

EFFECTIVE TEACHER-PARENT COMMUNICATION TOOLS TO EMPOWER FAMILIES
TO BE ACTIVE IN THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters
of Arts in Teaching.

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Project Summary

Parent-teacher partnerships are linked to positive student outcomes, improved social skills with peers, increased academic success, and a stronger relationship with teachers (Fefer, 2020). However, efforts to engage families are oftentimes taxing. Without professional development for teachers around building and maintaining positive relationships with parents, good communication can be a daunting task. This led me to ask my question, *How can educators effectively communicate with families to empower them to take an active role in their child's learning?* The goal is to provide professional development and a solid resource to answer this question and lay out a comprehensive plan for teachers.

This project aims to answer the question *How can educators effectively communicate with families to empower them to take an active role in their child's learning?* I will provide a professional development session along with an interactive resource to assist teachers in building and maintaining partnerships with families. The intended outcome of the professional development series is to provide information on the benefits of parent-teacher partnerships along with effective modes of communication to foster the relationships. The desired result of the resource is for teachers to have a tiered program to follow for molding and maintaining partnerships with parents.

Section one is the professional development session and section two is the interactive resource for building relationships with families. Section one gives users of the resource their why. Providing teachers with the research behind parent-teacher collaboration allows them to better understand and be willing to commit to communicating with parents. Section two makes the task manageable with a workbook.

The professional development portion of the project stresses the positive significance of teacher-parent relationships. Tying in research from the literature I reviewed, which states these partnerships between home and school and the subsequent impact on the way the children grew socially and academically. Grounding teachers in the research and providing evidence of the importance of this work allows for the second section to be more successfully utilized and realize its full potential. Once the grounding work is completed the session will turn to the effective ways in which teachers can make connections with parents. By walking through the various modes of communication available to teachers and how to execute those methods, teachers will be able to better use the resources available to them through this project.

**EFFECTIVE TEACHER-PARENT
COMMUNICATION TOOLS TO EMPOWER
FAMILIES TO BE ACTIVE IN THEIR
CHILDREN'S LEARNING**

Positive relationships between school and home

EQUALS

Positive effect on the students' school experiences.

Teacher-parent communication is important.

When positive relationships are shaped between school and home it is shown to have a positive effect on the students' overall school experiences. Attendance increases, social skills rise, academic competence increases, parents feel more comfortable, and teachers build empathy and care through connections made. It is recommended for teachers to build a partnership with parents as a tool for teaching success.

Parent involvement can
impact social skills at
school.



Students with parents and teachers who reported consistent parent involvement saw increased abilities to solve problems with peers when upset, follow directions and instructions throughout the day, as well as initiate conversations with classmates (El Nokali, 2010).

Parent involvement and their children's academic success are linked.



Families aren't typically trained to provide academic support the way classroom teachers are, but when given the opportunity to be involved through knowledge of academic expectations, academic success is shown to follow.

Parent involvement can positively impact the way the whole family perceives school.



When parents feel assured about their children's school experience, students are likely to view school in a similar light. When students are able to show up with a positive attitude and in a headspace to learn, with high expectations from parents, positive results are more likely to occur.



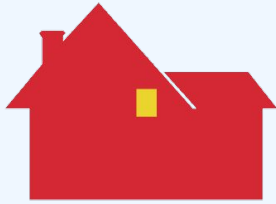
Parent involvement can positively impact educators.

Findings show that teachers' perceptions of a strong relationship between themselves and their scholars' parents are tied to lower risk for expulsion for students who have not yet been expelled. When a teacher has a positive relationship with a parent they may spend more time with their child in the classroom, therefore fostering student growth. Breaking down preconceived notions about who families or students are, and forming a positive perception of the families being served, benefits teachers and their decision making around keeping students in school.

Modes of Communication

One-way communication is information being delivered from school to home without the need for parents to respond in any verbal or written manner.





Two-way communication is when teachers are in a back and forth dialogue with parents.

