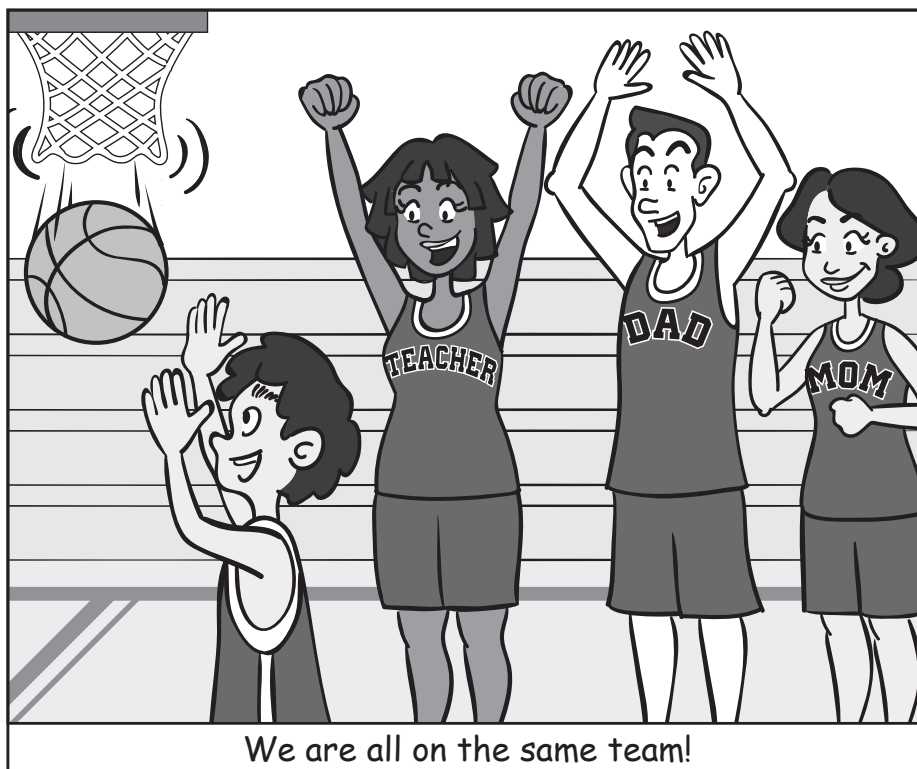


Partnerships with Parents

Parents are their children's first teachers and are the most important advocates for their children. Developing meaningful and positive relationships with parents requires careful planning, constant nurturing, and skillful communication. Educators must guide parents to become partners in the education of their children. The following practices help teachers establish and strengthen partnerships with parents.

- Recognize parents as partners in their children's education.
- Maintain a professional relationship with parents by treating them with respect and fairness.
- Establish positive rapport with parents.
- Develop trusting relationships with parents so they feel comfortable sharing information.
- Express genuine concern for the welfare and success of every child.
- Listen carefully when communicating with parents; be open to their ideas and opinions.
- Get to know parents at the beginning of the school year.
- Communicate that parents are always welcome in the classroom and that their input is valued.
- Contact parents early in the school year, introduce yourself, and inform them you are pleased to be their children's teacher.
- Begin parent/teacher conferences with positive affirmations.
- Display a positive tone when using verbal/nonverbal communication; sit next to parents when conferencing.
- Allow ample time for conferences to promote a meaningful exchange of dialogue.
- Engage in two-way communication, encouraging parents to share their thoughts concerning their children.
- Contact parents in a timely manner when students show signs of needing help (e.g., academically, behaviorally, socially).
- Avoid making judgments or generalizations.
- Provide frequent feedback to parents.
- Share evidence and samples of student learning to show that work is valued.
- Acknowledge that parents have individual needs and concerns and make accommodations accordingly.
- Be sensitive and patient when parents have negative feelings toward school or may be intimidated by the school environment.

- Provide parents with clear and concise guidelines to follow when seeking support.
- Monitor parents' reactions during conversations, pausing to obtain frequent feedback about concerns or questions.
- Allow parents opportunities to contribute to the development of educational plans and goals for their children.
- Emphasize the importance of building strong relationships and showing consistency between home and school.



Communication with Parents

Effective communication is essential in building partnerships with parents. Parents can offer insight into their children's abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. Teachers can share information and data concerning academic, social, and behavioral growth or concerns. Together, parents and teachers share the responsibility for student success. This is accomplished when two-way communication flows, building a positive home and school connection.

