

Solid Foundation

# Communication

**S O L I D**

**Foundation<sup>®</sup>**

Reading • Studying • Respect • Responsibility



## Communication

Communication between the school and the home includes five essential topics: 1) what parents can expect from the school—its programs, curriculum, activities, procedures, and policies; 2) what the school can expect from parents—the curriculum of the home; 3) how the parents' child is progressing; 4) how the school can help the parents; and 5) how the parents can help the school.

Typically, schools are good at providing information about their programs and some indication of how the child is progressing. The school probably provides some avenues for two-way communication about these two topics. A greater challenge lies in giving due attention to what the school should expect from parents, how the school can help parents in their role, and how parents can help the school in its role. Also, most schools need to work hard at creating opportunities for true communication—conversation—between parents and school personnel, and between parents and other parents. This requires outreach to parents, and it requires careful linkage between parent-child interactions and school learning.

*From [The Mega System: Deciding. Learning. Connecting.](http://www.adi.org) Available at [www.adi.org](http://www.adi.org)*

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# **School Community Compact and Self-Rating**



## School Community Compact

Many schools have developed Compacts that outline the responsibilities of students, teachers, parents, and sometimes principals. Title 1 schools often call these “Learning Compacts.” Some schools use the U.S. Department of Education’s “Reading Compact” process.

A school needs only one Compact, whatever it is called. Some of the items in the Compact may vary by grade level. The sample Compact on the next page provides a model. If the school already uses a Compact, that Compact can be modified to include the essential elements listed below.

### Essential Elements of a Compact

- \_\_\_\_\_ **Includes goals for reading, study habits, and respectful/responsible behavior.** Other goals may also be included, and the suggested goals below may be modified to fit the purposes of the school. Schools should include special attention to the three areas of greatest shared responsibility between the school and the home—reading, study habits, and respectful/responsible behavior—as well as ways students, teachers, and parents communicate with one another.
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Lists the responsibilities** (some schools prefer the term “expectations”) of parents/families, students, and teachers. May also include list for principal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Provides guidelines for homework and home study habits.**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Provides guidelines for parent-child reading and teacher’s reading assignments.**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Provides guidelines for encouraging respectful, responsible behavior.**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Provides guidelines for communication within the school community.**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Encourages attendance at parent-teacher-student conferences and open houses.**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Encourages parents to participate in parent education programs offered by the school.**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Outlines ways the school partners with families to enhance students’ learning and mastery of standards.**

Look over your school’s Compact if it has one. Consider the example of a School Community Compact below. Develop one Compact for your school that includes the essential elements above. Check the items above to be sure they are included in your Compact. Submit your Compact for inclusion in the School Improvement Plan. Distribute the Compact to teachers and parents (it’s a good idea to have parents and student sign a copy and return it to the school). Include the Compact on the agenda of parent-teacher-student conferences. Talk about it at open houses. Review it at faculty meetings.

If your school includes a preschool program, or if you would like to include guidance for parents about their preschoolers, consider how each “responsibility” in your Compact might apply to preschool children. For example, preschoolers may not have homework, but it is still a good idea to encourage interactive, parent-child learning activities. You may want to add specific “responsibilities” that clearly apply to preschoolers. If your school includes a preschool program, then it should be clear that parents of preschoolers are included in open houses and parent-teacher-student conferences.

## FRANKLIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (EXAMPLE) SCHOOL COMMUNITY COMPACT

### I. GOALS

We, the Franklin Elementary School community, establish this School Community Compact so that:

- **Goal 1: Reading.** Every student will learn to *read well, read often, and enjoy reading* through a focused alliance of family support and powerful classroom instruction.
- **Goal 2: Studying.** Every student will *become a self-directed learner* through teaching that incorporates study skills, homework practices that build study habits, and parental guidance.
- **Goal 3: Respect & Responsibility.** Every student will *develop a sense of responsibility and respect* for self and others through consistent direction and support from the family and the school.
- **Goal 4: Community.** The *school will function as a community* of its constituents—parents, students, teachers, and other school personnel.

### II. RESPONSIBILITIES

#### A. Parent's and Family's Responsibilities

We will:

#### Goal 1: Reading

- Know what skills our child is learning in reading each day.
- Complete activities at home, like the Reading School-Home Links (K-3), that reinforce our child's classroom learning.
- Read with, or to, our child for 15 minutes each day, five days a week (Pre-K-1st grade).
- Read with, or to, our child for 30 minutes each day, five days a week (grades 2-3).
- Provide a quiet place for our child to read.
- Encourage our child to read for pleasure and to learn.
- Get a library card for our child, and encourage our child to bring reading materials from the library into the home.
- Visit the library with our child.
- Talk about reading with our child—what our child is reading and what we are reading.
- Establish family reading time as a family activity.

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**Goal 2: Studying**

- Spend a few minutes each day with interactive learning activities (activities parents and children do together) with our preschool child.
- See that our school-age child spends at least 10 minutes per grade level per day, five days a week, studying and completing homework at home (example: 4th grader—40 minutes).
- Establish a study place at home that is quiet, well-lit, and where our child can sit to study.
- Monitor our child's study time, offering praise and encouragement.
- Check our child's assignment notebook at least once each week.
- Assist our child with study resources by providing books and taking him/her to the library.

**Goal 3: Respect and Responsibility**

- Make sure that our child attends school regularly, is on time, and is prepared to learn, with necessary supplies and homework completed.
- Expect our child to behave responsibly and treat other people with respect.
- Teach our child to help other people.
- Teach and reinforce table manners and telephone manners.
- Teach our child to make proper introductions and greet people warmly and respectfully.
- Teach and encourage our child to look for the good in other people and to pay and receive sincere compliments.
- Listen attentively to our child each day.
- Teach and model acceptance of responsibility for the positive and negative outcomes of personal behavior.
- Teach and model responsible decision making.
- Model good citizenship and encourage our child to demonstrate good citizenship in the classroom, school, home, and community.

**Goal 4: Community**

- Attend parent-teacher-student conferences and open houses and communicate frequently with our child's teacher, through notes and conversation, about how well our child is doing and what we can do to help.
- Participate in programs offered by the school for parents, including workshops and courses.

## B. Student's Responsibilities

I will:

### **Goal 1: Reading**

- Ask my family to read to me or with me for 15 minutes each day, five days a week (Pre-K-1st grade).
- Ask my family to read to me or with me for 30 minutes each day, five days a week (grades 2-3).
- Read regularly for pleasure as well as to learn.
- Talk about reading with family members, friends, and teachers.
- Write about my reading by keeping a reading journal.

### **Goal 2: Studying**

- Preschool children: Spend a few minutes each day with my parents with an interactive learning activity (something we do together).
- Study at home in a quiet place at least 10 minutes per grade level per day, five days a week (example: 4th grader—40 minutes).
- Complete my homework on time in a thorough and legible way.
- Welcome help from my family on my homework and papers.
- Study while sitting up in a quiet, well-lit place.
- Plan study time to avoid conflicts with other activities.
- Complete and turn in all assignments.
- Keep an assignment notebook to record assignments, due dates, work completed, and grades.

### **Goal 3: Respect and Responsibility**

- Arrive at school on time and ready to learn.
- Pay attention to my teachers, family, and tutors, and ask questions when I need help.
- Help other people (family members, teachers, friends) each day.
- Exhibit good table manners and telephone manners.
- Make proper introductions and greet people warmly and respectfully.
- Look for the good in other people and pay a sincere compliment to someone (family member, teacher, friend) each day.
- Listen attentively to someone (family member, teacher, friend) each day.
- Behave responsibly and treat other people with respect.
- Recognize and accept the positive and negative outcomes of my behavior.

- 
- Accept responsibility for my learning and persist until I get the job done.
  - Demonstrate good citizenship in the classroom, school, home, and community.

**Goal 4: Community**

- Attend parent-teacher-student conferences and keep my parents informed about what I am doing in school.
- Keep my parents informed about what I am learning and doing at school.

**C. Teacher's Responsibilities**

I will:

**Goal 1: Reading**

- Keep parents informed of the reading skills their children are learning and how they can reinforce the skills at home.
- Assign Reading School-Home Links to my students at least three times each week (K-3).
- Provide time for students to read, and encourage discussion and writing about reading.
- Participate in professional development in how to teach reading and how to communicate with families.
- Read to students at least twice each week.
- Require students to read each day.
- Make "Writing about Reading" assignments each grading period.
- Encourage class discussion about reading.
- Teach students methods for reading for the purpose of mastering the material.

**Goal 2: Studying**

- Provide parents of preschool children with interactive learning activities that they can do together.
- Assign homework regularly, including reading assignments, and collect, correct, and return homework.
- Use homework assignments to help students master material rather than to introduce new material.
- Grade homework and return it promptly to students, marking the work with comments particular to the student as often as possible.
- Count homework grades toward the report card grade.
- Teach students how to study.
- Teach students to monitor their own learning.

