

Family-School Collaboration and PBS

Applications at the School-wide Level

Part 3: Proactive Strategies for Reaching Out to Families

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Hang in there...



WHAT ON EARTH AM I
DOING IN HERE ON THIS
BEAUTIFUL DAY?!
THIS IS THE ONLY LIFE
I'VE GOT!!



- § Where I am welcomed, I will go.
- § Where I am respected, I will flourish.
- § Where I am shunned and ridiculed, I will flee.
- § Where I am uncomfortable, I will avoid.
- § Where I am understood, I will grow and shine.

- Betty Williams during an interfaith celebration for Martin Luther King day (1995)
- quoted from "Stop blaming parents- and make them partners."
Michael Gamel-McCormick.

Proactive Strategies for Reaching Out to Families

OVERVIEW

1. Getting information FROM families
2. Creating an inviting physical plant
3. Collaborative written communications
4. Relationship-building activities
5. Family-school conferencing

Insanity =
doing the same thing over and
over again
but expecting different
results.

Strategy 1:

Get information FROM families

- § Family members as participants on your school-wide team?
- § School climate and other data from families?
- § Input from families in planning, implementing, and evaluating the school-wide discipline plan?

Strategy 2: Create an Inviting Physical Plant

How welcoming to families does the school appear?

Are visitors a priority?

Create an Inviting Physical Plant

What are some ways to the message that families are welcome here?

- § Welcome signs, mission statement, & school map in several languages
- § Someone/everyone to greet visitors
- § Arrange office in an inviting way
- § Greet all visitors promptly and courteously

Create an Inviting Physical Plant

**All visitors must report
to the office.**

Strategy 3: Collaborative Written Communications

§ Forms and policies

§ Personal communications

Written notices & letters from the school

Does the message communicate that we want to collaborate, learn from families, and work together toward the shared goal of student success?

Teacher to Parent Messages

§ Invitations

- ✓ Should be specific (not just sent home in newsletter)
- ✓ Should be “non-institutional”
- ✓ Should make clear how the activity affects the parent’s own child.

Written Communications: Forms and Policies

- § What reading level is required to interpret the documents?
- § Is there jargon that can be removed or better explained?
- § How do we ensure that families with limited written English literacy have access to this information?

Written Communications: Forms and Policies

- § Are all documents available translated into the primary languages represented in the school?
- § If not, how do we ensure that linguistically diverse families have access to this information?

Written Communications: Forms and Policies

§ Where appropriate, do the documents encourage:

✓ **Parental choices and options**

✓ **Two-way communication**

Bidirectional Communication



"Mom says thanks for your list, and here's a list of things you might like to volunteer to do at our house."

Activity

Activity 7: Volunteers Wanted

- § Review the sample flyer asking for parent volunteers.
- § Note up to three ways in which it reflects a collaborative approach (in contrast to a traditional “parent involvement” approach).
- § Note up to three ways in which it could be made more collaborative.

Activity 7: Volunteers Wanted

Note up to three ways in which it reflects a collaborative approach.

- § It offers multiple options
- § There is an assumption of specific parental expertise (guest lecturing)
- § There is respect for parents' time (asking for best times to call).

Activity 7: Volunteers Wanted

Note up to three ways in which it could be made more collaborative.

- § Was this flyer preceded by a needs assessment?
- § More explanation and detail
- § Communicate respect for different choices (including choice not to participate in these ways).
- § Clarify that these are the “at school” options (there should be others)

Written Communications: Personal Communications

Good people- questionable choices

- § sincere effort to help
- § frustration, anger, defensiveness
- § limited recognition of consequences

Note home to parent...

Dear Mrs. X: I understand that you are confused as to why James received a failing grade in math. I don't understand the confusion as I sent home a progress report with James on February 25, 2002. At that point, his average was 56%. F. I also sent home, via the mail, a district failing notice. You should have been aware that James was indeed failing from these two communications.

Note home to parent...

I left on Feb. 26, 2002 for an extended leave. All of the grades during the duration of my absence were considered when I calculated the final grade. At the end of the marking period, James' average was still only a 60%. F. If you did not receive the two notices, you may need to check with James to see why you did not receive them. If you have any further questions, you can speak with me directly between 1:30 and 2:45 everyday (m-f) at 555-5555.

Activity 8:

Note home to parent...

