



Teacher Tip of the Week

New Teacher Support Program 2009-2010

Terry Edwards, Program Coordinator

October 2009

Vol. 5 Issue 11

Teacher Tip of the Week
New Teacher Support
Program
Wilson County Schools
615-453-7282

Keeping in touch with parents all year long

Step out of your teacher shoes for a moment and imagine yourself as the parent of a child you teach. You're at home, and the phone rings. You pick it up and a voice says, "Hello. This is Ms. Norris, Emily's teacher." If you're like many parents, two words spring immediately to mind: "Uh oh."

For many parents, a phone call home from a teacher means trouble: Our son is doing something he shouldn't; our daughter hasn't done something she should. The result? When a teacher gets in touch, parents' anxiety levels and defensive barriers may automatically go up, reducing their potential to participate as partners in their children's education.

But it doesn't have to be that way. We can regularly contact students' families when nothing's wrong, just to share what their child is doing well and what's going on in the classroom. In our hectic school days, finding the time to reach out like this can seem daunting, but it's the core of effective communication and building positive relationships.



Reasons for Staying in Touch

Consider these benefits of communicating regularly with students' families:

Families need information to be partners in their child's education. To be able to best support their children's learning, adults at home need to know what their child is studying and what else is going on in the classroom. Brief, regular communication gives them a window into their child's daily school life.

Frequent contact fosters positive school-home relationships. Sporadic communications focused on problems do little if anything to foster positive school-home relationships. If, on the other hand, we communicate small bits of good news all year long, families feel encouraged and

supported, and they're more apt to encourage and support us, as well.

Collaborative problem-solving requires trust. Frequent positive communication helps families trust that you believe in their child's ability to learn and to be a productive member of a classroom community. With that trust in place, it's much easier to work collaboratively on difficult issues that might come up during the year.

Ways to Keep in Touch

What are some ways to make "things are good" connections with families, and how can we find the time to do this for each of our students throughout the year?

Now is the time to start thinking about how you might establish routines for more regular, positive contact with school families next year. Here are just a few ideas:

Positive news phone calls

Consider picking up the phone when you notice something positive in a child, even if it's small—for example, the child says something helpful, works hard on a project, or makes progress on a skill. If you decide to phone parents, remember that whether you call every few weeks or every few months, spontaneously or according to a schedule, what matters most is the positive nature of the contact.

Periodic postcards Postcards can work much the same way as phone calls. At the start of school, buy or make enough postcards for the year, depending on how often you plan to send them out. Students can write their addresses on the cards. Then, when you have something positive to share with a family, jot your news on a postcard and drop it in the mail.

Occasional emails In general, serious or confidential matters are best discussed in person, by phone, or in a paper-and-envelope letter. But email can be a quick and easy way to communicate brief notes about day-to-

Continued on page 2.....

HOW TO DO IT— CHECKLIST



Collecting Student Work

Set up procedures for collecting student work. First, label a collection basket for each period you teach. Show students where the basket for their period is. Place a stapler and a container of paper clips near the baskets for students to fasten together all the pages of an assignment. Any work that is completed by the end of a class period can be collected by one or two students and placed in the basket.

You can allow students to complete unfinished work as homework; however, do not give students the "finish it at home" option until the very end of the period (to keep them working during class). When you have intended an assignment to be completed in class over several days or it is obvious most students need more time, you can tell students to keep the work in their notebooks and finish it during the next class.

Keeping in touch with parents. . . (continued from page one)

day classroom life. A few things to consider:

- Know if parents can—and want to—use email. Many families have no computer or Internet access or simply don't like using email. Try offering a sign-up sheet at your fall open house. Keep the stakes low for everyone by casually inviting parents to sign up to receive information by email if they'd like. Note that this is just an option—you'll be communicating with them in several ways. Judge by the number of signups whether to use email regularly.
- Keep the volume of messages manageable. If you communicate with parents mainly by email, you may receive lots of return messages. Control the flow by mixing email and other ways of communicating. Most parents rely less on email once they know you'll be sharing news about their child in various ways throughout the year.
- Follow the guidelines. Check whether your school, district, or parent organization has guidelines you need to follow when emailing families.

Weekly or bi-weekly newsletter Traditional paper newsletters about classroom happenings remain an effective way to keep in positive touch with families. Keep newsletters brief, and stay focused on the chil-

dren's current learning. The "Ask me about ..." format works well for many teachers. (See example to left.) You can get ideas for this during closing circle. Gather the students and ask what they remember about that day's learning. Record their reflections and choose some to share in the newsletter. Phrasing these as things to ask about helps adults at home start conversations about what children are learning at school.

Daily or weekly "exit pass" Like an "Ask me about ..." newsletter, an "exit pass" helps parents stay in-formed about classroom life while having productive conversations with their children. Sometime each day or

such as "Today I was proud that I ____.". The child chooses one prompt to complete and takes the sheet home to share.

Weekly work folders Each Thursday, students take home schoolwork they've been gathering in a folder. A bright slip of paper inside the folder includes space for you to write a note and space for adults at home to comment as well. "Hayden has been using friendly words when asking to borrow something from a classmate," you might write, or "Cristal worked hard on her chapter book this week."

After reviewing the papers inside the folder with their child, parents write a comment, if they wish, and sign the slip. "I can see that John is really taking his time to write neatly on all of this work," one might write. Or they might respond with a question, such as "Can you suggest some fun ways to practice multiplication with Jesse at home?"

On Friday, the child brings the folder back to school. You read the comments and keep the slips as part of the documentation of the child's progress throughout the year.