The goal is to forge a supportive, holistic partnership, molded through a concise and consistent use of the one-way or two-way communication efforts.





Newsletters

When sending communication home through a form of a newsletter, stay consistent.

Stay Consistent. When parents grow accustomed to receiving the newsletter in a specific format, it catches their attention and they know what they are looking for to receive crucial updates. If the newsletter is sent home on yellow paper, continue to do so. If a text is sent to families with an emoji at the top of a sun, continue to do so. Make sure the newsletter is pushed out on a consistent schedule and stays generally the same length. All of this will continue to make the written letter to families a more effective tool for communication. Stay positive and stay understandable. The purpose of the letter is to build positive communication between school and home as well as create clear expectations of the happenings at school with succinct updates about news that will support parents in their journey to champion their childrens' learning.

By setting aside time to make phone calls with families about their children's school experiences, teachers can see academic progress, positive relationships with parents, and a more trusting relationship with students.

Phone Calls

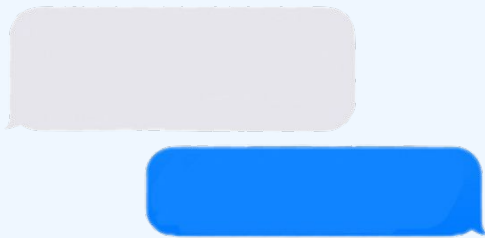


Phone calls are an established form of two-way communication. They allow for parents and teachers to build trust with one another by having consistent human interaction where both parties are able to take something new from the conversation. By setting aside scheduled time to make phone calls to touch base with families around their children's school experiences, teachers can see academic progress, insight into home life that allows for accommodations to be made if need be, positive relationships with parents, and a more trusting relationship with students (Gustafson, 1998).

By connecting with home about positive observations, it sets a foundation for if and when an uncomfortable conversation needs to be had. Ramirez (2002) stated as a high school teacher that by scheduling time during his prep hour he was able to call all 160 of his students to build a relationship with parents. Families were grateful for the communication and because of this provided him with support throughout his career.

Texting

Research shows that the best way to facilitate parent engagement is communicating little and often



Research shows that the best way to facilitate parent engagement is communicating little and often (Parental Engagement Network, 2021). Texting is an effective way to meet that goal. A study by the Education Endowment Fund (2021) found that by texting regularly with positive and negative messages and reminders about upcoming events, students' attendance and academic performance improved. It is important to consider that not all of the families being contacted will speak English as a first language. Making sure that parents get clear messages and feel comfortable replying for clarification is important. Using a platform to communicate through writing in families' preferred language is one way to do this. One example is the TalkingPoints app. TalkingPoints is an educational technology tool used to help support student success by eliminating barriers to communication, such as language or time constraints. The platform offers two-way translation using algorithms as well as human translators to build relationships between school and home through text messaging. According to an end of year parent survey conducted by TalkingPoints (2017), 85 percent of parents reported having more conversations with their children about school, 90 percent of parents felt more connected to the school community, and 89 percent of families felt more informed about what was going on in their kids' schools. Not only is it an effective tool for contacting parents but the survey also showed that over 70 percent of parents preferred to be contacted by text message. 80 percent of teachers reported seeing positive changes in their students behavior and overall performance and over 80 percent felt more connected to their students' families.

Face to Face



Connecting with families at their home or inviting them to the school building can help foster trusting relationships, create open communication, and build a partnership between teachers and families.

Another way to stay interconnected with parents is meeting in person. Many times conferences have the stigma of being a “reporting session” causing anxiety for all involved (Metcalf, 2001). Instead they should be looked at as a way to build a solid partnership. Taking time to invite parents to school to discuss what’s going well for their kids can alleviate stress from parents who may find academic settings unpleasant. Home visits are a strategy used by educators to attempt to build a team between home and school to support student achievement. The goal of a home visit is to help foster trusting relationships, create open communication, and build a partnership between teachers and families. Taking time to make home visits has shown to have positive impacts on students’ success. Making home visits a regular practice has shown to be a good tool for mindset work. As human beings we all have implicit bias: it is built into our brains as humans. Home visits have an impact on how families see educators and the way educators see the families they serve.