What emotions does this note convey?

What are the likely responses of the parent receiving this note?

Suggestions for Teachers

- § Use written notes primarily for good news!
- § Communicate about concerns early and directly. Do this in person.
 - ✓ Don't avoid conflict until the problem has escalated.
- § Concentrate on your main goals.
 - ✓ goal is to help the child succeed; criticizing her parents, blaming them for her shortcomings, venting anger will NOT move you closer to this goal.
- § Consult with others when needed.
 - ✓ When you feel angry and like blaming, STOP, talk things out with a trusted colleague (note: this is different from griping and gossiping!). Make a plan.

Suggestions for Teachers

§ If you **MUST** write a letter about a problem (for documentation purposes)...

- ✓ The first note should simply be to set up a meeting.

- ✓ Then have a face to face conversation.

- ✓ A follow-up (documentation) letter should contain **NO SURPRISES**.

- ✓ The letter should stress points of agreement (even if the agreement is limited to your shared desire for the child to be successful).

- ✓ If there are points of disagreement, these should be stated in neutral language.

- ✓ The letter should stress optimism that you will continue to work together.

Ask yourself...

Would I send this same note if the child belonged to the superintendent?

Activity 9: Help a Colleague

A teacher in your building shows you a note that she plans to send home regarding a student in her class. She asks you what you think (NOTE: This is a genuine request for your opinion and assistance).

- ✓ How do you respond? Using good communication strategies, write down what you would say to her regarding her note. Be sure to validate her concerns but help her consider an alternative approach.
- ✓ Assuming that some kind of note must be sent home, rewrite the note to reflect collaborative principles.

Relationship-building activities

§ How often have you heard someone say?

“We never see the parents we need to see!”

Relationship-building activities

§ Examine Current Opportunities

- ✓ Orientation/Back to School Night
- ✓ Workshops
- ✓ Good news phone calls
- ✓ Newsletters
- ✓ Communication systems
- ✓ Contracts/agreements
- ✓ Student progress reports
- ✓ Information on supporting students at home

Relationship-building Activities

§ Start of the year questionnaire:

✓ For parents:

Ø What are your hopes and goals for your child for this school year?

Ø What gets your child excited about learning?

Ø How has your child changed over this past summer?

✓ For students:

Ø What did you learn this summer?

Ø What do you want to learn this year?

Relationship-building Activities

§ "See and Be Seen"

- ✓ Teacher walks around the school
- ✓ Map the neighborhood for resources
- ✓ Shop in the neighborhood (or otherwise spend some non-school time there)
- ✓ Home visits

» From Kyle, et al. (2002)

Relationship-building activities

§ Examine Current Opportunities

§ Needs Assessment/Evaluation

✓ Survey those in attendance at events

Ø What could be done differently to encourage more parents to come?

✓ Survey parents when they register their children

✓ Ask parents for their views at conferences

Sample Evaluation Questions

§ To what extent are the following present in our school community:

- § Recognition that the quality of the family-school relationship influences children's success.
- § A non-blaming, no-fault, problem-solving stance in interactions with families.
- § Parental and school trust in each other.
- § Policies and practices that support shared responsibility for children's learning.

Delaware Self-Assessment School-wide Collaboration Items

- § Delaware Implementation Self-Assessment (DISA) has several items embedded in the school-wide section.
- § You may want to expand on some of these as you develop your school-wide collaboration processes.

DISA Sample Family-School Collaboration Items

§ Support Systems for School-wide Prevention and Correction of Behavior Problems

“Families are actively involved in the development and evaluation of the school-wide plan for preventing behavior problems and promoting positive behavior and self-discipline (e.g. through parent representation on the team; through periodic surveys of families).”

Needs Assessment/Evaluation: Open-ended approach

- § **What information** would you like to receive from your child's teachers that you are not receiving now?
- § **What changes** do you recommend for how conferences and meetings are conducted?
- § **What ideas** do you have about ways to help parents support their children's learning?
- § What would you like teachers to know about your child that they don't know now?

Relationship-building activities

- § Examine Current Opportunities
- § Needs Assessment/Evaluation
- § Build in Options
 - ✓ Choices for families of whether or how to participate
 - ✓ Continuous process of evaluation and information gathering FROM families

Activity 10: Relationship Building Activities

- § Go back to sheets on wall of current activities
- § Select one to three items and develop ways to make them more collaborative.
- § Prepare to share out one idea

Strategy 5: Family-School Conferences

§ Conferences:

- √ Regularly scheduled throughout the year
- √ Offered to all or some families

Strategy 5: Family-School Conferences

In a traditional conference...

