

A Masterpiece of Love and Skill

Building Partnerships between Teachers and Parents

Written by the MetLife Fellows in the Teachers Network Policy Institute (TNPI)

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“When love and skill work together, expect a masterpiece.”

~John Ruskin (1819 - 1900)

The classroom sparkles with a sense of newness; bulletin boards are up; the desks are arranged; and lessons are prepared.

We are ready for the first day of school ...but are we really ready? Have we connected with our students' parents?

According to the U. S. Department of Education, when families are involved in their children's education, children achieve higher grades, have better attendance, complete more homework, exhibit better behavior, and demonstrate more positive attitudes toward school.

The teachers from the Teachers Network Policy Institute (TNPI) together with parents from their schools have successfully implemented several different parent involvement initiatives.

Lamson Lam is a fourth grade teacher in a New York City school with free lunch eligibility of 76%. His students recently passed the New York State English Language Arts test at a 92% rate. Lam demonstrates that parent involvement was key to this success. In his parent workshops, parents and children come together, eat pizza, review class work, and work with him to plan for their children's test success. A parent told Lam, “This is the first time in my son's school years that I've seen him improving a lot in every subject. It's been the best time in my life working at home with him because of all your help.”

In San Jose, California, Quynh Vu at Orchard School offers multiple opportunities for strengthening the parent-teacher partnership by making herself available to parents through phone calls, email, and face-to-face communication daily.

At Mount Pleasant Elementary School in Wilmington, Delaware, the culture of the school changed when teachers took the initiative to involve parents in their children's education. By assessing the needs of the community, the school learned how to include parents who wanted to be involved. According to Bonnie Kirkpatrick, a first grade teacher, "Parent attendance at school functions increased when the school provided transportation, dinner and activities that involved all members of the family."

Here are a few suggestions to begin achieving our goal of creating a shared partnership based on equal accountability and responsibility for educating our children.

"Face Time"

- ? Teachers will commit to being available to parents and providing time to meet and discuss important issues.
- ? Parents will spend time every night discussing what is happening at school.

Communication

- ? Teachers will establish an open and positive line of communication by starting early and continuing throughout the year.
- ? Parents will get involved by attending conferences, school meetings, and activities.

Homework

- ? Teachers will have a clear and consistent policy that ensures homework is meaningful, appropriately assigned, and reviewed to meet individual student needs.
- ? Parents will follow-up with the homework policy set in place and approach the teacher if concerns arise. They will provide a quiet, organized place and a regular time for doing homework, and they will set aside time every day to discuss it.

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The parents' and teacher's commitment to meaningful communication and partnership results in students' success.

Let's check again... bulletin boards up, desks arranged, lessons prepared ... *and* a strong line of regular communication between school and home. **Now** we are ready to begin our journey together for a great start and a successful year for our children.