

GETTING THE YEAR OFF TO A GOOD START WITH FAMILIES



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Strategies for Getting the Year off to a Good Start

➤ Positive Communication with Families

Communication with parents/guardians should begin early in the school year and initially focus on the student's strengths. Parents of children who are struggling with behavior and learning at school often expect to hear negative things from teachers. However, when initial communication is positive and when parents and teachers feel comfortable communicating with one another, this can set in motion a partnership in which communication can shift to student needs.

Within the first 2 weeks of school, you should try communicate positive news to parents/guardians. If the best way to reach a parent is by phone, try reaching 3-5 parents each night. The goal of that positive communication is to introduce yourself, provide examples of positive behaviors, and to get input from the parent regarding his/her goals for their child. Good topics to ask about include the parent's perspective on his/her child's strengths, motivators, and successes with previous teachers, the best time and way to be in communication with them etc. Ask the parent if they have anything else they would like you to know.

******Be sure to note your parent/caregiver/family outreach attempts in your grade book.**

5. Let parents know what you will be doing to maintain ongoing communication with them throughout the school year:

6. Inquire if parent has any questions, concerns, or comments:

7. Ask parent about other adults involved in child's schooling:

_____/_____
Name Relationship to Child

_____/_____
Name Relationship to Child

8. Exchange information regarding the best way to communicate (parent ↔ teacher)
Consider creating a "call-in" time for parents.

Phone: _____ Best time to call: _____

Alternate Phone: _____ Best time to call: _____

Best way to reach you if your number changes or you move (family member who attends the school, friend/family member who works in the school): _____

Written note sent home with child

E-mail: _____

Text message: _____

Other: _____

9. Thank parent/guardian for their time and let them know that you look forward to working with them and their child

Positive Communication with Families Script

Student Name: _____ Parent Name: _____

Home Phone Number: _____ Cell: _____

Date/Time of first attempt: _____

Date/Time of additional attempts: _____

1. Introduce yourself and describe the purpose of the phone call.

Hello, I am Ms. Jones, Jasmine's fifth grade teacher at Smith Elementary. I'm calling to welcome you and Jasmine to my classroom. If this is a good time for you, I wanted to take a few minutes to share some good news with you about Jasmine's start to the school year and to find out more from you about her strengths. Is now a good time to talk or should I try you another time?

2. Provide examples of positive behaviors you have observed in the classroom/school.

Part of the reason I am calling is to let you know about some of the positive things that I have observed Jasmine doing in class this year. She has a cheerful personality and is eager to participate in class. Does this sound consistent with what her previous teachers have said about her?

3. Encourage parent to discuss his/her goals for the child for the upcoming school year.

It is really important to me that we work together this year and I hear about your goals for Jasmine this year. What are your goals for Jasmine? What should we continue working on from last year?

4. Ask parent to discuss his/her child's strengths and motivators.

You know Jasmine best and I do need your help to make sure she has a successful year. What do you see as Jasmine's strengths? What academic areas does she really enjoy? What is she motivated by and interested in?

5. Let parents know what you will be doing to maintain ongoing communication with them throughout the school year.

Keeping parents informed of upcoming events and the curriculum is very important to me. I will be sending home a monthly newsletter that lets families know about lessons and important dates planned for that month. I sent out the welcome letter to my classroom last week which included basic information on school policies, the school day, homework policies, and how to contact me. I really want to stay connected with you throughout the year.

I also want you to be able to contact me easily if any questions or concerns arise. I am usually in the classroom about 30 minutes before the school day starts (7:30AM) and stay after school for one hour on Mondays and Wednesdays (2-3PM). You can also try to reach me by calling the school at 312-777-8888. If I am not available, I try to return calls within one day.

There are two report card pick-up days per year and one open house that I hope you can attend. I'm also very happy to schedule a conference at another day/time if needed.

6. Briefly describe activities and curriculum that are planned for the classroom.

This will be a very exciting and important year for Jasmine. She'll get the chance to build on her strong background in science and learn about geography, basic chemicals, and several laboratory experiments in the beginning of the year. In math, we will be focusing on geometry and basic algebra, which will be important new concepts to learn. In reading, we will review several reading comprehension strategies and work on improving how quickly and accurately students read (which is called oral reading fluency). Do you have any questions about what we have planned to cover this year?

7. Inquire if parent has any questions, concerns, or comments:

Let me stop right here and see if there is anything else that is important that I should know about Jasmine? Do you have any questions or concerns as of now?

8. Ask parent about other adults involved in child's schooling.

Are there other adults involved in Jasmine's schooling?

_____/_____
Name Relationship to Child

_____/_____
Name Relationship to Child

9. Exchange information regarding the best way to communicate (parent ↔ teacher) Consider creating a “call-in” time for parents.

To make sure we can communicate easily with each other, what is the best phone number and time of day to reach you?

Phone: _____ Best time to call: _____

Is there another phone number and time that I can reach you?

Alternate Phone: _____ Best time to call: _____

If your number changes or if you move, what is the best way to reach you (email, family member, etc.)?

Best way to reach you if your number changes or you move (family member who attends the school, friend/family member who works in the school: _____

Written note sent home with child

E-mail: _____

Text message: _____

Other: _____

10. Thank parent/guardian for their time and let them know that you look forward to working with them and their child.

Welcome Letters

One way you as a teacher can support parents and create two-way communication is to send a letter home at the beginning of the year (and potentially every few weeks after that).