How do I manage contacting families consistently?

Leveled System of Support

When creating a system for myself to contact families, I create groups to support 3 different levels of need. Level 1 being the group that needs the least additional support and level 3 being the group that is in need of the most support. When asking myself who belongs in each leveled group I take a few things into consideration, including social and academic strengths or weaknesses, parent requests, and students' emotional well being.

When creating a system for myself to contact families, I create groups to support 3 different levels of need. Level 1 being the group that needs the least additional support and level 3 being the group that is in need of the most support. When asking myself who belongs in each leveled group I take a few things into consideration, including social and academic strengths or weaknesses, parent requests, and students' emotional well being. Remember all of this is based on your professional opinion as a teacher. There won't always be a certain percentage of scholars who fall into each leveled group. Some years you may have 80 percent of your class in level 1 and other years you may only have 50 percent. Let's break it down.

Level 1

Level 1 consists of the scholars in my class who have low academic and social concerns. They aren't needing very much additional support from adults in the building to function at "grade level". Families with students who require level 1 support are contacted monthly. **E.g.** If I have 20 level 1 students, I would divide those students into 4 groups. 5 students would be contacted each week. This 4 week rotation allows me to contact all of these families monthly.

Level 2

Level 2 consists of the scholars who may be needing additional academic and social support. Maybe they need to have frequent restorative chats with peers or check-ins with adults. If they are seeing other adults during the day, touch base with those adults to make sure you aren't all contacting parents at the same time. Families with students who require level 2 support are contacted bi-weekly. **E.g.** If I have 6 level 2 students, I would divide those students into 2 groups. 3 students would be contacted each week. This 2 week rotation allows me to contact all of these families bi-weekly.

Level 3

Level 3 consists of the scholars who need the most support throughout the school day. These are the few scholars in your class who have high academic or social needs. Students who would greatly benefit from making sure home and school are consistently on the same page. Families with students who require level 3 support are contacted weekly. **E.g.** If I have 2 level 3 students, I would contact these families every week.

Students can and will most likely move from group to group as the school year progresses. A student who was in level 1 in the first twelve weeks of school may require more support or the parent may request to be contacted more often the second trimester of school or vice versa.

Nothing is permanent

This calendar shows how often each child's family will be contacted. In this example I contacted my level 1 group on a four week rotation on Tuesdays, my level 3 scholars every Wednesday and my level 2 group on alternating Thursdays.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		Level 1: Jerry Lisa Michael Kim	Level 3: Paul Bonnie Daniel	Level 2: Dawn Ken Tracy		
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The calendar resource informs the educator what color week it is, which indicates which students should be contacted. There are also links embedded in the calendar to give guidance on how to push information out to families via one way and two way communication efforts.

Tier 1:

Week 1						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	Talking Points Weekly Preview	Family Connections	Family Connections Specific positive noticing. Preferred communication method?	Family Connections	Newsletter Template	

Embedded Links



The links embedded in the calendar allow teachers to follow a weekly schedule by using templates provided for newsletters, apps, and scripts for conversations with parents.

Additional Resources

In addition to the links embedded in the calendar, a communication log and template for student contact information are available to help track the consistency and content of family communication.

Communication Log

erichardson01@hamline.edu (not shared) [Switch account](#)

First name
Your answer _____

Last name
Your answer _____

Date
Your answer _____

Method of Contact
Select Method Used

Phone Call

Student	Number	Email
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		

As a strategy to organize the way in which students are contacted, a communication calendar template has been created. This calendar divides a trimester into a four week rotation, each week classified by a color. Within the calendar, there are links to information and templates to guide efforts to form partnerships with families.