Strategies for Teachers

- Develop a yearlong plan for consistent communication with parents.
- Begin the school year with an orientation meeting; communicate expectations and policies (e.g., attendance, school dismissal, homework, grading, behavioral expectations, academic requirements); provide information about your conference period, how parents can become involved in the school, and how and when to reach you.
- Mail letters to parents before school begins; include personal information about your teaching experience, your philosophy of education, and how you plan to engage with parents and families of your students.
- Schedule parent/teacher conferences on a regular basis; allow parents the opportunity to have a voice in making decisions involving their children.
- Maintain records of parent communications according to school and district guidelines.
- Ask parents to identify their preferred methods of communication and use these methods to share information.
- Communicate with parents using a variety of methods (e.g., texts, emails, newsletters, phone calls, home visits, school-to-home notebooks, YouTube, Google+, Facebook®, Pinterest); exhibit discretion in the selection of methods by considering the nature of the content.
- Use two-way communication forms, providing space for parents to respond.
- Update parents about student progress on a regular basis.
- Share student work samples with parents.
- Be visible during morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up.
- Greet parents who are eating lunch with their children and acknowledge parental involvement.

- Practice sensitivity with parents who have special needs.
 - » Language barriers – Provide interpreters.
 - » Inability to read or write – Communicate orally.
 - » Cultural diversity – Show respect for differences.
- Avoid the use of educational jargon and complex terms when conferencing with parents.
- Invite parents to provide feedback about how well their children understand the concepts being practiced through homework assignments.
- Develop a calendar with dates and times of parent nights and meetings; share using a variety of mediums (e.g., email, Facebook®, school website, printed version).
- Host online meetings with parents.
- Distribute weekly newsletters that highlight special activities, concepts being learned, positive comments, success stories, and parental involvement.
- Post information on the school/class website.
- Plan for parental involvement by preparing documents in advance of the school year.
 - » Timeline milestones
 - » Sample letters to parents
 - » Phone scripts
 - » Parent and teacher school commitment forms
 - » Volunteer sign-up sheet (e.g., read to class, become a lunch monitor, chaperone field trip)
 - » Home information forms (e.g., parent phone number, address, email address, contact information)
 - » Meeting logs/phone logs
 - » Ideas and tips to share with parents



Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the ability to use logic and reasoning to solve problems and make thoughtful decisions. A classroom that promotes critical thinking is key to the academic success of students. A supportive environment in which students feel free to make mistakes and to express themselves must be evident in the classroom and the home if students are to become critical thinkers. The teacher's role is to explain the benefits of critical thinking to parents. Teachers support parents as they help their children become critical thinkers. The development of critical thinking skills is crucial to success in school and in life.

Strategies for Teachers

- Define critical thinking.
- Conference with parents about the importance of teaching their children to think critically.
- Ask questions to determine the perception of parents and what they observe at home.
 - » Do you think critical thinking is important? Why or why not?
 - » Do you think the development of critical thinking skills will help your child in school? Why or why not?
 - » Does your child know how to solve problems?
 - » Have you observed your child solving problems? Tell me how your child solved a problem.
 - » Does your child ask for help when facing problems?
 - » How does your child react when problems with peers are encountered?
 - » Does your child understand how to identify pros and cons when making decisions?
- Encourage parents to create an environment that is conducive to critical thinking (e.g., helping children feel safe answering questions, encouraging children to take risks, listening thoughtfully to children, asking thought-provoking questions).
- Explain the thinking required of students in meeting the standards.

Strategies for Parents

- Ask open-ended questions (e.g., those that require more than yes/no answers).
 - » How did you solve that problem?
 - » Why do you think that way?
 - » What changes can you make?
 - » What do you think will happen next?
- Have your child record the pros and cons of possible solutions on a T-chart before decisions are made.
- Ask your child to evaluate decisions (e.g., What worked well? What did not work well?).
- Lead your child to understand the importance of fact-gathering prior to making decisions.
- Encourage your child to share opinions and ideas.
- Demonstrate that you value your child's thoughts by listening attentively.
- Ask your child questions that encourage drawing conclusions, making judgments, or using reasoning to find possible solutions.
- Allow your child think-time after asking questions.
- Brainstorm possible solutions when your child encounters problems; discuss all possible ideas.
- Value curiosity by encouraging your child to ask questions about the world.
- Praise your child for thinking about how problems might be solved.
- Ask questions that require your child to consider alternatives (e.g., What would happen if _____? How could you solve that problem in another way?).
- Provide your child with hands-on experiences and apply the new learning to make it relevant.
- Discuss how to respect the ideas of others; ask questions (e.g., How might your friend feel about this? How did your friend solve that problem?).
- Teach your child to value the viewpoints of others by listening and responding to what others say.
- Have your child explain, clarify, or justify thinking.
 - » Have you thought about the effects of _____?
 - » How is _____ like _____? How is _____ different?

- » How could you improve?
- » How did you get your answer?
- » Which is better? Why?
- Read and discuss books that illustrate problem solving.