### **Goal 3: Respect and Responsibility**

- Encourage students to behave responsibly and treat other people with respect.
- Teach and encourage students to be helpful.
- Teach and reinforce table manners and telephone manners.
- Teach students to make proper introductions and greet people warmly and respectfully.
- Teach and encourage students to look for the good in people and to pay and receive sincere compliments.
- Teach and encourage attentive listening skills.
- Clearly apprise students of assignments to be completed and hold students responsible for meeting obligations.
- Teach and model acceptance of responsibility for the positive and negative outcomes of personal behavior.
- Teach and model responsible decision making.
- Model good citizenship and encourage students to demonstrate good citizenship in the classroom, school, home, and community.

### **Goal 4: Community**

- Communicate frequently with parents about their children's progress and show them how they can help.
- Hold at least two parent-teacher-student conferences a year.
- Encourage parents to participate in parent education programs offered by the school.

#### **D. Our Family-School Partnership**

Our school helps strengthen the family-school partnership to enhance our students' learning through our parent-teacher organization, School Community Council, family resource library, family nights, series of courses for parents, classroom visits by parents, home visits, and communication about students' progress toward learning standards. A schedule of parent activities is available in the office and on the parent bulletin board outside the office.

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## Pledge and Signature Page

We have read the School Community Compact and will do our best to meet our responsibilities.

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

The School Community Compact should be distributed annually to parents, students, and teachers, and discussed with students, parents, and teachers. The Compact may be attractively presented as a booklet and may include other important information such as school contact information. The signature page may be distributed separately or two copies of the Compact given to parents so that they have a copy to refer to when they return the signed copy. You may want to introduce the Compact and other new policies at the beginning of the next school year.



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## Self-Rating Forms

Self-rating forms have two purposes:

- 1) to encourage every teacher, student, and parent to think seriously about how they fulfill the responsibilities outlined in the Compact, and
- 2) to gather information so the school can give attention to areas where teachers, students, and parents are having difficulty. Giving attention may mean providing education programs or information.

A self-rating form is nothing more than a list of the responsibilities included in our Compact and a scale by which a teacher, parent, or student estimates how well he or she is meeting that responsibility.

Create self-rating forms for teachers, parents, and students and decide how to administer them. Decide how to word the “categories” for the scale and how to administer the forms and calculate the results. The forms are always completed anonymously, and then collected so you can calculate which responsibilities may need more attention. Parent-teacher-student conferences are a good time to administer the forms, but they may also be done at another time. Students may complete them in class or with their parents.

An example of a self-rating form for *teachers* is on the following pages. Look at it and then decide how to construct your own for teachers, parents, and students.

## School Community Compact Self-Rating for Teachers (Example)

Please rate yourself on the following school community responsibilities from our Compact, according to the following scale:

### Rating Categories

3 = I meet this responsibility consistently and well.

2 = I meet this responsibility some of the time and fairly well.

1 = I seldom meet this responsibility.

NA = Not applicable to my grade level

Reading				
3	2	1	NA	Keep parents informed of the reading skills their children are learning and how they can reinforce the skills at home.
3	2	1	NA	Assign Reading School-Home Links to my students at least three times each week (K-3).
3	2	1	NA	Provide time for students to read, and encourage discussion and writing about reading.
3	2	1	NA	Participate in professional development on how to teach reading and how to communicate with families.
3	2	1	NA	Read to students at least twice each week.
3	2	1	NA	Require students to read each day.
3	2	1	NA	Make "Writing about Reading" assignments each grading period.
3	2	1	NA	Encourage class discussion about reading.
3	2	1	NA	Teach students methods for reading for the purpose of mastering the material.
Studying				
3	2	1	NA	Assign homework regularly, including reading assignments, and collect, correct, and return homework.
3	2	1	NA	Use homework assignments to help students master materials rather than to introduce new material.
3	2	1	NA	Grade homework and return it promptly to students, marking the work with comments particular to the student as often as possible.
3	2	1	NA	Count homework grades toward the report card grade.
3	2	1	NA	Teach students how to study.
3	2	1	NA	Teach students to monitor their own learning.
Respect and Responsibility				
3	2	1	NA	Encourage students to behave responsibly and treat other people with respect.
3	2	1	NA	Teach and encourage students to be helpful.
3	2	1	NA	Teach and reinforce table manners and telephone manners.
3	2	1	NA	Teach students to make proper introductions and greet people warmly and respectfully.



**Tabulate the results of the Self-Rating forms and report the findings.**

Constructing self-rating forms is simple enough. Make a separate form for teachers, parents, and students. For preschool and early primary students, you might use a happy face, straight face, and frowning face on the scale and ask students to circle one when the parent or teacher reads and explains the responsibility.

You may want to change the definitions of the scale. Discuss the scale and decide if changes need to be made.

Our scale categories will be worded as follows:

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When and how will the self-rating forms be administered?

To preschool students \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To primary grade students \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To intermediate grade students \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To upper grade students \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To teachers \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To parents \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Set a date by which the self-rating forms will be administered and collected. Decide who will take on the task of tabulating the results and preparing a report. Maybe other parents or teachers can be enlisted to help.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## *Sample Self-Rating Forms*

## M.L. King Elementary School Community Compact Self-Rating Form for Students (Intermediate Grades)

Please rate yourself on the following school community responsibilities from our Compact, according to the following scale.

Rating Categories

3 = I meet this responsibility consistently and well

2 = I meet this responsibility some of the time and fairly well

1 = I seldom meet this responsibility

0 = Not applicable to my grade level

Reading				
3	2	1	0	Ask my family to read to me or with me for 30 minutes each day (K-3)
3	2	1	0	Read regularly for pleasure as well as to learn
3	2	1	0	Talk about reading with family members, friends and teachers
Studying				
3	2	1	0	Study at home in a quiet place at least 10 minutes per grade level per day, (4) four days a week (example 4th grader – 40 minutes)
3	2	1	0	Complete my homework on time, written clearly and neatly
3	2	1	0	Welcome help from my family on my homework and papers
3	2	1	0	Keep an assignment notebook to record assignments, due dates, work completed, grades, and parent signature
Respect and Responsibility				
3	2	1	0	Come to school on time and ready to learn
3	2	1	0	Pay attention to my teachers, family, and tutors and ask questions when I need help
3	2	1	0	Recognize and accept the positive and negative outcomes of my behavior
3	2	1	0	Demonstrate good citizenship (behavior) in the classroom, school, home, and community
Community				
3	2	1	0	Keep my parents informed about what I am learning and doing at school


Comments \_\_\_\_\_


\_\_\_\_\_


Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## M.L. King Elementary School Community Compact Self-Rating Form for Students (Primary Grades)




Directions: Please rate yourself by circling the face that best describes you, according to the scale.  
SCALE




 = Always




 = Sometimes

 = Never




### Reading



   I ask my family to read to me or with me every day (K-3)




   I read to learn and for fun




   I talk to my family about reading

### Studying




   I have a quiet place to study at home

   I do my homework neatly and turn it in on time


   I ask for help when needed




   I keep my homework folder neat and up to date

### Respect and Responsibility




   I come to school prepared to learn

   I pay attention in class and ask questions

   I follow rules and am responsible for my behavior

   I behave well at school, home, and in the community

### Community

   I always tell my parents about what I have learned

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## M.L. King Elementary School Community Compact Self-Rating Form for Teachers

Please rate yourself on the following school community responsibilities from our Compact, according to the following scale:

Rating Categories

3 = I meet this responsibility consistently and well

2 = I meet this responsibility some of the time and fairly well

1 = I seldom meet this responsibility

0 = Not applicable to my grade level

Reading				
3	2	1	0	Keep parents informed of the reading skills their children are learning and how they can reinforce the skills at home
3	2	1	0	Assign Reading School-Home Links to my students at least three times each week (K-3)
3	2	1	0	Participate in professional development on how to teach reading and how to communicate with families
Studying				
3	2	1	0	Assign homework regularly, including reading assignments, and collect, correct, and return homework
3	2	1	0	Use homework assignments to help students master materials rather than to introduce new material
3	2	1	0	Grade homework assignments to help students master materials rather than to introduce new material
Respect and Responsibility				
3	2	1	0	Teach and encourage students to look for the good in people and to pay and receive sincere compliments
3	2	1	0	Clearly apprise students of assignments to be completed and hold students responsible for meeting obligations
3	2	1	0	Model good citizenship and encourage students to demonstrate good citizenship in the classroom, school, home, and community
Community				
3	2	1	0	Communicate frequently with parents about their child's progress and show them how they can help
3	2	1	0	Hold at least two parent-teacher-student conferences a year
3	2	1	0	Encourage parents to participate in parent education programs offered by the school