§ The **teacher** comes to talk

§ The **parent** comes to listen
and ask questions

§ The **child** comes not at all

Traditional process

- ✓ teachers show they care about child
- ✓ parent shows they care about education
- ✓ BUT there is little exchange of ideas

THERE'S NO SENSE FOR ME TO LOOK AT HALLOWEEN COSTUMES, CHUTNEY! MOM WON'T LET ME GO TO THE PARTY ON SATURDAY ONCE SHE GOES TO THE PARENTS-TEACHERS MEETING ON FRIDAY!

YOU'RE BEING SILLY, CURTIS! I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING MRS. NELSON COULD TELL YOUR MOM THAT WOULD MAKE HER SO ANGRY THAT SHE'D GROUND YOU!....

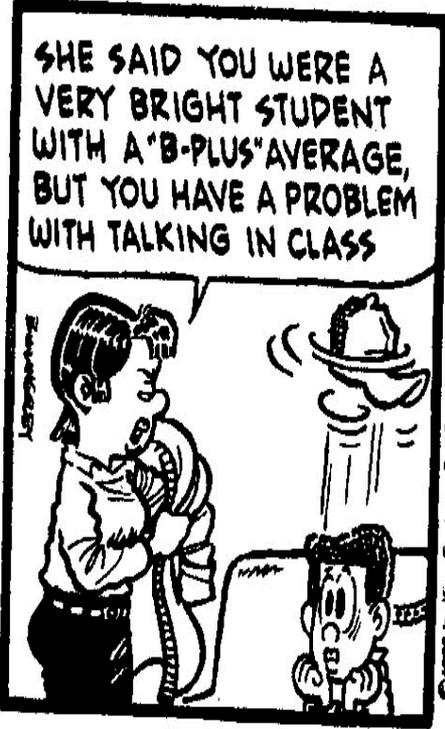
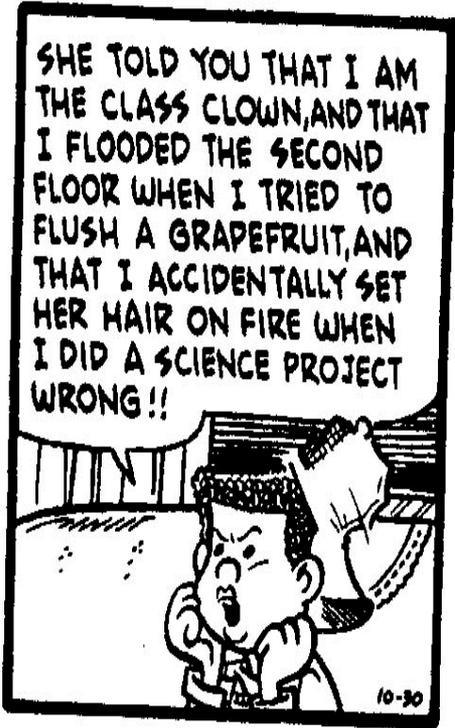
SORRY, MRS. NELSON

I'LL TELL YOU HOW THE PARTY WAS ON SUNDAY....

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19-27

Billingsley



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Traditional Conferences

"...it's just you start at 8 in the morning, and that's where you stay, parked at your table, just pulling folders and papers and talking, and then that person leaves, pulling folders, papers again. So it's like being a mannequin or a robot, I guess...I'm lucky if I can talk after the second day. It's unbearable."

COLLABORATIVE Conferences

The routine conference is a time set aside mostly for a parent-child-teacher celebration of accomplishments and plans for further success; it is not a time to enumerate significant problems (student's or family's).



Emphasize Strengths!!

Family-School Conferences

Process goals

- ✓ **PARTICIPATION:** Each participant has ample time to share thoughts in the conference.
- ✓ **EXPECTATIONS:** Shared expectations for the child are discussed by the group.
- ✓ **ROLES:** Each participant is both a teacher and a learner.

