

Educators and families agree that school-family-community partnerships are essential for children's success. There are many reasons for developing school-family-community partnerships. However, the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life.

Mentors and mentor support team members will have many opportunities to assist new teachers as they develop and strengthen parental involvement partnerships or programs. The role and involvement of parents in student learning is measured in the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching Domain V., Component B. Component B and the Attributes with descriptions of effective teaching behaviors from Domain V are listed below. Suggestions for addressing each of the Attributes may be found in *Strategies for Effective Teaching in the 21st Century*.

### **Domain V: School Improvement**

**Component B:** The teacher creates partnerships with parents/caregivers and colleagues.

VB1. Provides clear and timely information to parents/caregivers and colleagues regarding classroom expectations, student, progress, and the ways they can assist learning.

The effective teacher develops and implements a variety of methods to communicate with parents/caregivers and colleagues in a timely manner. Expectations are clearly defined; the ways parents can assist in learning are identified, and continuous parental involvement is encouraged.

VB2. Encourages parents/caregivers to become active partners in their children's education and to become involved in school and classroom

The effective teacher communicates with parents/caregivers by initiating planning meetings with parents/caregivers and by participating in school or parent-directed meetings.

VB3. Seeks community involvement in instructional program

The effective teacher adjusts activities and schedules when necessary to accommodate other programs or activities. He/she seeks outside help for students as needed and seeks community resources relevant to student or school needs.

Research has shown that parental involvement increases student achievement and self-esteem. However, the amount of increase may be directly related to the degree of involvement. Anne Henderson, in a report on parental involvement, states that programs with strong parental involvement produce students who perform better than programs that do not involve parents so thoroughly or that do not involve them at all. Research has also shown that, as parents become actively involved in the school, they tend to support the school and develop more positive attitudes toward the school.

**“Where parents volunteer their time and attention, students achieve more and like school better.”**

Shalaway, Linda  
*Learning to Teach*

### Types of Involvement

Productive relationships between the home and school require that parents and teachers interact with an understanding of each other’s role. Parents and teachers must work together as a team in assisting the child’s development and must understand the influence each has on the life of the child. Listed below are some ways parents become involved with schools. Although each type of involvement is important, the first two are the ones with which the mentor will probably spend the most time with the new teacher.

### Ways Parents Become Involved With the School

1. Taking an active role in home learning  
(assist with/monitor homework, augment class work, etc.)
2. Communicating with the teacher  
(participate in conferences, hold telephone conversations, respond to written communication, attend open-houses, etc.)
3. Being a participant or supporter of school activities (attend/be involved in school functions, join school-related organizations, help secure time and money, etc.)
4. Volunteering  
(act as an aide, tutor small groups, supervise lunchtime or playtime, assist in making classroom materials, help with classroom activities, etc.)
5. Serving on school/parent committees  
(serve on a school advisory board or committee, serve on curriculum committees, etc.)

### 1. Parents Taking an Active Role in Home Learning

In working with parents, the teacher should promote home learning as an extension of the classroom. Many parents will not be equipped to take on this role. Thus, the teacher will need to provide parents with suggestions and activities for working with their children. Some suggestions and activities include the following:

- discussing with parents ways that they can extend classroom learning into the home,
- sending activity sheets or suggested activities to parents,
- providing directions with homework assignments,
- sending teacher-annotated student work home on a frequent basis,
- providing ways a parent may help his/her child develop,
- providing time or mechanisms for parent feedback.

The amount of time the teacher spends working with parents will vary, but he/she should work with parents of all students: parents whose children are more academically able as well as those who have children needing more attention. For the more talented students, the teacher

may wish to provide suggestions for augmenting homework or classroom work.

### **2. Communicating with Parents**

Maintaining effective communication is one of the most important aspects of working with parents. Since effective communication is a two-way street, methods should be established for parents to interact easily with the teacher. Ways that a teacher may communicate with parents include the following:

- one-on-one conferences,
- group conferences,
- telephone calls,
- written notes to or from parents (mailed, e-mailed, or carried by student),
- annotations on student work with opportunity for parents to provide comments back to the teacher,
- formal/informal reports (e.g., report cards or other periodic reports),
- student portfolios,
- impromptu meetings.