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**M. L. KING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COMMUNITY COMPACT**  
**Self-Rating for Parents**

Please rate yourself on the following school community responsibilities from our Compact, according to the following scale:

Rating Categories

3 = I meet this responsibility consistently and well

2 = I meet this responsibility some of the time and fairly well

1 = I seldom meet this responsibility

0 = Not applicable to my grade level

<b>Reading</b>				
3	2	1	0	Make sure that your child attends school regularly, is on time, and is prepared to learn, with homework completed.
3	2	1	0	Know what skills your child is learning in reading and other classes each day.
3	2	1	0	Do activities at home, like the School-Home Links (K-3) that continue your child's classroom learning at home.
3	2	1	0	Read with or to your child for 30 minutes each day, (4) four days a week (K-3).
3	2	1	0	Encourage your child to read for pleasure and to learn.
3	2	1	0	Get a library card for your child and encourage your child to bring reading materials from the library into the home.
3	2	1	0	Visit the library with your child.
<b>Studying</b>				
3	2	1	0	Provide a quiet place for your child to study and read.
3	2	1	0	See that your child spends at least 10 minutes per grade level per day, (4) four days a week, studying and completing homework at home (example: 4th grader – 40 minutes).
3	2	1	0	Monitor your child's study time, offering praise and encouragement.
<b>Respect and Responsibility</b>				
3	2	1	0	Expect your child to behave responsibly and treat other people with respect.
3	2	1	0	Model good citizenship (behavior) and encourage your child to demonstrate good citizenship (behavior) in the classroom, school, home, and community.
<b>Community</b>				
3	2	1	0	Attend parent-teacher-student conferences and communicate frequently with your child's teacher through notes and conversations about how well your child is doing and what you can do to help.
3	2	1	0	Participate in programs offered by the school for parents, including workshops and courses.

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



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# Homework Policy and Monitoring



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## Homework Policy

**Homework.** Work assigned by a teacher that is done outside the regular school day.

**Studying at Home.** “Studying at Home” is a term used to describe all instances of a child’s studying at home, including but not limited to assigned homework. Parents can contribute to the child’s habit of study and acquisition of knowledge by establishing study time at home. During this time, children complete homework and, if homework is finished, continue to read, practice, and study on their own.

Ideally, parents will expect their children to study at home for a period of time each school day, and teachers will consistently assign homework. Thus, the habit of studying is established by both the home and the school. Learning time is extended beyond the regular school day.

### Homework Policy and Practice

From research, we know that homework is a powerful means for increasing children’s learning. We know that homework helps children form the habits of independent study. We know that homework is the school’s primary extension into the home. We also know that homework is a source of conflict between many parents and children. Homework is also the topic of complaint many parents raise against schools. Parents who accept the responsibility for seeing that their children attend to their homework are often perplexed that homework practices vary so widely from teacher to teacher. Parents are confused that some educators tell them that homework is important but some teachers do not assign it. They find that some teachers grade homework, and some do not. In some classes, homework is counted toward the report card grade, and in some classes it is not. Parents are surprised to hear from their children that they have completed their homework at school. What is homework if it is done at school rather than at home?

Because a school community wants its teachers, parents, and students to work in harmony, with clearly understood roles in the education of children, homework is a topic that every school community must address. Because school communities are concerned with children’s habit formation, they know that positive habits are best built with consistent reinforcement from home and school. Independent study is an important habit, and homework can be a strong tool for helping children acquire the habit of study.

Research (see *Parents and Learning* workshop materials in Education section) on homework tells us that:

- Required homework is more effective than voluntary homework.
- Having no homework assigned at one grade level adversely affects performance at subsequent grade levels.

Homework is most effective when returned promptly by the teacher with comments and a grade.

We also know that some kinds of homework are more effective than others. Homework is most effective when it is:

- Frequent,
- Directly related to in-class work,
- Used to master rather than introduce new material,

- Graded and included as a significant part of the report card grade, and
- Returned to the student soon after it is collected, and marked, with comments particular to the student.

A great quantity of homework is not as important as the regular assignment of homework. A rule of thumb is that students should study at home a minimum of 10 minutes per grade level per day, five days per week. Of course, this time expands when students prepare for tests or write major reports.

How can a school community enhance the benefits of homework? The process begins with a clear policy that states the roles of teachers, parents, and students. But policies are no better than the paper they are written on unless:

- The people to which they apply are given assistance in carrying them out, and
- Actual practices are monitored to detect and correct problems.

## What is included in an effective homework policy?

### Elements of a Homework Policy

<b>Importance.</b>	Explain why homework is important.
<b>Roles.</b>	Clearly state the roles of teachers, parents, and students in the assignment and completion of homework.
<b>Frequency.</b>	Provide guidelines for frequency of homework.
<b>Quantity.</b>	Provide guidelines for amount of time students might be expected to spend with homework (this will vary by grade level).
<b>Weight.</b>	Establish the weight of homework in determining report card grades.
<b>Correction/Return.</b>	Establish guidelines for prompt return of graded homework to students.

The following is an example of a homework policy:

## Franklin School Community

### Homework Policy

Because the Franklin School Community wishes to assist students in developing habits and skills of independent study and desires to extend learning time beyond the regular school day, homework will be assigned by teachers at all grade levels. As a rule, students will receive homework assignments each school day, and the amount of time required to complete such homework will typically be no less than 10 minutes per grade level per day. Parents will be expected to provide a quiet, well-lighted place for children to study and to see that their children complete homework assignments. Parents may, but will not be expected to, assist their children in understanding homework. Students will complete homework and submit it to their teachers on time. Teachers will correct and return homework promptly, within a period of time not to exceed one week. Homework will count for no less than 20% of the report card grade in each subject. While students in the preschool program may receive few “homework” assignments, they will be provided interactive learning activities that include their parents, and parents are encouraged to take time each day for learning activities with their preschool children.

Discuss and construct a homework policy that includes the elements of a homework policy listed above. Jot the central ideas on the worksheet. Then develop a full draft of the policy.

### Homework Policy (Worksheet):

Importance: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Roles: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Frequency: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Weight: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Correction/Return: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent-Child Interactions for Preschoolers (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



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## Monitoring Homework

A homework policy will benefit children only to the extent that it is carried out. To know how well the policy is working, to identify problems, to make necessary adjustments, and to provide training for teachers and parents, you need to know what is really happening with homework. Is homework being consistently assigned? Are students completing homework? Are parents encouraging students to complete homework? Which students are having difficulty with homework? How can they be helped?

A simple way to monitor homework is to ask each teacher to submit to the principal a weekly summary of homework assignments made the previous week. This may be done for a month each year, so that results can be compared from year to year. The summary would include:

- Assignments made each day
- Number of students who completed assignments to the satisfaction of the teacher each day
- Number of students who did not complete assignments to the satisfaction of the teacher each day (other than for reasons of excusable absence)

Gathering this information enables monitoring of the effectiveness of the homework policy and taking steps to improve it.

Monitoring homework helps draw attention to its importance, for teachers, students, and parents.

A form for teachers to report information about homework could look like the one on the following page. Tabulate the results of the teacher reports for the month and prepare a summary report for the school to show parents and teachers.

Teacher's Homework Report

Please submit this report to the principal's office each Friday for the week that ended the previous Friday.

Teacher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level: \_\_\_\_\_

For Week Beginning (Monday's Date): \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Subject:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Assignment					
Estimated Time					
Students Completing					
Students Not Completing					
Subject:					
Assignment					
Estimated Time					
Students Completing					
Students Not Completing					
Assignment: Brief description of assigned work. Estimated Time: Time average student would take to complete assignment. Students Completing: Number of students who completed and submitted homework on time. Students Not Completing: Number of students who did not complete and submit homework on time.					

Homework Report

A tabulation of the homework reports prepared by teachers for one month.