Family-School Conferences

Outcome goals:

- ✓ **OPTIMISM:** All participants leave feeling hopeful about their participation and future success.
- ✓ **EMPOWERMENT:** Educators leave feeling in charge of teaching. Parents leave feeling in charge of parenting. Students leave believing they have greater ownership of their own learning.
- ✓ **PLAN:** A plan is developed collaboratively for supporting the student's continued success, including plans to remediate identified difficulties.

Family-School Conferences

- § All parties prepare in advance
- § Students are **active** participants
- § Educator concentrates on **receiving** rather than just giving information.
- § Educator acknowledges, expands and underscores the **strengths** of the family.
- § The conference is a “**conversation.**” At no time is the educator the “**presenter.**”

6 steps

- A. Preparations
- B. Start the Meeting
- C. Structure the Discussion
- D. Plan for future success
- E. Summarize, Follow-up
- F. Evaluate

A. Preparation

- By asking others to prepare, you set the stage for everyone feeling valued in the interaction.
- It is preferable to have participants write down their thoughts.
- BUT just asking them to think about these areas will help.

1. Prepare parents

Send home a letter identifying the time and parameters (e.g., time allotted) of the meeting.

Ask the parent(s) to think about what is going well and not so well for the student and to write down one or two key issues they wish to discuss in the meeting.

Emphasize that they are encouraged to confer with the student during this process.

2. Prepare students

Let students know they will be active participants in the conference; take some class time to prepare them.

- Explain the purpose (*e.g.*, *"This will help us all work together to help you do well in school."*) and the process of the new conference procedure (& *"This is your chance to share your ideas about how things are going."*)
- Help the students practice introducing you to their parents.
- Ask each student to share with you (or, if old enough, have the student write) his/her thoughts about what is going well, and not so well, this school year, and to identify issues they wish to discuss in the meeting.

3. Prepare yourself

Make your own list of two or three key points you wish to include in the meeting.

Gather work samples that illustrate the child's learning (including test score information, if needed)

Think about anecdotal stories that underscore the child's uniqueness; these stories help the parents understand that you have a connection with their child.

4. Prepare environment

Try to find a comfortable space with sufficient adult sized chairs (eliminate physical barriers such as teacher's desk).

Consider snacks, displays for families who are waiting.

B. Start the meeting

Formal introductions. If the student knows everyone, s/he will perform the introductions. This sets the expectation that the student is a central, active participant in the process. If you plan to do this, prepare the student ahead of time.

Acknowledge the importance of each participant's contribution. Be sure to connect with the participants by looking at each person and welcoming them warmly.

Be clear that the focus is on the student's strengths but that minor concerns can be addressed.

Provide a short description of the agenda. [*"We will begin with (child's name), then the rest of us can join in."*] Include the amount of time available for the meeting keeping in mind the age and attention span of the child (e.g., no more than 15-20 minutes for 5 or 6 year olds).

Starting the Meeting



C. Structure the discussion

3 requirements

1. Begin with the student
2. Integrate
3. Follow the sequence

1. Begin with the student

*"We are here to talk about your
(looking at student) progress so far
this school year. I believe you had
some things you wanted to share
about what is going well for you so
far this year.*

*Let's do that first. What was the first
thing you wanted to share?*

2. Integrate- PRAY

As the conference unfolds integrate your prepared points into the discussion rather than “saving” them for your turn.

Use the PRAY strategy to elicit information.

Integrate – P.R.A.Y.

Pause

Reflect & elicit more information

Ask others' opinions

You offer your view and any necessary supporting information

Creating a Conversation

- 1) Student shares a strength
- 2) The teacher elicits more detail from the student
- 3) The teacher asks the views of the parents and other participants about that point
- 4) The teacher provides his/her own perspective regarding that point
- 5) The teacher summarizes and elicits the next student-identified strength

Process Hints

1. Help students express themselves.

- ✓ Clues- give student ideas by referring to classroom processes
- ✓ Ask "Compared to last year how do you think you are doing in _____ (subject or behavior area)?"

2. Be patient.

- ✓ Do not move prematurely to discuss problem areas. Let everyone have their say and then revisit problem areas.
- ✓ The first part of the conference is for identifying strengths and areas to work on, not for working on problems.

3. Give parents time to brag.

- ✓ Seize every opportunity to genuinely compliment them (blame for success).

