

## ***Effective Parent-Teacher Partnerships: An Introduction for Parents***

All too often, parents and teachers find themselves embroiled in disagreements about how best to help children with special learning needs. Children are always winners when teachers and parents work together effectively. This partnership will ensure that problems can be addressed quickly and that the needs parents, school personnel, and students are reflected in any decision-making process.

A wonderful first step in building this relationship is the parent-teacher conference. Such a meeting, held at the beginning of the school semester, can enable parents and teachers to overview hopes and expectations for the academic year and to overcome potential barriers to communication.

Equally important is to create a plan for regular and ongoing contact that will ensure that concerns are addressed before they turn into problems.

1. The key to any successful partnership is to establish a relationship of mutual respect and appreciation. An occasional note, informal meeting, or conversation can go a long way toward fostering a productive relationship.
2. By agreeing upon a system for regular and ongoing communication, parents and teachers can best monitor progress and address unexpected needs in a timely manner. Parents and teachers should agree upon a “best time” to meet or speak, or choose to communicate in writing.
3. Parents are well advised to learn about the system within which teachers must do their job and that sometimes compromises their ability to pay closer attention to students with special needs. Parents are encouraged to ask how they can help teachers to overcome obstacles and to promote positive change.
4. Teachers can help parents become active partners in supporting learning by sharing information about class routines. Notifying parents about grading criteria, homework and test schedules, projects, and class trips is very useful, as is establishing guidelines for ways in which parents can help with checking work and studying.
5. Parents should inform teachers about possible factors at home that either pose obstacles to learning or that might enhance the teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom. Family stressors and student’s participation in extra-curricular activities might impact upon school performance.
6. Teachers should inform parents about rules and regulations for the classroom as well as the school community. Parents might be asked to provide feedback regarding behavioral expectations and discipline guidelines at the onset of the school year.
7. Parents may not always be able to assess the workings of the classroom from homework assignments and test grades. Teachers should provide parents with an overview of content area instruction and teaching style. Parents should seek information about classroom routines.
8. Parents are “experts” when it comes to their own children. By providing information to teachers about past positive (and negative) school experiences, teachers can take advantage of what is already known to be good practice with these children. Parents should highlight activities that have been successful in increasing motivation and improving performance. Mention situations that have caused frustration and resulted in underachievement or inappropriate behavior.

9. Just as students are unique learners, parents and teachers have unique characteristics and styles of working with children.

10. Parents and teachers should remind each other that one way to promote success in school is to insure that students feel “special” about their learning. Children should be praised for even small successes.

### **Enhancing Parent -Teacher Interviews**

#### Sample Interview Questions

1. What types of tests were used to evaluate the work assigned? What can be learned from the tests? What limitations do the tests have?

2. What tests were used to assess ability? How well did my child respond to the person giving the test? Was the tester satisfied that my child seemed motivated in the test situation? Do the results agree with your assessments of my child in the classroom? How are the test results used in planning for my child?

3. What strengths does my child display in the classroom? How are these strengths used to help him feel good about himself? How are these used to help in areas where he/she experiences more difficulty?

#### Special Problem Examples

1. Since written tests are clearly a problem (because of test anxiety, or a learning disability, or a broken arm) might a research paper be substituted for partial or extra credit? Could it be tape recorded instead of written?

2. My child has difficulty doing written work. As typing is being taken to eventually become a substitute for hand-written assignments, how important is speed as a test criterion? Can we substitute a high level of accuracy and a reasonable quantity of output in a given block of time but allow short rests for poorly co-ordinate hands?

3. The report card states that my child interacts poorly with his/her peers. Has he/she been observed on the playground? Is he/she less co-operative there than in the classroom? What special approaches are planned to assist him to change?

4. The report card says “He/She needs to take more pride in his work”. I notice many children have their work displayed, but I do not see any of my child’s work. Has he/she ever had his/her work displayed? If he/she cannot get a piece of work done in that is acceptable, can he/she do a special assignment after which will be displayed?

5. “Would benefit from drill” is another statement on his/her report card? What programs could I initiate at home? How can I make this fun? What practice is he/she given at school? How much time is spent on this at school?

6. With evidence indicating the need for special help in a particular area, such as poor comprehension, what special assistance is the school planning to provide?

7. My child appears to need a program adjusted to his special requirements, but the program appears to be lock-step. Is my child expected to adjust to the program, or are there adjustments that can be made in the program? What specific recommendations do you have?

8. If I feel my child is not benefiting from the present classroom as much as I would wish, what options are open to me? What special programs does the school board offer? Have these options been considered?

9. Individualized help is often recommended. Does the school have enough personnel to carry out the specialized programming the teachers would like to see? Is there a volunteer program? How might I assist with this? Are there other ways that parents could assist the school to meet his/her objectives?