The following suggestions are to assist new teachers in developing successful and productive parent communication.



**Tips for Successful Communication with Parents**

**1. Make contact early.**

Do not wait for problems to develop before contacting parents. Contact all parents/guardians at the beginning of the year with some type of correspondence (memo, newsletter, etc.). Inform them about the types of communication that will be used and how contact may be made. Stress the importance of working together as a team.

**2. Keep focused.**

Keep discussions or comments focused on the child or on the objective of the communication. Although the student’s progress should be placed in perspective with the class, do not compare students or discuss others in the class. Be specific with all comments by not talking in generalities (e.g., state that “Susan has turned in only three of the last seven homework assignments” rather than “Susan does not seem to be concerned with her classwork.”) Focus on solutions rather than on problems.

**3. Be positive.**

Begin and end conferences or communication on a positive note. Remember that parents do not view the child from the same perspective as the teacher. Focus on strengths as well as areas of need. Be cognizant of body language or non-verbal cues that can be misinterpreted. Be aware of any physical barriers that can project dominance or a negative atmosphere.

**4. Be prepared.**

Plan ahead, especially for conferences and telephone calls. To put the parents at ease, make the conference area as comfortable as possible.



**Make the Conference Area Comfortable.**



- Play soft music.
- Sit beside parents.
- Provide paper and pens.
- Consider offering refreshments.
- Display a “conference in progress” sign.
- Post a list to keep everyone on schedule.

Plan what to say and be prepared to answer questions parents may have. Formulate a list of possible questions that may be asked. Have student work, tests, records, etc. organized for easy reference. Know the relationship of the student to the person (step parent, grandparent, guardian, etc.) attending the conference.

### **5. Listen.**

Good communicating includes good listening skills. Listen to what parents are saying. Be sure to read any comments parents may write on any of written communication.

### **6. Collaborate.**

Create an atmosphere of working together. Ask for parent opinions, and make communication a collaborative effort. Avoid making judgments.

### **7. Summarize.**

Before transitioning into another area, summarize what has been said or written. Everyone should have a full understanding of and be clear on the current situation or solution before moving on. If appropriate, be sure to summarize at the end of the communication.

### **8. Follow up.**

Be sure to follow up on any discussions. Follow-up may include setting up any additional communication that is needed. Be sure to keep accurate notes and records of communication.

### **9. Assess.**

Conduct a self-assessment of all conferences or discussions. Look for things that may help in improving future communications or things to modify when communicating with other parents. Assessment of conferences may include parental input. Sending questionnaires to parents may provide valuable feedback about what they liked or disliked about the conferences. Offering parents an opportunity for feedback may increase their involvement.

**Guidelines for Disarming Parental Criticism**

**Don't make excuses or place blame on others.**

In *Understanding and Relating to Parents*, Robert DeBrun suggests the following guidelines for defusing negative reactions and dealing with distraught parents.

**If a parent's concern and criticism are justified**, the mentor should encourage the new teacher to remain objective and to accept mistakes. New teachers may need to develop strategies to turn confrontations into productive conversations. By stopping and thinking before providing an honest and straightforward answer to a parent's concern, a new teacher has an opportunity to defuse confusion or frustration. Answers to parents' questions or concerns should be made clearly without blaming others.

**If the criticism is incorrect or partially correct:**

**1. Listen.**

Remain quiet, and give the parent an opportunity to "vent." Use effective listening skills. Maintain eye contact with the parent, and listen attentively.

**2. Ask questions.**

After the parent has had the opportunity to share his/her concern, ask specific probing questions. This technique is a very useful way to disarm a parent's criticism. By asking questions, the new teacher is expressing concern and care about what the parent is saying. Remember, justified or not, the parent's anger is real. Let the parent talk.

Examples of probing questions:

- That really concerns me. Can you explain more about what you mean?
- Could you share some examples of what you are talking about?
- Have I done anything like this before? When?