Consistently Contacting Families

When creating a system for myself to contact families, I create groups to support 3 different levels of need. Level 1 being the group that needs the least additional support and level 3 being the group that is in need of the most support. When asking myself who belongs in each leveled group I take a few things into consideration, including social and academic strengths or weaknesses, parent requests, and students' emotional well being. Remember all of this is based on your professional opinion as a teacher. There won't always be a certain percentage of scholars who fall into each leveled group. Some years you may have 80 percent of your class in level 1 and other years you may only have 50 percent. Let's break it down.

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Students can and will most likely move from group to group as the school year progresses. A student who was in level 1 in the first twelve weeks of school may require more support the second trimester of school or vice versa. Let's take a look at an example. This class has 25 students who have been divided into the three leveled groups.

Level 1:	Scholars:	Contact Schedule: Contact monthly
1.	Jerry	Yellow Week (1)
2.	Lisa	Yellow Week (1)
3.	Michael	Yellow Week (1)
4.	Kim	Yellow Week (1)
5.	John	Purple Week (2)
6.	Michelle	Purple Week (2)
7.	Mark	Purple Week (2)
8.	Laura	Purple Week (2)
9.	Will	Green Week (3)
10.	Brenda	Green Week (3)
11.	Joseph	Green Week (3)
12.	Mel	Green Week (3)
13.	Tim	Orange Week (4)
14.	Robin	Orange Week (4)
15.	Charles	Orange Week (4)
Level 2:	Scholars:	Contact Schedule: Contact biweekly
16.	Dawn	Yellow and Green Week (1 & 3)
17.	Ken	Yellow and Green Week (1 & 3)
18.	Tracy	Yellow and Green Week (1 & 3)
19.	Anthony	Purple and Orange Week (2 & 4)
20.	Anne	Purple and Orange Week (2 & 4)
21.	Chris	Purple and Orange Week (2 & 4)
22.	Carla	Purple and Orange Week (2 & 4)
Level 3:	Scholars:	Contact Schedule: Contact every week
23.	Paul	Yellow/Purple/Green/Orange Week (1,2,3,4)
24.	Bonnie	Yellow/Purple/Green/Orange Week (1,2,3,4)
25.	Daniel	Yellow/Purple/Green/Orange Week (1,2,3,4)

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		Level 1: Will Brenda Joseph Mel	Level 3: Paul Bonnie Daniel	Level 2: Dawn Ken Tracy		
		Level 1: Tim Robin Charles	Level 3: Paul Bonnie Daniel	Level 2: Anthony Anne Chris Carla		

Tier 1:

Week 1 (Yellow)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>Talking Points</u> <u>Weekly Preview</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Newsletter</u> <u>Template</u>	

Week 2 (Purple)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>Talking Points</u> <u>Weekly Preview</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Newsletter</u> <u>Template</u>	

Week 3 (Green)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>Talking Points</u> <u>Weekly Preview</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Newsletter</u> <u>Template</u>	

Week 4 (Orange)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>Talking Points</u> <u>Weekly Preview</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Newsletter</u> <u>Template</u>	

Week 5 (Yellow)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>Talking Points</u> <u>Weekly Preview</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Newsletter</u> <u>Template</u>	

Week 6 (Purple)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>Talking Points</u> <u>Weekly Preview</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Newsletter</u> <u>Template</u>	

Week 7 (Green)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>Talking Points</u> <u>Weekly Preview</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Newsletter</u> <u>Template</u>	

Week 8 (Orange)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>Talking Points</u> <u>Weekly Preview</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Newsletter</u> <u>Template</u>	

Week 9 (Yellow)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>Talking Points</u> <u>Weekly Preview</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Newsletter</u> <u>Template</u>	

Week 10 (Purple)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>Talking Points</u> <u>Weekly Preview</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Newsletter</u> <u>Template</u>	

Week 11 (Green)


Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>Talking Points</u> <u>Weekly Preview</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Newsletter</u> <u>Template</u>	

Week 12 (Orange)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>Talking Points</u> <u>Weekly Preview</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Family</u> <u>Connections</u>	<u>Newsletter</u> <u>Template</u>	

Staying organized can be a barrier for success in regards to making connections with families. The following pages are communication logs designed to help map out who has been contacted, when they were contacted and what was discussed. There are options to either do this electronically or on paper. Below is also a student contact form to ensure the process of communication is efficient.