**Beginning Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**End Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Number of School Days Reported:** \_\_\_\_\_

Homework Assignments : Average Number of Days per Week and Average Estimated Minutes Per Day by Subject and Grade

Grade	Reading		Math		Social Studies		Science		TOTAL	
	Days	Minutes	Days	Minutes	Days	Minutes	Days	Minutes	Days	Minutes
<b>K</b>	3-2	5.1	1.1	5.1	.4	4.0	.3	3.9	5.0	18.4
<b>1</b>	3-4	7.3	2.1	6.4	1.3	5.2	1.6	4.5	8.4	23.4
<b>2</b>	4-2	11.8	2.3	10.3	1.8	6.8	2.1	6.8	10.7	35.7
<b>3</b>	4-1	14.3	3.4	8.7	2.2	7.9	2.4	10.7	12.1	41.6
<b>4</b>	4-4	18.6	3.4	11.8	2.3	9.2	2.4	5.8	12.5	54.4
<b>5</b>	4-6	20.4	3.7	12.2	2.1	10.8	2.5	9.5	13.2	52.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	23-9	77.5	16.0	54.5	10.1	43.9	11.6	41.2	61.6	217.1

Homework Assignments: Total Assignments and Percent Completed by Subject and Grade

Grade	Reading		Math		Social Studies		Science		TOTAL	
	Assigned	Percent Completed	Assigned	Percent Completed	Assigned	Percent Completed	Assigned	Percent Completed	Assigned	Percent Completed
<b>K</b>	24	96%	14	92%	8	96%	7	97%	53	95.3%
<b>1</b>	36	94%	18	93%	10	94%	9	95%	73	94.0%
<b>2</b>	42	95%	22	93%	10	96%	9	96%	83	95.0%
<b>3</b>	46	97%	28	89%	14	95%	15	89%	103	92.5%
<b>4</b>	51	92%	28	87%	14	94%	18	84%	111	89.2%
<b>5</b>	58	91%	31	85%	12	97%	20	81%	121	90.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	257	94.6%	144	89.8%	68	572	78	90.3%	547	92.6%



Action	Timeline



Solid Foundation

# Information Technology



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## Information Technology in Education

### “E-Parenting”

“E-Parenting” is an especially convenient and effective way for parents and teachers to communicate about student progress. Web-based student information reporting, sometimes referred to as “E-parenting,” offers a web host and portal system for monitoring student assignments, attendance, grades, school nurse activity, disciplinary, and even lunch information. Such systems are touted to increase parent involvement and raise student achievement. For parents whose work removes them from the home environment for days at a time, these systems allow frequent checking and monitoring of their child’s academic activity simply by logging on to the school’s secured information system.

These systems can also give parents insight into the subject matter in their child’s classes at any given time and become alerted to areas of difficulty while there is still time to make improvement during the grading period. Often times a link directly to the teacher is offered on the report summary page providing an immediate avenue of communication to express concerns or ask questions about the information being viewed. The system also gives teachers the flexibility of responding to parent concerns as time allows during their busy day.

Having the ability to track student activity throughout each grading period and communicate conveniently as needed with school staff, many parents feel these systems could replace the old-fashioned, hard-copy report cards.

### Information Technology Providers

A web search of Student Management Software will produce an extensive listing of software packages and providers for student management programs. Most software packages are available in modules with topics ranging from student registration to grade reporting, and from accounting to personnel management, making it easy to custom tailor a management service to the needs of the school or district. The provider websites offer a view of sample forms, reports, and virtual tours of sample schools.

For a quick sampling of products available visit:

- [www.blackbaud.com](http://www.blackbaud.com)
- [www.edline.com](http://www.edline.com)
- [www.powerschool.com](http://www.powerschool.com)
- [www.SDS.com](http://www.SDS.com)
- [www.skyward.com](http://www.skyward.com)

### School Websites and E-mail

School websites can provide easy access to electronic student progress reporting systems through a link on the school’s main webpage. Even when a school doesn’t have an electronic student progress reporting system, school websites can be a valuable source of information for parents and offer a convenient and efficient way of keeping communication flowing between parents and the school.

School websites often house useful information such as:

- Department and staff listings with links to teachers' and administrators' electronic mail boxes
- School and sports calendars
- Lunch menu
- Clubs and organizational information
- Activity announcements and schedules
- Alumni information
- Homework assignments

All of these areas hold a great deal of interest for parents. However, in developing a website for your school, don't overlook Parent Resources. A Parent Resources webpage on the school site is an excellent way to keep important information readily available to parents.

A parent resource section could be used to:

- Post your school's parent involvement policy, Compact, homework policy, and classroom visit policy
- Post tips for parents on such topics as homework help, reading at home, building respect and responsibility, and knowing your child's friends
- Request volunteer helpers
- Provide links to parent resource websites
- Provide links to state and local educational agencies websites
- View and download student handbooks
- Review and download school discipline policies and procedures
- Download school forms such as:
  - ◆ Volunteer survey forms
  - ◆ School physical forms
  - ◆ Authorization to administer medication form
  - ◆ Permission to participate forms
  - ◆ Pre-arranged or excused absence forms
  - ◆ Free or reduced lunch forms

As children progress into and through the upper grades, communication with parents seems to become more challenging. Information technology in education can be helpful in bridging that communication gap. Parents can initiate and maintain contact with the school outside of normal school hours. No longer do parents need to rely on their children as the main source of information regarding school functions and activities.

Solid Foundation

# **Teacher to Parent Telephone Calls**



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## Teacher to Parent Telephone Calls

Phone calls are a personal form of communication and may be difficult for teachers who do not have phones in their classroom or within communities where families do not have access to phones. However, this type of communication ensures direct contact with families and allows the teacher to be certain that families are indeed receiving important information. It is helpful to utilize a brief agenda when making phone calls to highlight the issues to address with the parents. This can serve as an informal script and provide a record of your communication with the parents. A sample worksheet is included in this section that highlights items to discuss when contacting parents by phone, welcoming them to the classroom at the beginning of the school year. The worksheet provides teachers with an agenda/checklist to guide phone calls, as well as a sample script.

Teachers can also use phone calls to share special accomplishments. Parents may expect only negative information about their child from the teacher, but this perception can be altered. A positive phone call acknowledging a student's improved work or continued effort, thanking a parent for helping out on a class project, or personally inviting a parent to a special event will increase parent's comfort with teachers. These phone calls can be brief; essentially, the intention is to make sure the parent is aware of what a great job the child is doing.

Telephone calls can be a useful way for parents and teachers to share information about children's progress. Utilize phone calls to provide parents with positive information about their children, updates about classroom activities, and to express support and/or concern for students. Developing guidelines for conducting phone calls may also help make this form of communication effective. It helps to outline the major topics to address with parents during a phone call. It is important that the teacher introduces himself/herself, explains the purpose of the call, provides the parent with pertinent information, and encourages parent feedback. Taking time to listen is imperative.

Providing specific descriptions of the student's behavior and conveying support and enthusiasm for the student's accomplishments are likely to enhance the effectiveness of the phone communication. To maximize the success of telephone communication, practices need to be developed to ensure that teachers have access to phones and promptly receive messages. Principals and school staff need to make accommodations to ensure that teachers have the time and resources to make phone calls to parents.

Communicating through phone calls may be difficult for parents who do not have access to a telephone or are not fluent in English. Thus, alternative arrangements need to be made for these families. A translator may be very helpful for written or in-person communication with parents who have difficulty in conversing in English, and teachers can request to meet personally with parents who do not have access to a phone. Phone calls are a good alternative for working parents to communicate with teachers directly during the school day.



Solid Foundation

# **Passing Notes:**

**Teacher to Parent  
Parent to Teacher**



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## Teacher Notes to Parents

Many teachers prefer to use written notes and find them to be an extremely convenient way to communicate with families. You may choose to send a postcard, brief letter, or note that welcomes families to your classroom. Since families are often overwhelmed with written materials early in the school year, it may help to print notes on colored paper or utilize graphic designs to capture parents' attention. In addition, using larger print and minimizing the amount of written material on the page may also make it more likely that families will read written communication. Families are often more receptive to personalized communication; you can address the note to the family, or include a handwritten note at the bottom of a printed page.

There are several ways to deliver written communication to families; prior to the start of school these letters can be sent to families through the mail. After school begins, many teachers choose to send home written communication with students. A great way to ensure that written communication is received by families is by hand delivering it at orientations, registrations, or when parents come to pick up or drop off children.

Notes to the home can be used to keep parents informed of children's progress. Through the use of these notes, you can make specific, individualized comments about children's skill development and achievement. It is important to recognize at least one positive accomplishment of children when creating progress notes. In addition, you can provide additional ways for parents to facilitate children's learning and achievement. In order to foster two-way communication, you can request that the parent send a note back to you. You can also encourage parents' responses by allocating space for comments or including a few brief questions for return. This practice also keeps you informed of parents' ideas and concerns. However it is important to promptly respond to parents' remarks and/or questions.

A flyer at the beginning of the school year can highlight important information for students and parents about the first day of school, but does not overwhelm them with a lot of writing and information. Information to be included in this communication is the date and time of the first day of school, your name, location of the classroom, and classroom number.

A welcome letter can provide basic information about classroom practices. Within this letter, it is helpful to highlight key information related to classroom routines, homework, and communication practices. As always, it is best to continually encourage parent involvement and remind parents that you are available to discuss questions or concerns.

Welcoming communication efforts can also come from the principal. Many schools utilize a school-wide welcome letter that provides families with orientation information about school policies, but letters from the child's teacher are always especially appreciated by parents.

## Parent Notes to Teachers

### Happy-Grams

Print pads of Happy-Grams for teachers to send notes to parents complimenting students for specific achievements and behaviors. Because teachers also appreciate notes of kindness, distribute pads of Happy-Grams to parents. Print blank Happy-Grams forms in the newsletter. Parents can clip the forms from the newsletter and send notes to teachers.