4. Summarize frequently- particularly at the end of each topic discussed, before moving to next topic.

Exploring Strengths



Integrating Teacher's Information



Exploring Strengths



Review Areas for Improvement

- § The process is repeated, beginning with the student's ideas for improvements

Plan for future success

- § **Prioritize.** Encourage family to choose one (or maybe two) goals for ongoing success.
- § **Strategize.** Brainstorm possible plans (encourage family to take primary role)
- § **Guide.** Facilitate a discussion to select the plan each person is willing to support.

Areas for Improvement/Planning for Success



Summarize, Follow-up, Feedback

- § Summarize discussion. Either summarize yourself or invite one of the participants to summarize. Check that everyone agrees.
- § Follow-up. Determine mutually agreeable follow-up, if needed.
- § Seek feedback. At the end, ask student and parent their opinions of the conference and changes they would suggest for the next one.

Making the Plan/Wrap Up



F. Evaluate

See form

Research

Minke, K.M., & Anderson, K.J., (2003).
Family-school conferences: An
effective means to encourage parent
involvement in education. *Elementary
School Journal, 104*(1), 49-69.

Family-School Conferences

Outcomes

- § Participating parents and teachers agreed that the conferences were beneficial and they wanted to continue using the FSC style.
- § Children were active participants.
- § Parents and teachers valued watching each other interact with the child

Family-School Conferences Outcomes

- § FSCs took roughly the same amount of time but participants felt more information exchange occurred.
- § Teachers felt they needed lots of practice and feedback to do the process well.

Traditional Conferences

"...it's just you start at 8 in the morning, and that's where you stay, parked at your table, just pulling folders and papers and talking, and then that person leaves, pulling folders, papers again. So it's like being a mannequin or a robot, I guess...I'm lucky if I can talk after the second day. It's unbearable."

Family-School Conference

"My students were active participants in the conferences. I solicited information from parents prior to the meeting. All parents attended. About 95% of the students attended the conference with their parents. I plan on doing this again with every family in the spring!"

Family-School Conference

"I felt more relaxed . . . I felt less like [my son's] defender . . . and I felt [the teacher] was less defensive. I thought she was more open . . . I don't know if it was her tone or her mannerism or her body language . . . it just felt less like something you want to go smoke a cigarette after."

CORE Model Routine Conference

The routine conference is a time set aside mostly for a parent-child-teacher celebration of accomplishments and plans for further success; it is not a time to enumerate significant problems (student's or family's)

Emphasize Strengths!!

Activity 11:

Routine Conference Practice

- § Select one of the two scenarios
- § Choose a role (student, teacher, parent, observer)
- § Try to conduct the conference; use handout
- § Be creative but brief (you only have 20 minutes)
- § Remember this is NOT a problem-solving meeting
- § **Pause and ask for help if needed**

Collaborative Meetings

§ Other approaches to routine conferences

- ✓ Austin, T. (1994). *Changing the view: Student-led parent conferences*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- ✓ Picciotto, L. P. (1996). *Student-led parent conferences*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books.
- ✓ Seliner, B. (1997). Student-led parent conferences. *Learning*, 26, 44–49.

Collaborative Meetings

§ IEP meetings

- ✓ Childre, A., & Chambers, C. R. (2005). Family perceptions of student centered planning and IEP meetings. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 40*, 217–233.
- ✓ Martin, J. E., Van Dycke, J. L., Christensen, W. R., Greene, B. A., Gardner, J. E., & Lovett, D. L. (2006). Increasing student participation in IEP meetings: Establishing the self-directed IEP as an evidence-based practice. *Exceptional Children, 72*, 299–316.
- ✓ Van Reusen, A. K., & Bos, C. S. (1990). IPLAN: Helping students communicate in planning conferences. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 22*(4), 30–32.

Activity 12: Examining Current Practices and Planning for Change

- § Review the planned revisions to your collaborative activities.
- § Outline your dream (up to 3 things you'd like to have happen), including new collaborative activities.
- § Develop 3 steps you can take toward the dream in the first three months of school next year.

If you are completing the cluster...

- § The **tracking sheet** will help you document your activities/reflections.
- § Must have **7 hours total** to include both actions and written reflections.

The importance of relationships...

An understanding heart is everything in a teacher, and cannot be esteemed highly enough. One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feeling.

Carl Gustav Jung

Questions/Assistance

Kathleen Minke: minke@udel.edu

Debby Boyer: dboyer@udel.edu