

RESOURCE: These items supplement the webinar for LSU conducted by Dr. Joyce Epstein, March 2, 2016.

Eight Strategies for Partnering with Parents of Students with Special Needs

Nagro, S. (October, 2013). *Eight strategies for partnering with parents of students with disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: National Network of Partnership Schools Conference.

This icon ★ indicates a template is included for your use.

1. Opening the Lines of Communication

- a. Write personalized introductory letters to parents at the beginning of the year.
- b. Give clear guidelines for two way communication so parents know how you will contact them and how they can contact you.
- ★ c. Student Progress Log – Let parents know what is happening with their child routinely so they are not guessing how their child is doing in school. This is a daily log for students, but bi-weekly or weekly can still work as long as it is consistent and sent home on the same day(s) every week.

2. Communicating Clearly

- a. Write all communications between a 5th and 8th grade reading level. (see Improving Readability Handout for steps to set Microsoft Word Software to test readability for you)
- b. Use the active voice rather than passive voice when writing or speaking.
- c. Shorten sentences by limiting complex and compound sentences.
- d. Avoid using acronyms unless they are well known within your school community by all stakeholders.

3. Including Parents in Educating their Children

- a. Monthly newsletter – Let parents know about school events, important dates, what the students are learning, and study tips for families.
- b. Invite parents to volunteer in school or the classroom through a planned event. You may want to include your invitation in the newsletter to get parents comfortable with where to find the information on a consistent basis. The monthly invitation should be a variety of activities at different times so more parents have the option to participate throughout the year. Examples include:
 - i. Come watch students present their work at the end of a unit in class
 - ii. Participate in a science experiment
 - iii. Enjoy the Gallery walk of student work in the evening
 - iv. Register for our fine arts school festival
- c. Invite parents to write a column in your newsletter on community activities, stories about their children in relation to education, or tips they have used that may be helpful for other parents.

4. Maintaining Lines of Communication

- a. Thank you Letters – Whenever possible, seize the opportunity to thank parents for their efforts. I recommend having a premade thank you card or letterhead that you can quickly jot a note to say thank you for the school supplies, help with homework, school visit, or class snack. Let the parents know their efforts are noticed. Consider having their child help you write the note so all three parent, teacher, and child are engaging in communication.
- ★ b. Parent Contact Log – Track your communication with each family to help identify patterns. This data can be used to determine which methods of communication are working and which parents need extra supports for the partnership to be more meaningful.
- c. Poll your parents to see if the ways you are communicating are working. Ask yourself which parents are you still not reaching and what else can you try? You can use data from your contact log to help with this.

Strategies for Partnering with Parents of Students with Special Needs

5. Communicating Over the Phone

- a. Ask the family member how they are and how their child is doing this week at home. The first step is determining where the family member on the other end of the phone is in a spectrum of emotions.
- b. Tell family member(s) specific positives about their child. Don't just say "your son is a good kid" or "your daughter tries." Let the parent know you have formed a meaningful relationship with their child by giving them details they will otherwise not get. Examples include:
 - i. "Today in Math we were learning about fractions and your daughter was brave enough to come to the board to explain to the class how she got her answer."
 - ii. "Today when we got back from lunch your son was the first student ready to learn with his reading book out on his desk and his eyes towards me waiting for directions."
- c. Ask family member(s) for help solving a problem. Do not scold them for their child's behaviors. Ask them to brainstorm with you methods for helping their child stay on task, make good choices, and succeed. This proactive strategy will prevent an "us vs. you" mentality and deepen the "we" are in this together partnership that you as the teacher have been working towards all year.

6. Communicating In Person

- a. Borrow strategies from phone conversations.
- ★ b. Preconference Survey – This is useful for face to meetings (informal, formal, IEP review). Find out what parents expectations, questions, concerns, and goals are to better plan a successful meeting. Consider including your goal(s) for the meeting so parents come in knowledgeable and in the right mind frame.

7. Supporting Parents in Decision Making

- a. Do you understand IEPs, 504s, and the necessary paperwork and timelines? If the answer is no, how can you help parents through this process if you yourself are unsure? Make an appointment with your IEP chairperson and get informed.
- b. Include an easy to follow cover letter with all print materials sent home to family members about service options, program changes, important dates, or student testing. The cover letter should:
 - i. Explain why the materials are being sent
 - ii. Outline the key points
 - iii. Tell what steps parents are expected to take
 - iv. Give clear directions on who to contact with any questions

8. Reflecting

- a. Parent Partnership Portfolio – Save all your resources and templates in a binder or electronically. Organize the portfolio by month so as the next school year progresses you can refer to the portfolio for strengthening relationships with parents. Jot down what happens each month as communication patterns are likely cyclical and such information can prove helpful the following year.
- b. Consider having parents, students, and yourself complete post meeting surveys to reflect and determine if goals were met, if the meeting was successful, if everyone was comfortable expressing themselves, what everyone hopes will change, and how things can improve moving forward.

Student Progress Log

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Today's Strength				
Something to Work On				
Parent Signature				
Parent Thoughts				

Parent Contact Log

Contact Info:

Student Name:

Date	Method	Person & Relation to Child	Information Shared During Contact	Next Steps
	<input type="checkbox"/> phone <input type="checkbox"/> text <input type="checkbox"/> email <input type="checkbox"/> note <input type="checkbox"/> mail letter <input type="checkbox"/> online <input type="checkbox"/> in person <input type="checkbox"/> conference <input type="checkbox"/> _____			
	<input type="checkbox"/> phone <input type="checkbox"/> text <input type="checkbox"/> email <input type="checkbox"/> note <input type="checkbox"/> mail letter <input type="checkbox"/> online <input type="checkbox"/> in person <input type="checkbox"/> conference <input type="checkbox"/> _____			
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	<input type="checkbox"/> phone <input type="checkbox"/> text <input type="checkbox"/> email <input type="checkbox"/> note <input type="checkbox"/> mail letter <input type="checkbox"/> online <input type="checkbox"/> in person <input type="checkbox"/> conference <input type="checkbox"/> _____			

“Before We Meet” Questionnaire

Let’s share our thoughts before we meet.

We are scheduled to meet _____ at _____ in _____.
Date Time Room

If you need to reschedule please contact me right away at _____
Phone Number/Email Address

My goals for the meeting are: _____

Please help me understand your goals for the meeting by answering the following questions:

1. What questions do you have about the topics we are going to discuss at the meeting?

2. What do you think we should accomplish by the end of our meeting?

3. Do you have any concerns you would like addressed before we meet? If yes, please explain.

4. Would you like your child to attend the meeting? _____

5. Would you like other school members to attend the meeting? _____

If yes, who? _____

Please return this form before _____

Date

For these and other ideas, see:

Dardig, J. (2008). *Involving parents of students with special needs: 25 ready to use strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.