Solid Foundation

# Newsletters



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## Tips for Using Newsletters to Communicate with Parents

Many schools publish newsletters to establish school-home communication. A quality newsletter needs to be well planned and organized to reach parents effectively. Use this tip sheet as a tool for evaluating your newsletter or to help you develop a newsletter at your school.

What is the purpose of the newsletter?

- To inform parents about what is going on at the school
- To stimulate interest in school activities
- To communicate expectations
- To celebrate successes
- To share information from one parent to others
- To solicit feedback from parents

Questions to ask about your school's newsletter

- Who is it for?
- What do we want to communicate?
- How do we present the information?
- Who is responsible for developing the newsletter?
- Who is responsible for designing, formatting, and copying the newsletter?
- How will it be distributed?
- Who needs to approve the newsletter before it is sent out?

Content of a quality newsletter

- Feature specific items from the school community compact
- Feature specific items from the school's parent involvement policy
- Explain the school homework policy and parents' role with homework
- Suggest books for children to read, parents to read, and families to read together and discuss
- Share recent accomplishments of the students in all areas of activities
- Include upcoming changes in school policies or programs
- Announce service projects that the school is implementing
- Include a calendar of upcoming events: testing, workshops, conferences, etc.
- Include human interest items featuring students, class project, volunteers, etc.
- Be sure that content is clear, simple, and direct
- Make sure the letter maintains a positive and upbeat tone

- Ask parents to write articles for the newsletter
- Ask parents for tips for helping kids with homework
- Ask parents to share ideas for family activities and outings
- Feature community resources such as libraries, museums, zoos, and youth clubs
- Provide information for enrolling in youth organizations and activities such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys & Girls Clubs, and 4-H

Solid Foundation

# Parent Bulletin Boards



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## Parent Bulletin Boards

Parent bulletin boards are not typically perceived to be a communication tool, but rather, an information source. Creative uses of bulletin boards can facilitate parent-to-parent communication, school-to-parent communication, and parent-to-school communication. It can create an avenue that encourages parental interaction with and at the school. Centrally located, where parents come and go, a parent bulletin board or message center can reach out to parents who rarely attend school functions or meetings.

In developing a parent bulletin board, think of it as communication central for ships that pass in the night. Your school's parent message center can certainly be a platform to post monthly school information such as announcements, calendars, lunch menus, board minutes, and honor roll rolls and other award announcements. But remember, the nature of communication is two-way, and the goal is to generate parental interaction. Posted information can and does inspire communication from parents to school, but in a school community, interaction between parents is just as desirable.

In addition to a school information section on the parent bulletin board, provide a section for parents to communicate with other parents. Individual parents possess individual expertise, talents, and interests in a variety of areas. Try to view parents as resources to the school and to other parents. Not only is parent expertise and talent beneficial to the school in a volunteer capacity, it can also be useful to other parents if there is an awareness. The parent section of your message center opens the doors to parents helping parents and strengthens parental interaction.

Content of the parent section may require some screening. For this reason, a parent volunteer might be designated to manage the bulletin board project. This parent volunteer would receive items to be posted from parents and prepare the items for presentation on the board. This method would also keep the message center looking uniform and organized.

Here are a few things to consider in planning your Parent Communication Center:

- Keep two-way communication as it's purpose
- Place it in a high parent traffic area
- Post clear instructions on how to submit items for posting
- Use a parent volunteer to coordinate the project
- Set a schedule for periodic changes in look and content
- Give it an attractive but orderly presentation
- Keep items simple and to the point
- Provide a Parent-to-Parent section
- Organize the bulletin board as a monthly calendar with a monthly theme



Solid Foundation

# **More Communication Resources**



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# Partnerships

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## Positive Communication Between Parents and Teachers

by

Eva Patricakou, Roger Weissberg, Mayr Hancock, Michelle Rubenstein, and Jennifer Zeisz  
Laboratory for Student Success

One of the key goals of the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) is to encourage school, family, and community partnerships to improve the academic performance and the socioemotional development of children and youth. Teachers face the challenge of educating an increasingly diverse student population, which is growing up in varied home environments. Families and schools are both active participants in the education of children and youth. Parents/guardians and teachers need to collaborate to improve student achievement and school performance. Family members and educators each have a distinct yet interrelated role to play, and each has an important voice to be heard.

The latest National Education Goals (Goals 2000: Educate America Act) encourage schools to increase their efforts to involve parents or guardians in their children's education. Open communication between responsible, concerned adults in the home and at school is essential to building this partnership. The tips offered in this brochure can help teachers initiate constructive and consistent communication with parents to foster ongoing parental involvement.

There are four essential ingredients to building healthy, open communication between schools and families. These ingredients are the Four P's:

### Positive

Too often students and parents are wary of a note or call from the teacher. Sending home words of praise and encouragement can change this perception and improve communication with the family. Remember, parents need a pat on the back too!

### Personalized

Parents can be overwhelmed by impersonal xeroxed memos, which seem less relevant to their child. To help avoid the "junk mail syndrome," jot a quick personal note on letters home or have students decorate to draw parental attention.

### Proactive

Keep parents informed of your class rules, expectations, and current activities. Provide plenty of notice for special events. Let parents know immediately if you have a concern and work together to prevent problems from developing.

### Partnership

Well-informed parents can work as partners in their children's education. Encourage parents to respond to your notes by leaving space for comments or including a few quick questions for return—this practice keeps you informed of parents' ideas and concerns.

## Getting Started

All written communication to parents should use simple, familiar language and short sentences. Be direct and avoid using educational jargon and long explanations.

If possible, use “attention grabbers”—upbeat graphics, bold headings, borders or boxes around special items, etc. Students can decorate invitations and letters going to their parents—this will help ensure that parents see your communication.

Always communicate respect for and appreciation of parents and families. Talking down to parents will put a quick stop to two-way communication. Be sensitive to cultural differences. Have your letters and memos translated to the first language of your students’ families. Integrate bilingual and multicultural materials into displays and written communications. Be persistent. Use a variety of methods to communicate your important information to families. See which format (note, newsletter, phone call, meeting, etc.) works best for different kinds of information. Use alternative methods to follow-up with hard-to-reach families.

### Send a welcome letter

Send a welcome letter to parents well before the school year starts to help them get their children ready for a new classroom. This letter may also be sent to the parents of students transferring into your class throughout the year. In it you should include:

- Basic subjects and major goals for the year
- Materials needed for class
- How and when to contact you (phone number and most convenient times to reach you)
- Your expectations for students’ work and behavior
- Suggestions for ways parents can be involved in homework
- A sincere invitation to share concerns, visit class, and provide support

### Remind parents to read the school handbook

You may want to highlight school policies and programs pertinent to your students (procedures regarding absences and tardiness, weather emergencies, after-school activities, etc.). Ask parents to discuss this information with their children.

### Encourage parents to attend the school open house or orientation

If your school does not sponsor such an event, hold one for your classroom. Publicize the open house on school bulletin boards and with community outlets such as grocery stores, banks, etc. Mail invitations to parents well in advance. Be prepared to review the information in your “welcome letter,” but recognize that the open house is a social event. Parents will want to get to know their children’s teacher and classroom in a relaxed atmosphere. Have displays and examples of last year’s student work to give parents an idea of your teaching style.

### Give parents a chance to express their needs and priorities

Encourage parents to share with you their goals about their child’s education. Ask them to express their priorities about their child’s academic and behavioral performance. Provide them with ways to enhance their child’s learning at home and extend the classroom curriculum in the home environment and beyond. Discuss with parents the best ways (e.g., phone calls, notes) to communicate with them on a regular basis.

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## Ideas for Positive Two-way Communication

### Start a weekly or bi-weekly newsletter

Start a weekly or bi-weekly class newsletter. While this may seem an impersonal method of communication, it can be personalized in several ways: (1) pick a student to decorate the border and be the newsletter artist of the week; (2) feature an “academic star” and a “class citizen” of the week and note their recent efforts; and (3) include student and parent contributions on a regular basis.

The tone of the newsletter should be positive, highlighting recent accomplishments and interesting experiences of the class. The newsletter is a proactive way to inform parents of upcoming events and activities. It may also include a few tips for parents about helping with homework and boosting reading skills. To encourage parents to be involved, add a few questions for a “reader opinion survey”—post the results the next week.

### Greet parents personally as they drop off or pick up their children

This may require you to come in a little early so that you are organized before students arrive. Communication with parents in this informal manner helps increase the comfort level of two-way communication. It also reinforces the idea that parents and teachers know each other and are working together for the benefit of students. This is not a good time to discuss problems, but it may be an opportunity to set an appointment.

### Try to contact parents by phone at least once each quarter

A positive phone call acknowledging a student’s improved work or continued effort, thanking a parent for helping out on a class project, or personally inviting a parent to a special event will increase parents’ comfort in approaching you.