Welcome letters should emphasize the following: 1) as a teacher I want to develop a working partnership with you; 2) parent/family input is critical to student learning; and 3) if problems arise, we will work together to find a solution.

You can explain your policies for attendance, homework, and begin a dialogue with families around their needs. Additionally, you can include information about how families can get in touch with you and participate in your classroom.

You may consider including an email address and/or your phone number with guidelines for responding to both (i.e. you will do your best to return parent calls or emails within 24 hours) and include good times for parents to drop by your class to visit. Consider whether the parents' first language is English, and if not, what resources are available to have the welcome letter translated.

(Swap, 2003).



Sample Welcome Letters

Welcome Back to School!

Here are some important facts about school:

School begins at _____ AM

School ends at _____ PM

Our classroom number is _____

My name is _____

The best way to reach me by phone is through the front office at

_____ (I will try to answer phone calls within 24 hours.)

The best way to reach me in person is to stop by the classroom before or after school.

I am looking forward to a great school year! See you soon!



Dear Parent,

Welcome back to school! I am very happy to have your child in my classroom and am looking forward to an exciting school year. I believe that it is important to keep parents informed of what their children are learning in the classroom. Once per month I will send home a class newsletter that has information about what is being taught this month and any special events.

I also really want to hear from you and enjoy having parents in the classroom. Please let me know if you have any ideas about ways you'd like to get involved this year (volunteer, help organizing the classroom, put together papers, etc.).

I look forward to meeting and working with you and your child! Please do not hesitate to call me or stop by our classroom if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Jones





Family Surveys

Another way to incorporate the contributions of parents and to encourage them to share their expertise on their child is through a family survey. Parents/guardians can offer unique insights into their child's strengths and areas of growth, strategies that have worked for their child in the past, what motivates their child, and what growth they hope to see over the academic year. You can also learn about the best ways to contact and get families involved (Swap, 1993). Consider whether the family's first language is English, and whether it is best to do this survey in person, during the first parent-teacher conference, in writing, by phone, etc. This will depend on the needs of the family.



Sample Questions for a Family Survey

Child's name: _____ Birth date: _____

Child's home address: _____
Street Apartment

_____ City State/Zip Code

Your name: _____
First Last

1. Who was your child's favorite teacher? What made that teacher so good?

2. What is your child's best subject? Why? _____

3. What is the most challenging subject for your child? Why? _____

4. What are your goals for your child this school year? _____



Family Survey Follow-Up

Thank you!

Thank you for completing the Family Survey. Your views are very important to me, and your input will help me develop communication strategies that meet your needs. I look forward to partnering with you during the upcoming school year! Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,
Ms. Baker

Dear _____,

I have not yet received your Family Survey. I am very interested in learning from you about how to help your child be successful in school this year. If you would rather complete this survey by phone or in person please let me know. In case you did not receive a survey, I have also attached another copy.

Thank you for your time and effort!

I look forward to working with you this year!

Sincerely,
Ms. Baker

➤ Good News Notes

For those students in your classroom who need frequent redirection and/or discipline, try to keep an eye out for those times when these students do something well (i.e., accomplish an academic goal, help you or someone else, finish his/her homework on time).

Send the student's parents/caregiver a "good news note" to let them know about the student's good behavior and/or accomplishment.

Good news notes allow you to recognize and reward the efforts of individual children and build good relationships with both parents and students.



has been working hard this week on:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Following class rules | <input type="checkbox"/> Adding and subtracting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading with a partner | <input type="checkbox"/> Walking quietly in the hall |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Studying Chicago history | <input type="checkbox"/> Helping classmates |

WELL DONE!



News from Mrs. Thomas' 1st Grade Classroom



September 1, 2009

Dear Parents,

We have made it through our first week of school. Our theme for this week revolved around the child and school. Here are some of the things we have been doing this week:

Calendar – Each morning we start our day with our calendar activities. We cover the day, date, and weather. Along with these activities we relate the number of days in school to money value in pennies and nickels. We practice a weekly poem and song.

Guided Reading – We read at school.

Activities: Wall story, little book, sequence story, story retell and Ss sound and letters.

Shared Reading – We read Mary Had a Little Lamb.

Activities: We sang read Be the Story, completed a word match, worked on letter and sound identification, and created the story in their version.

Social Studies – School rules for the lunchroom, classroom, and hallways.

Math – Patterning and graphing.

Activities: We graphed how we came to school, the number of letters in our name, sorted and graphed our different kinds of shoes, our birthday months and the animals we brought to school.

Science – We discussed different types of animals.

Writing – We wrote on a variety of topics: This is Me, What I like in first grade, What I want to learn in first grade, and writing the Letters for the Week.

Please remember that our Open House is on Thursday, September 10th. I'm looking forward to meeting you!

Sincerely,
Mrs. Thomas



Feedback Cards

Your turn!

Please share any comments or suggestions about the communication materials I have sent home this month or stop by the classroom and let me know your feedback.



What do you think?

Please share any comments or suggestions about the communication materials we have been using this month or stop by the classroom and let me know your feedback

(Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Swap, 1993, Christian & Conoly, 1992; Weissberg)