Communication Log

 erichardson01@hamline.edu (not shared) [Switch account](#)



First name

Your answer _____

Last name

Your answer _____

Date

Your answer _____

Method of Contact

Select Method Used

Phone Call

Text

Email

Phone number

Your answer _____

Email address

Your answer _____

Notes

Your answer _____

Submit

Clear form

Student	Number	Email
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
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10.		
11.		
12.		
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11.		
12.		

Student	Number	Email
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
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12.		

Below are resources for educators to use when making connections with home including a list of prompts for phone conversations, templates for newsletters, and information about connecting with families through technology.

Weekly Preview

It's key to check in with families to set the intentions for the week, give consistent updates, and open up space for families to ask any questions they may have about their children's learning. Sometimes these messages get lost in the shuffle of the weekend when sent on Friday. Using the Talking Points app to quickly and consistently connect with families to start the week is a great way to do that.

Ask yourself these questions when forming a weekly preview message:

- What are we working on this week?
 - What are the key updates?
 - What are the weekly goals?
 - Did I welcome questions?

Message Template:

Happy Monday! Just a reminder that this week we will be continuing to work on our 2-step word problems in math this week. We are making so much progress! We have field day on Wednesday so make sure to have shoes to run in as well. Our goal this week is to make sure all of our classmates feel included at lunch and recess. If you have any questions about the week, please feel free to ask. Let's rock it!

What is Talking Points?

TalkingPoints is an education technology nonprofit with a mission to drive student success by using accessible technology to unlock the potential of family engagement in children's education. Our multilingual technology platform connects and empowers families and teachers by using human and AI-powered, two-way translated communication and personalized content. This unique approach eliminates barriers including language, time, mindsets, and capacity to foster strong family engagement in development of students' academic success. Check out how to sign up for free below.



GETTING STARTED ON TALKINGPOINTS

STEP 1: SIGN UP FOR FREE

ONLINE

- Go to www.talkingpts.org on your computer
- Click on [Sign up for free](#)
- Enter your name, email, and password, or sign up with your Google account

ON MOBILE

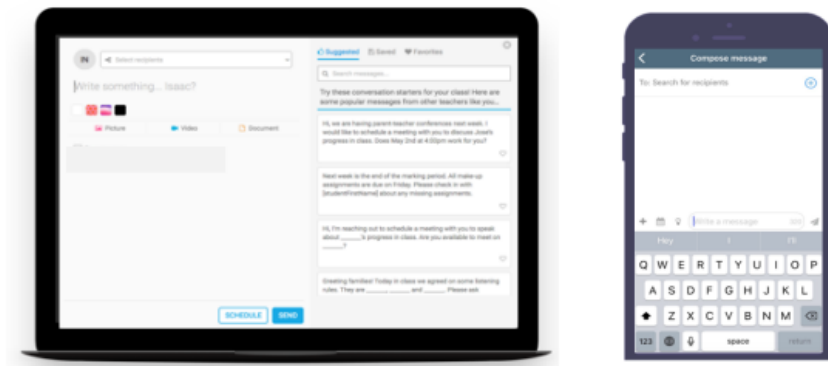
- Download the mobile app:  

STEP 2: ADD CONTACTS OR INVITE THEM TO JOIN

- Enter student contact information from your class roster
OR
- Send invite codes to parents/guardians to join on their own (available in the app)

STEP 3: SEND YOUR FIRST MESSAGE

- Send a first message to families introducing yourself



- Complete your engagement plan and set up a routine for communicating with families

Newsletter

The newsletter sent on Friday is used as a way to recap the week and give positive feedback to students and their families. When sending a newsletter, be consistent with your formatting. Whether you're sending a paper copy or an electronic copy, be sure to use the same page color and formatting guidelines. By doing this, families will know what to look for when checking for messaging from you as the teacher. I like to include something fun for students and families to do together. This interactive piece is why I send a paper copy on Fridays. The hard copy also allows families who prefer this form of communication to be reached weekly.

