



Parents with High Expectations

Keys to Success in the Family-School Partnership

Parents as School Partners

As a parent, you are your child's first and most important teacher. When your child enters school, you and the school become partners in what you both hope will be the successful development and education of your child. Years of research show that the more families are actively involved in the education of their children, the more successful the child will be in school and in life. This handout will give you tips for creating a positive and productive partnership with the school.

Good Communication

- Introduce yourself to your child's teachers, the principal, and other school staff. An open house or other "back-to-school" event is a great time to start. Simply shaking hands and saying, "Hi, I'm Jamie's mom. I'm looking forward to working with you this year," can set a positive tone.
- It's important to know the appropriate time to talk with staff. Whenever students are present, school staff do not usually have time to talk to parents for more than a few minutes. If a personal meeting is desired, you should schedule it with the teacher.
- If you are communicating by phone, please keep in mind that teachers usually check voice mail or email only when they are not with their students. If you have an urgent need, ask the school secretary to write down your message and have it delivered directly to the teacher.
- Find out the best method for communicating with school staff. Some staff prefer phone calls while others will respond best to email or written notes. Important information should be communicated in writing if possible.
- If you use email to communicate, try to keep it brief and factual. If you want to tell someone your feelings, talk to the person directly or on the phone.
- Provide the school with the best times and methods to communicate with you. Update contact information, such as your home or cell phone number, whenever there is a change. Respond as quickly as possible when someone contacts you.
- Check your child's backpack daily for notes, newsletters, or other communications from the school.
- Find out how to use the school websites and check them regularly for information.
- If English is a second language for you, ask for information to be provided in your primary language.

Respectful Interactions

- Treat others with the same respect you would like to have and expect the same from them.
- Be positive with your child. He or she will copy your thoughts about the school and teachers which will directly affect his or her educational progress.
- Try to respect the variety of needs and concerns of other students and staff members while speaking up for your own child's individual needs.
- Keep your commitments. Put school conference and meeting dates on your calendar and check it frequently. If you can't make a meeting, call ahead of time to reschedule.

Meaningful Involvement

- Find a way to volunteer or help in your child’s classroom or the community based on what you like to do, what you do well, and the time you have available. For example, if you have a camera and enjoy taking photographs, volunteer to take photos at a school event. This sends a strong message about the value you place on school and sets a good example for your child.
- If your work schedule makes it hard to volunteer during school hours, offer to work on projects that can be done at home and sent back into school with your child.
- Consider serving on a school council, parent involvement committee, or other school or district advisory committee. Parent members are needed.
- Let people know when they are doing a good job. A child’s homemade card with a short note from you can be a great encourager and motivator for a teacher, nurse, or other staff person.

Positive Problem-Solving

- When mistakes are made, try to resolve them quickly and completely. Then move forward. The goal is the successful education of your child.
- Try to approach each new school year as an opportunity for a fresh start regardless of past issues or conflicts.
- You are the expert on your child, and each school staff partner has his or her own particular area of educational expertise and experience. Each can learn from the other how to meet the developmental and educational needs of your child.
- It’s important for parents to understand their rights and responsibilities and how the system works. Ask for and read the school district’s parent handbook.
- Try to address your questions or concerns to the most appropriate person. It may be the teacher, principal, or superintendent of schools.
- If you have ongoing conflict with a particular staff person and you are unable to successfully resolve the issue with them directly, ask to speak with their immediate supervisor.
- Try to disagree without being disagreeable. Separate the person from the problem. Keep adult issues between adults. In most cases, you and your child will have an ongoing relationship with the school long after the conflict is past.
- When you feel upset or confused, try to ask questions rather than becoming angry. Ask school staff to explain using words you understand.
- Focus on possible solutions, rather than the problem itself. Make sure the “problem” is clearly defined.
- When there is a disagreement on how to approach an area of concern, be willing to try something new on a trial basis. Make sure there’s a plan in place to collect information during the trial period to determine whether or not the new plan should be continued.
- Contact PACER Center if you, as the parent, need advice or help (952-838-9000).

While working together in partnership may be challenging, it can also be rewarding. The parent-school partnership can accomplish the goal of helping your child to succeed in learning and in life.

Questions?

Do you have questions about partnering with your child’s school? Call PACER Center at (952) 838-9000 and ask to speak with PACER staff who work on the **Parents with High Expectations Project**.

PACER is a Minnesota nonprofit organization. It supports the educational rights of children with and without disabilities. It offers workshops, individual assistance, written information, and more.