### Create a Family Bulletin Board

By creating a Family Bulletin Board in your classroom you can notify parents of upcoming events, display pictures from special occasions, and offer suggestions for parenting and home learning.

### Send students home with a Weekly Work Folder

Weekly Work Folders should be given to students every Friday containing their completed homework assignments, in-class work, and any tests or quizzes. Staple a blank sheet to the inside cover of the folder so that you can write a quick message to parents and allow space for them to respond.

### Recognize academic and behavioral achievement

Achievement certificates should be able to be taken home and displayed. These certificates can be formatted and xeroxed in advance so that you can simply write in the child’s name and achievement. Certificates can also be used to thank parents for their efforts.

### Organize a telephone tree for parents in your classroom

In this way, each parent will receive a personal call reminding them of an upcoming event with a minimum amount of time and effort for you.

### Develop a parent feedback form

Parent feedback forms can assist parents in monitoring their involvement in important areas, such as praising their children, getting children to school on time, helping with homework, volunteering in the classroom, etc. These forms are also a good way to provide parents with additional ways they can get involved in their child's learning.

### Communicate personally with parents at least once a month

A quick "home-note" can encourage parental involvement by suggesting home learning activities. Clearly mark a parent response portion of each note to encourage two-way communication. Ask parents to comment or answer one or two questions relevant to the content of your note. Seek parents' input and feedback about the most effective ways to communicate with each other. Share information with other educators about successful parent involvement and communication approaches.

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*Partnerships* is a publication of the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), the mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory at Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education.

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# Partnerships

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The latest National Education Goals (Goals 2000: Educate America Act) encourage schools to increase their efforts to involve parents or guardians in their children's education. Open communication between responsible, concerned adults in the home and at school is essential to building this partnership. The tips offered in this brochure can help teachers initiate constructive and consistent communication with parents to foster ongoing parental involvement.

Good communication between home and school is important to keep you in touch with your child's educational needs and success. Answer these following questions to see how you can improve your communication with your child's teacher.

Do you get the information you need at the beginning of the school year? Do you:

- Go to the school/classroom open house or orientation night?
- Have the teacher's phone number and know convenient times to call?
- Read the school handbook so that you understand school rules?

Do you let the teacher know that you want to be informed regularly about your child's schoolwork and behavior? Do you:

- Give the teacher your home and work phone numbers and a convenient time to reach you?
- Tell the teacher that you want to hear about both negative and positive issues with your child?
- Read and respond to all notes, newsletters, etc.?
- Ask about class rules, routines, and what students will be learning?
- Talk to the teacher as soon as you have a question or concern about your child?

Do you let the teacher know that you want to be involved in your child's education? Do you:

- Go to parent-teacher conferences and other school meetings?
- Ask the teacher how you can help with schoolwork at home?

- Volunteer to help the teacher in class or with special events?
- Ask the teacher when you can visit the classroom?
- Mark your calendar with special school activities and events so that your child is prepared for both of you to attend together?
- Work with the teacher to clarify your child's academic and behavioral goals for the year?
- Share information about your child's accomplishments at home or in extracurricular activities?

Do you act like a partner with the teacher for your child's education? Do you:


- Tell the teacher that you want to work together to solve problems?
- Let your child know that you support the teacher's classroom rules and work goals?
- Contact the teacher to let him/her know about things at school that your child likes?
- Communicate with the teacher when you have questions, concerns, or suggestions to improve your child's learning experience?
- Ask for suggestions about activities you can do with your child at home to build on what he/she is learning?
- Show respect for the teacher and school?
- Thank the teacher for his/her effort?

If you answered "YES" to these questions, congratulations! You have open and positive communication with your child's teacher. Here are some more tips to help you build on this strength.

More tips to enhance parent-teacher communication:

- Write a note on your child's homework to let the teacher know if the work was easy or difficult.
- Make an appointment so that you have time to talk with the teacher if you have a concern, and let the teacher know what you want to talk about.
- Talk about your concerns in a positive, problem-solving way. Avoid blaming or criticizing the teacher—especially in front of your child.
- Let your child know about talks you have had with his/her teacher. Children should see that open communication between home and school is a good sign of teamwork.
- Tell the teacher about any major changes in your child's life (death in family, birth of sibling, divorce, etc.) that may affect his/her schoolwork.
- Show the teacher your appreciation when he/she does something special for your child.

<b>Two-Way, School-Home Communication</b>	
Idea	Explanation
Parent-Teacher-Student Conferences	<p>Prepare an agenda for parent-teacher-student conferences that encourages the participation of all three parties. Let parents know the agenda in advance of the conference. How would the parents describe the child's study habits at home? Does the child read at home?</p> <p>Report cards are typically used by teachers to report the child's progress in school to the parents. But report cards could become two-way by including the parents' report of the child's progress at home with such school-related topics as: 1) willingness to do homework, 2) reading for pleasure, 3) moderation of television, 4) attitude toward learning. The cards might also encourage parents to note specific concerns or request conferences.</p>
School Newsletter	<p>Many schools publish newsletters. To encourage two-way communication, ask parents to write articles for the newsletter. What tips can parents give for helping kids with homework? What family activities would parents like to share? Where has the family gone recently that was of educational value? Also, student contributions to the newsletter are good.</p>
Happy-Grams	<p>Print pads of Happy-Grams for teachers to send notes to parents complimenting students for specific achievements and behaviors. Because teachers also appreciate notes of kindness, distribute pads of Happy-Grams to parents. Print blank Happy-Grams forms in the newsletter. Parents can clip the forms from the newsletter and send notes to teachers.</p>
Open Door Parent-Teacher Conferences	<p>Designate a certain time when teachers are available for walk-in conferences. Some schools set aside 30 minutes before school each morning (or on certain days of the week) when all teachers are available to parents.</p>
Telephone Tree	<p>Establish a parent-to-parent telephone tree within each classroom so that parents can be contacted in a short period of time. The message begins with one parent who calls four other parents who each call four other parents and so on. The telephone tree should be printed with names and numbers so everyone knows their connection to everyone else.</p>



**Your turn!** Please share any comments or suggestions about the communication materials I have sent home this week. Thank you!

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**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

Please share any comments or suggestions about the communication materials we have been using. Thank you!



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## Teacher's Phone Call Worksheet

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time of first attempt: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time of additional attempts: \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Briefly discuss pertinent information for the beginning of the school year.

\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Encourage parents to visit the classroom and provide guidelines for contacting the teachers.

\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Thank parents for their time and let them know that you look forward to working with them and their child.

\_\_\_\_\_





### Parents and Students,

Welcome to the 2004-2005 school year. It is going to be an exciting one! To keep you updated about the many things that will be happening throughout the school year, we will be sending home a school newsletter during the first week of each month.

Our goal is for parents, students, teachers, and school staff to work together to promote children's success. We can work together to achieve this by:

Ⓢ *Making sure children arrive at school on time. Classes begin at 8:30 a.m. daily. If children are late, they miss valuable learning time..*

Ⓢ *Young children need plenty of sleep. Set an appropriate bedtime for your children so they will be well rested and ready to learn!*

Ⓢ *Homework is given to students Monday through Thursday. Help review your child's homework. Make sure they have a quiet place to work and the necessary supplies to complete assignments.*

We look forward to seeing you at our Open House on September 10th at 6:00 p.m.

*Beethoven School and Health Center  
Working together to support  
school-family partnerships*



### Parents and Students,

Welcome to the 2004-2005 school year. It is going to be an exciting one! To keep you updated about the many things that will be happening throughout the school year, we will be sending home a school newsletter during the first week of each month.

Our goal is for parents, students, teachers, and school staff to work together to promote children's success. We can work together to achieve this by:

Ⓢ *Making sure children arrive at school on time. Classes begin at 8:30 a.m. daily. If children are late, they miss valuable learning time..*

Ⓢ *Young children need plenty of sleep. Set an appropriate bedtime for your children so they will be well rested and ready to learn!*

Ⓢ *Homework is given to students Monday through Thursday. Help review your child's homework. Make sure they have a quiet place to work and the necessary supplies to complete assignments.*

We look forward to seeing you at our Open House on September 10th at 6:00 p.m.

*Beethoven School and Health Center  
Working together to support  
school-family partnerships*

# Homework Helper



Here is some important information about the assignments for this week!



# Homework Helper

I had some comments and questions about the assignments for this week.

## Using Newsletters to Communicate with Parents

Newsletters are used by many schools as their major form of school-home communication. A quality newsletter may well be the most effective way of reaching parents and informing them of the school's activities and expectations.

As their name implies, “newsletters” provide readers with news in an informal letter style. Their function is to inform, announce, teach, stimulate interest, and in other ways communicate. Newsletters are useful when careful thought is given to: “Why have a newsletter?” “Who is it for?” “What do we want to communicate?” “How should we present the information?”