In my newsletter I stick to these principals:

1. Stay positive
2. Stay brief
3. Stay consistent

Happy Friday families! We had another successful week of learning in 4th grade! We gave our best effort with our math word problems so shout out to the entire class for working so hard. We also had time for some fun with field day on Wednesday and games in the afternoon on Friday. Balance is the key to life! One thing I took away from both of these fun activities was the amount of students who supported and included each other. Everyone looked to be having a great time. You all rock! I want everyone to have a wonderful weekend. You deserve it! Don't hesitate to contact me through talking points, by email or phone. See you Monday!

erichardson@isd622.org

651-748-7490

Friday Riddle:

What goes up but never comes back down?

Can you solve this equation using the box method?

$$174 \times 45 =$$

Introduction:

“Hi this is Mr. Richardson calling. I’m Johnny’s teacher at (insert school name). Is this Johnny’s parent?”

Ask for permission to have a conversation at that time:

“Hi! So nice to speak with you. Do you have a couple of minutes to talk?” -OR- “Is this a good time to talk?”

If it’s not a good time:

“Is there a day or time that usually works best for you?”

Start positive:

Depending on whether or not the relationship is already established, I start with positive messaging a few different ways.

If I have not yet built a relationship or spoken to the parent I may start with 3 positives like this:

“Well first of all mom, Johnny brings so much to our classroom community each day. He is thoughtful, hard working and helps others during math. I’m sure you’ve seen some of these things at home so it’s no surprise to you.”

If I’m maintaining a relationship that has already been formed I may state a specific example of positive behavior like this:

“You have to hear this story, it was one of the highlights of my day. After recess, Johnny helped clean up all the snowpants that were left in the hallway without being asked. He is continually so thoughtful and I really wanted to share that story with you. What an amazing kid!”

Sometimes when I’m maintaining a relationship with a parent I start with a positive interaction where I check in with the parents themselves like this:

“Hey Dad. Things have been moving so fast lately here at school, I’m sure you’ve been busy too with life. How are you?”

Followed up by validation:

“Sounds like you’re working really hard to make sure everyone is doing well.”

When giving an update:

“I just wanted to let you know that we’ll be going to the library again this week so I want to make sure folks remember to bring their books back by Thursday.”

Always remember to create space for parents to ask any questions they may have:

“Did you have any questions about anything I may not have addressed?”

When highlighting a concern:

Find a way to transition to the area of concern and be specific about the issue and the steps you are taking to remedy the situation:

“Lately I’ve noticed Johnny has had a hard time following our classroom expectation of using kind words with others. We put together a goal setting sheet to help practice some of the skills we’d like to see improvement with.”

Collaborate with parent:

When discussing an area of concern make sure to use this as an opportunity to collaborate with the parent:

“Is this something you’ve noticed at home at all?”

“Is there anything you’ve found that motivates him to be reflective about his behavior at home?”

“I appreciate all your insight and support. Please feel free to reach out anytime if you have anything else you’d like to discuss.”

School support:

Remind the parent that you’re there to support the scholar and specifically remind them of the plan.

“So as a team I think we can really help Johnny find success with the language he’s using in the classroom. My plan is to continue focusing on the goal setting sheet by sitting down each week with him to reevaluate his goals. It sounds like you’re willing to have conversations at home about his goals to keep it fresh in his mind.”

All of these professional development slides and family communication resources can be found in a shareable folder by clicking this link.

[EFFECTIVE TEACHER-PARENT COMMUNICATION TOOLS TO EMPOWER FAMILIES TO BE ACTIVE IN THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING](#)

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