voice message with any updates about home. AAC devices and apps almost always have buttons that are used specifically for home/school news and are easy to record.

Classroom Newsletters

Send home regular classroom newsletters. Older students might assist in the creation of such newsletters. There are many samples of newsletters on the Internet, and you can find free templates at www.teacherspayteachers.com/.

Back to School Night, Open House, Curriculum/Literacy Nights

Encourage all families to attend these events - provide information in their home language.

Phone calls

Make a phone call the first week of school to introduce yourself and share something positive about the student. Talk about an effective way to stay in touch.

Emails

Email can be a convenient method of communication. Keep it brief, and remember to begin and end your communication in a positive way.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Pick a mutual time so parents will be able to attend. Work with fellow teachers who have their siblings as students to pick times that are convenient for the family.

Home visits

Consider offering a home visit for parents who have difficulty getting to the school for an in-person meeting. Take a translator if the family has a different home language.

Apps for communication

There are now apps designed to facilitate communication between teachers, parents, and students. They allow the teacher to send text messages or emails, and keep all phone numbers private. *Remind 101* <https://www.remind101.com/> is an app that allows one-way communication from the teacher. *Class Messenger* <http://www.classmessenger.com/home> is an app that allows two-way communication.