### Content

The content of a newsletter should be informative, relevant, timely, brief, and to the point. Newsletters often include:

- Recent accomplishments of students in academic, athletic, artistic, and citizenship areas.
- Changes in school appearance or organization.
- Recently initiated services of the school.
- Upcoming school events, schedule changes, conference times, testing dates, etc.
- Human interest items featuring students, parent volunteers or staff.
- Program articles on the strengths and emphasis of the curriculum.
- Scholarship application information.
- Activities scheduled for parents, students and community members.
- Transportation arrangements.
- After-school childcare opportunities.

### Style

Newsletters should be written in a style that is clear, simple, and direct. Humor is appropriate, as long as it is reviewed in advance to ensure that it would not be offensive to any readers. As newsletter editors work to inform and communicate, they should attempt to be objective and stimulating while maintaining a positive and upbeat tone.

### Format and design

To attract the attention of parents, newsletters should be attractive and well organized. The following ingredients contribute to appealing newsletters:

- **Simplicity:** Present your message in an uncluttered format. Reducing the number of lines, drawings, and different typefaces can make the newsletter look “cleaner” and easier to read.

- **Proportion:** Design pages in a manner that balances articles and illustrations. Also, consider dividing pages into thirds or fifths in order to increase the visual appeal of each page.
- **Contrast:** Use simple techniques, such as boxes and graphics, to call attention to special items. Limit the use of these techniques on each page, however, so that they will have the desired impact.
- **Harmony:** Develop a visual “theme” for each newsletter so that the layout and graphics are complementary. Use shapes and images that go well with each other and are pleasing to look at.
- **White Space:** White space is the area on a page in which there is no writing or illustration. This space is very effective in improving the readability of the newsletter.

### **Additional ideas on producing effective and attractive newsletters**

- Present the main ideas of an article in the first few paragraphs. Who, What, When, Where, and Why should be answered at the top of every article.
- Solicit articles from teachers, administrators, parents, and students.
- Invite readers to write to the newsletter to share ideas about the school.
- Use headings within articles to highlight the points that are being made.
- Select a tone that is informal, personal and friendly.
- Use language that is familiar and direct.
- Liven text with simple graphics that capture attention, summarize ideas, provide reminders, convey attitudes, etc.
- Use one typeface on a page. *Italics*, boldface, or ALL CAPITALS can be used for emphasis in headings. On occasion, names of people or programs can be printed in a contrasting type to catch the reader’s eye.
- Print or photocopy the newsletter in dark ink on white or pastel paper for clean, clear and readable copies.

Remember the first principle of newsletters: If the information is important enough to be sent to parents, it is important enough to be sent in the most attractive and readable form.



Solid Foundation

# **Community Building Ideas**

**Communication**



## Communication

The primary purpose of the Communication component in building a goal-based school community is to help the various constituents of the school community meet the community's responsibilities of them.

There are essentially three forms of communication within the school community:

### 1) *School Community Compact*

The *School Community Compact* is prepared and distributed annually by the school. The Compact informs parents, teachers, and students of the school community's goals and each person's responsibilities in achieving the goals.

### 2) *Informational Communication*

Informational communication includes the school's efforts to inform school community members of school community activities. Informational communication also includes methods of providing helpful tips and practical suggestions for meeting school community responsibilities, as outlined in the Compact.

### 3) *Two-Way, School-Home Communication*

The third form of communication—two-way, school-home communication—is communication between the school and home where information passes in both directions.

## School Community Compact

### Faculty Presentation of Preliminary *School Community Compact*

Contributing School: Darwin Elementary School, Chicago, IL

In the initial stages of community building, communication is crucial, not only between the school and home but also within the school. Once the School Community Council has developed its goals and responsibilities, present a draft of the School Community Compact to faculty members during a school-wide faculty meeting. Give teachers a chance to make comments and recommendations on the work during smaller group sessions, and have them return the Compact to the School Community Council. The School Community Council can then incorporate relevant suggestions into the final draft of the *School Community Compact*.

### Brick by Brick: Distribution of the *School Community Compact*

Contributing School: Lawn Manor, Oak Lawn, IL

All schools must distribute a School Community Compact to make sure that everyone knows the responsibilities of the school community. In order to make sure that everyone sees the Compact, first send a one page "news flash" home to parents to pique their interest. Four days later, send home a one page summary of the school's goals and responsibilities for parents to review. Three days later send home the whole Compact, including a cover letter with one statement each for parents, teachers, and students. Each person must sign the statement as a gesture of commitment to the community-building process. Once each student has secured the signatures, he or she returns it to the school and earns the right to place a brick into the frame of a house which is on display in the front hall of the school. In this way everyone is involved in the effort to build a school community.

## Informational Communication

### Report Card Pick-Up Days

Contributing School: Alcott Elementary School, Chicago, IL

Report card pick-up days are a natural opportunity for strengthening communication between the school and home relative to the school's goals and responsibilities. During pick-up days, set up a school community booth, attended by a member of the School Community Council. Distribute copies of the School Community Compact and other information about the school's goals and responsibilities. Provide a sign-up sheet for parents to become involved in community-building activities. Arrange a dinner after Report cards have been picked up, and use the dinner as a platform for introducing members of the School Community Council, reviewing the School Community Compact, and recruiting volunteers to help with community-building work and activities.

### Monthly Goal Flyers

Contributing School: Kingston Intermediate School, Kingston, IL

This method of communication promotes educational goals while helping parents and teachers meet the responsibilities of the school community. Each month, highlight a different goal by sending a series of flyers to parents and teachers. Send one flyer per week, each focusing on two or three responsibilities. The flyers should provide relevant and instructive suggestions for parents and teachers to help them achieve the goals of the school community. By the end of the month every responsibility of the chosen goal has received attention.

### School Community Newsletter

Contributing School: Corkery Elementary School, Chicago, IL

Publish a newsletter designed specifically to focus on the school community. Include articles related to the school's goals and responsibilities, as well as notices about special events arranged by the School Community Council. Publish contributions by parents, teachers, and students alike.

### Newsletters Focus on Goals

Contributing School: Lawn Manor Primary Center, Oak Lawn, IL

In addition to telling about activities in the classroom, the school newsletter highlights one goal per month. Include a book list based on school experiences, as well as a monthly calendar of events. A brochure that explains the school's educational goals and responsibilities for students, teachers, and parents accompanies the newsletter at the beginning of the year. Kindergartners and Early Childhood students take home their own weekly letters.

### Special Section in School Newsletter/Newspaper

Contributing School: Alcott Elementary School, Chicago, IL

Devote a special column in the school paper to focus on the school community goals. For the goal of Studying, for example, establish a regular "Study Hints" column, which features articles on good study habits, the benefits of studying, and other suggestions for parents, teachers, and students to help them meet the School Community's Studying goal.

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## School Community Council Reporter for School Newspaper

Contributing School: Darwin Elementary School, Chicago, IL

Appoint a School Community Council member to serve as a Reporter for the school newspaper. The Reporter can cover the School Community Council's planning process directly, keeping school community members abreast of the council's activities as they occur, and publicizing special events arranged by the council.

### Parent Column

Contributing School: Prairie View, Sandwich, IL

Initiate a column written by parents called "Parents in Action: Sharing their thoughts about..." The column includes tips from school parents on how they help their children at home with studying, reading, etc. Some, for example, could be written by working mothers who give other mothers practical hints at how to find time to help children study.

### Letter from the Principal

Contributing School: Bethune Elementary, Chicago, IL

The principal writes letters to parents which are posted regularly in the school newsletter. For example, at Bethune Elementary, one of the principal's letters suggested six great ways for parents to encourage family reading over the holidays.

### Homework Newsletter

Contributing School: Northwest Elementary School, LaSalle, IL

Publish a homework newsletter as a cooperative effort between teachers, students, and administrators. Focusing on the goal of studying, the homework newsletter can serve as a forum for publicizing the school's homework policy, examples of good study habits, and ways for parents to help their children study. It can include contributions from all members of the school community: parents, teachers, students, and administrators.

### School Community Council Introductions

Contributing School: Pershing, Rawlins, WY

Use the school newsletter to introduce the School Community Council members. A short summary about them, their families, and why they are involved in the School Community Council gives the entire school community a sense of the School Community Council's identity.

### Signed Return Slip

Contributing School: Southeast Elementary, Sycamore, IL

To encourage reading of the newsletter, include a return slip in each issue. Any student bringing back a parent's signature on the slip becomes eligible for a raffle drawing for a small prize.

### Classroom-based Newsletters

Contributing School: Pierce Elementary School, Chicago, IL

Each class develops a newsletter that focuses on the goals of the school community and classroom activities related to those goals.