**3. Refocus.**

Restate the student's problem and clarify why attention is needed.

Examples of refocusing:

- I understand how upset you are, but we still must help your child get his work done so he won't fall behind.

- I hear your point, but your daughter must do her homework, or her grades may drop.

### **4. Be a peacemaker.**

If the parent chooses to remain angry, the new teacher should point out that conflict is not in the best interest of the student.

#### Example

- I know we don't agree, but we are not going to help Tim if we don't work together.

### **5. Involve other Professionals.**

It may be appropriate to have the parent talk with the guidance counselor or principal.

**Working With Parents**

The situations listed below are examples similar to ones that new teachers may face in the first semester of the school year.

**1. The Case of the Missing Homework**

The new teacher you are mentoring approaches you about a student who has not turned in his last five homework assignments. The teacher told you that the student states that he is unable to study at home and, because of his chores, does not have time to complete homework. Since his grades are beginning to drop, the new teacher indicates that she will need to call the student’s parents. What suggestions would you give this teacher regarding this situation?

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**2. The Case of the Mean Classmates**

The new teacher you are mentoring indicates that a parent called and was upset about her 4th grade daughter’s being picked on by her peers. She said that her daughter comes home crying and complains that her classmates call her names and tease her about her small size. The parent wants to meet tomorrow after school to see what the teacher is going to do about this problem. What suggestions would you give this new teacher?

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**3. The Case of the Missing Parent Conference Information**

Parent conferences are next week, and the new teacher you are mentoring says he does not have any ideas about what to do. The professors never addressed parent conferences in his college methods classes, and he did not conduct any while he was student teaching. What suggestions would you give him?

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### Further Reading

- Ban, J. (1993). *Parents assuring student success*. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.
- Burns, R. (Ed.). (1994). *Parents and schools: From visitors to partners*. Washington, DC: National Education Association.
- Canter, L. (1989). *Homework without tears for teacher*. Santa Monica, CA: Canter and Associates.
- Doyle, M. E., and Barber, B. S. (1990). *Homework as a learning experience*. (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: National Education Association.
- Keith, T. (1986). *Homework*. West Lafayette, IN: Kappa Delta Pi.
- Lehr, J. and Harris, H. (1988). *At-risk, low-achieving students in the classroom*. Washington, DC: National Education Association.
- McCaleb, S. (1994). *Building communities of learners: A collaboration among teachers, students, families, and community*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rotter, J., Robinson, E., and Fey, M. (1987). *Parent-teacher conferencing*. Washington, DC: National Education Association.
- Shalaway, Linda. (1989). *Learning to teach...not just for beginners*. Scholastic Professional Books, New York, New York.
- Stillman, P. (1989). *Families writing*. Portsmouth, NJ: Heinemann.
- Swick, K., and Graves, S. (1993). *Empowering at-risk families during the early childhood years*. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

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### Web Wonders

- Children First/The Website of the National PTA. <http://www.pta.org>
- Children with Disabilities. <http://www.childrenwithdisabilities.ncjrs.org>
- Comprehensive Strategies for Children and Families (US Dept. of Education Report). <http://www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads/resourcekit/MakingInfo/miwfy1.html>
- Facts for Families. <http://www.aacap.org/web/aacap/publications>

Louisiana Department of Education. <http://www.louisianaschools.net>

Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals. <http://www.dhh.state.la.us>

Louisiana Department of Social Services. <http://www.dss.state.la.us>

Monroe City Schools/Parenting Series. <http://www.monroe.k12.la.us/mcs/community/parenting>

National Network for Partnership Schools (Johns Hopkins site). <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000>

Parent Resources. <http://www.eagle.ca/~matink/parents.html>

Parents' Guide to the Internet. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/internet/>

Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. <http://pfie.ed.gov>

State Education Agencies. <http://www.ed.gov/Programs/bastmp/SEA.htm>

*Teacher Magazine.* <http://www.teachermagazine.org/>

*Teachers' Toolbag.* <http://www.atpe.org/TeachersToolbag/linksparent.htm>

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