Pluses and a Wish In this variation of weekly work folders, you include with each child's folder a "Pluses and Wish" form, on which the child offers a quick reflection on the week's work by writing two "pluses" (things he or she did well) and one wish (an area to improve on). You also write two pluses and one wish about

TIPS FOR KEEPING IN TOUCH

- Make it a habit to spend time each day watching and listening to your students. Jot down your observations, and you will be able to draw from your notes when communicating with parents.
- Smart small! If communicating about every child every week feels overwhelming, plan to observe and comment on just a few students at a time. You will cover the whole class before long.
- Acknowledge to yourself that it can be harder to find complimentary things to say about some children than others. However, highlighting positives about those "harder" children is worth the effort, especially if their parents, and the children themselves, are used to hearing mostly about problems.

week, each student fills out a half sheet of paper, containing a choice of conversation prompts,



"You can pay people to teach, but you can't pay them to care." — Marva Collins

the child's work. After family members look through the folder with the child, they add their two pluses and one wish.

When the folder comes back to school, you read the added pluses and wish and keep the slips as documentation of the child's progress.

There are many other ways to communicate with families. You can develop an approach that works for you and your classroom community. Experiment, and keep these goals in mind: to let parents know what their child is learning in school, to set a positive tone for home-school communication, and to build a trusting relationship with students' families.

'09-'10

NEW TEACHER SUPPORT PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS



Matthew Farris

Mt. Juliet High School

Agriculture

WHY DID YOU BECOME A TEACHER? "I enjoy working with young adults and helping them get prepared for their future. I also like to provide the students with all of the leadership activities associated with FFA"—Matthew Farris



Brandon Eldridge

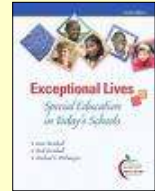
Lebanon High School

Criminal Justice

WHY DID YOU BECOME A TEACHER? "I became a teacher where I could have the chance to be able to positively effect the lives of young adults in our country. There have been many teachers that had a positive influence in my development into an educator. I want to be able to give back to our country."—Brandon Eldridge



OFF THE BOOKSHELF



Exceptional Lives: Special Education in Today's Schools

by Ann P. Turnbull, Ann P. Turnbull, Michael L. Weh-meyer, Michael L. Weh-meyer, Rud Turnbull

Through real-life stories about children, their families, and their teachers, and through the use of the most recent evidence-based re-search on special education, this important book provides students with a comprehensive introduction to special educa-tion and its relationship to general education. The sixth edition provides this experi-ence within the framework of three guiding themes: Inclu-sion, Partnerships, and Univer-sal Design for Learning.

Long noted for its focus on progress in general educa-tion through inclusion, fami-lies, and parent-professional partnerships, the new sixth edition of *Exceptional Lives: Special Education in Today's Schools*, now includes a "Values and Outcomes" end-of -chapter feature that discuss the ideal educational outcomes for each student presented in the opening vignette - out-comes that can occur if teach-ers put highly effective, re-search-based strategies into practice and uphold the values addressed throughout the book. In addition, the new edition has an in-depth focus on the IEP process with more coverage in chapter 2 and IEP margin notes integrated throughout each chapter to help inform teachers of their role in the IEP process in rela-tion to chapter content.

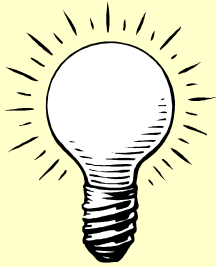
TEACHER WEBSITE of THE WEEK:



<http://www.justonemorebook.com/>

Just One More Book

A very regular (two or three times a week) short podcast series about children's books by a couple (and occasionally their daughters) who are very passionate about their subject. Often recorded in a coffee shop near their home, the programs sometimes include interviews with authors, chil-dren's literature experts and reviews submitted by listeners. Their focus is on books that are lower profile, not necessarily ones that everyone will have heard of. The podcast can be heard using the player on the site, downloaded from the page, or subscribed to in iTunes. Excellent example of using podcasts to express your passion on a topic.



Strategies for New Teachers . . .

PLANNING FOR EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

The most significant source of classroom disruption and other classroom issues stems from a lack of planning or poor planning.

- **COMMIT!** You must make a commitment to plan. While this sounds obvious it is surprising how many beginning teachers neglect to create daily lesson plans. Set aside a specific period of time on a weekly basis just for planning. Planning must be your number one priority.
- **PLAN FOR “BELL TO BELL” Instruction.** Clearly identify how you will engage your students at the start of the lesson, how you will teach or reinforce skills and concepts, and how you will bring the lesson to closure. There should be no wasted or empty time.
- **VARY YOUR INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH.** Include a variety of approaches (group work, pairs work, cooperative learning groups, direct instruction) for shorter time periods rather than one approach for an entire class period. Especially avoid a full class period of direct instruction (lecture and notes)—it is one of the least effective methods of instruction.
- **OVERPLAN.** Plan for more than you can teach in a class period. Develop a few “sponge activities” that you can use if your lesson takes less time than anticipated. Dead time in the classroom is a terrible waste and shortchanges your students.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

POSITIVE ATTITUDE MONTH

NATIONAL WORK AND FAMILY MONTH

PEACE, FRIENDSHIP AND GOODWILL WEEK
October 25-31

ST. JUDE'S DAY
October 28

INTERNET DAY
October 29

NATIONAL UNICEF DAY
HALLOWEEN
REFORMATION DAY
October 31



Back to school

Teacher: Why are you late, Joseph?
Joseph: Because of a sign down the road.
Teacher: What does a sign have to do with your being late?
Joseph: The sign said, "School Ahead, Go Slow!"

MCHUMOR.COM by T. McCracken



"If your parents want you excused from tomorrow's film on pollination, you'll need a note from home."

MCHUMOR.COM by T. McCracken



"If I threaten to bring a class action suit, will you pass me?"