## **Introduction of Parents to the School Community Council**

Contributing School: [Southeast Elementary, Sycamore, IL](#)

The School Community Council sends an informative letter to all parents explaining what the School Community Council is and what it has done in the school to date. In the letter, list members of the School Community Council and explain the selected goals, and ask for parental input on what steps to take next. Include a survey asking parents to contribute ideas, under each of the goals, for how the school community could work together to reach those goals. The idea of parents working together should be the theme of the letter.

### **Mini-Classes**

Contributing School: [Southeast Elementary, Sycamore, IL](#)

Rather than a traditional open house, this night gives parents an opportunity to get basic information about the classroom. Stagger the schedules in 15 minute blocks in each grade level so that parents with more than one child can visit several classes. Information on goals and responsibilities should be presented and discussed.

### **Information Booth**

Contributing School: [Alcott Elementary, Chicago, IL](#)

Set up an information booth on report card pick-up day to disseminate information about community-building activities. Distribute a copy of the goals and responsibilities to each parent along with their children's Compact cards. At Alcott, a school-wide assembly focused on decency and a laminated poster in each classroom served as a constant reference point for the goals and responsibilities.

### **Student Invitation to Open House**

Contributing School: [Northwest School, Lincoln, IL](#)

As a classroom assignment (this assignment can be graded for grammar, spelling, etc. if desired), all students write personalized notes to their parents inviting them to attend the Open House. The parents sign the invitations and bring them to the meeting's main session. There the invitations are entered into a drawing box for chances to win prizes. This will draw students and parents to the desired meeting/open house and will generate increased interest in the meeting's purpose.

### **Ice Cream Social**

Contributing School: [Littlejohn Elementary, DeKalb, IL](#)

Organize an open house and ice cream social. Take this opportunity to divide parents into small groups and have School Community Council members explain and discuss the school community goals and responsibilities. Display the four goals on banners or large signs in conspicuous places and ask parents, teachers, and students to sign them in order to express their commitment to the goals. Provide entertainment for the children as necessary. In order to ensure a large turnout, send parents personal invitations in the mail or have teachers call the parents personally. At Littlejohn Elementary, the class with the highest percentage of parents present was rewarded with a pizza party. Any class with more than half of the parents present received a popcorn party.

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## School Community Council Forum for Faculty and Parent Organization

Contributor: Dr. Paul Baker, Illinois State University

Plan a meeting of the School Community Council and the full faculty at the beginning of the school year. This would be a good time for discussion, distribution of the School Community Compact, and sharing ideas. The central purpose of the meeting, however, is to have the faculty select one of the school's educational goals to highlight for the year. The highlighted goal then becomes the focus of the School Community Council's activity, and the faculty can be asked for suggestions to help all students reach the goal. By highlighting one goal per year with new initiatives, the school community will, over time, become expert in all goals. If possible, the School Community Council should also meet with the parent organization at its opening meeting of the year. The School Community Council needs to secure the participation of viable parent groups, and draw them into a discussion of the highlighted goal.

### Clearinghouse

Contributor: Dr. Paul Baker, Illinois State University

Make sure that faculty and parents gain as much knowledge as possible about the highlighted educational goals. The faculty should circulate articles on the goals, bring in speakers or consultants for faculty study groups, learn about parental roles, and evaluate the curriculum to see how it supports the goals. Appoint a group of teachers and parents to serve as a clearinghouse on gathering, reading, and sharing the information. The school community can distinguish itself by becoming expert in its chosen goals.

### Community Awareness of School Community Council

Contributing School: Big Rock Elementary, Big Rock, IL

Post copies of the School Community Council's newsletter and announcements of events at the post office, on church bulletin boards, at the local restaurants and mini-marts, at market day pick-up, or any other place where the community regularly gathers.

### Banners

Contributing School: Big Rock Elementary, Big Rock, IL

Place large, colorful banners with the school goals on them around the building to stand out and remind students what they are aiming for.

### Parent Surveys

Contributing School: Lawn Manor Primary Center, Oak Lawn, IL

Send a Parent Survey home with students to be filled out and returned. Use it to discover parents' feelings on different activities and what they would like to participate in or volunteer for during the year. The survey should also ask about what factors contribute to non-participation in parent programs, such as babysitting difficulties, lack of time, lack of interest, or feeling uncomfortable. Include space for additional comments.

Contributing School: Southeast Elementary, Sycamore, IL

Survey parents frequently to get their input into decisions, and send the results of the surveys and their impact home with the students. Encourage parents to respond to the school office or drop ideas in a suggestion box. At Southeast Elementary, one survey helped the School Com-

munity Council come up with ideas for a welcoming sign for the school building. Parents responded with preferences for wall murals, quilts, banners, and student-created work.

### **Student Videotape**

Contributing School: [Big Rock Elementary, Big Rock, IL](#)

Videotape student-performed skits focusing on school pride and acceptable school behavior for parents to watch during an open house.

### **School Directory**

Contributing Schools: [Lawn Manor Primary Center, Oak Lawn, IL](#);  
[Bell Elementary, Chicago, IL](#)

Create a school directory. Some or all of the following information can be included: family name, address and phone number, names of children and their teachers, staff names and positions, all school phone numbers, bus company phone numbers, School Community Council members, a map of the school, and, of course, the goals and responsibilities. Be sure to get parents' permission before including anything about the children's families.

### **Keep a Camera Ready**

Contributing School: [Lincoln/Tyler Schools, DeKalb, IL](#)

Keep a camera and film at the school to use at all events, both for media publicity and record keeping.

### **Goals and School Community Council Introductions**

Contributing School: [Prairie View Elementary, Sandwich, IL](#)

Provide a list of the four educational goals to be placed on each student's desk at Open House. All School Community Council members should wear name tags to identify themselves. Hang a poster in the hall that introduces each School Community Council member and tells a bit about his or her family.

## **Two-way, School-home Communication**

### **Happy Grams in Newsletter**

Contributing School: [North Elementary, Sycamore, IL](#)

Provide a blank Happy Gram in the school newsletter for parents to return to the school to thank teachers. Include a list of other ways for parents to thank them.

### **Open House**

Contributing Schools: [Darwin Elementary School, Chicago, IL](#);  
[St. Pius V, Chicago, IL](#); [Bethune Elementary School, Chicago, IL](#);  
[Kingston Intermediate School, Kingston, IL](#)

A school-wide open house is a great opportunity for two-way communication between the school and the home while focusing on school community goals. If the open house is being held at the beginning of school, prepare posters in the summertime and hang them throughout the community to publicize it. Make the first session of the open house school-wide and introduc-

tory, reviewing the school community goals and responsibilities, and introducing the School Community Council members. After that, break down into individual classroom meetings, and have parents and teachers discuss the school's goals and responsibilities.

### **Two-Way Happy Grams**

Happy Grams are a common means for teachers to praise students. Normally a Happy Gram passes good news on to parents, but teachers deserve to hear good news, too. Distribute pads of Happy Grams to parents, suggesting that parents let teachers know when their children have an especially positive learning experience or when the parents appreciate a particular approach a teacher has taken.

### **Family School Community Activity Card**

[Contributing School: Martinsburg Elementary School](#)

Each family is given an activity card at the beginning of the school year. Out of the seven family school events (4 of them sponsored by the SCC), families are asked to attend and have their card punched at a minimum of four events. Those families meeting this goal are invited to the MES Family Celebration held in the park in May. Also, each time a family attends an event they are eligible to win a door prize.

### **Two-Way Report Cards**

Typically, report cards keep parents informed of the child's progress at school. Two-way report cards include a section for parents to report on the child's progress at home with school-related activities such as homework, reading, and attitude toward learning. Use the card to encourage parents to note specific concerns or to request conferences.

### **Open Door Parent-Teacher Conferences**

[Contributing School: Hughes Elementary, Chicago, IL](#)

Have teachers make themselves available for conferences with parents every morning before school for half an hour.

### **Parent-Teacher Conference**

All schools have parent-teacher conferences. To strengthen the school community's commitment to its educational goals, parent-teacher conferences can include a discussion of the child's progress toward the goals and encourage a flow of information in both directions.

### **Telephone Calling Trees**

[Contributing School: Malta Grade School, Malta, IL](#)

Calling trees among parents promote special events by the School Community Council, such as parent training sessions. Other schools also use calling trees to warn parents of a school closing for weather or in case of other disasters canceling school.

## **Parent Hot Line**

Contributing School: Lawn Manor Elementary, Oak Grove, IL

A parent hot line is in place so parent with questions or problems have a resource in other parents for information.

## **Dialogues on Values**

Contributor: Dr. Paul Baker, Illinois State University

A group of parents meet in a home, with a teacher present, to discuss the highlighted value, its goals, and expectations. This discussion would be informal. Dr. Baker says each teacher meeting with a small group of parents in the home once during the year would have a dramatic cumulative effect.





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