Communicating with Parents: Mediums and Methods for Success

We live in a fast-paced world where society as a whole communicates and receives feedback within seconds. This has become the expected norm in social settings and the business world and has also affected how educators connect with the parents of our nation's most important product — children. Here are some keys to communicate efficiently and effectively in this ever-changing world.

Mediums

Sending a letter home or waiting until parent-teacher conferences before contacting home allows too much time to pass. Immediate communication, when possible, can help correct academic and social behaviors by identifying obstacles to learning in a timely manner. While nothing can replace a face-to-face conversation, there are some options to bridge the gap until that can happen.

Email and texting. These approaches can be used as a quick reminder about tests and field trips, a class update, or to schedule that face-to face appointment. Keep in mind that you are an educator. While it may be convenient to use slang, lowercase letters, or trendy abbreviations within texts or emails, it may not leave a favorable impression on the parents of the child you are teaching.

Social media. Creating a private group for parents to follow is a common way to communicate with a large group and keep everyone informed. It is a fun way to share positive events through quick posts and photos. Always make sure to have

parent permission when including images or work of students. Once again, it is still important to use a formal writing style when posting updates.

Webpages. Many school districts offer links to teacher pages. Parents can review calendars, classroom activities, assignments, and schedules. Teachers can add links to helpful websites, textbook logins, and educational articles. They can also provide email, phone, and office hours so parents know when and how teachers can be reached. The key for using this medium is to update it frequently so the information is current and not outdated.

Electronic management programs. School districts often use a single electronic organizational system to house both student information and grades. Parents have access to the program and can typically do any of the following: provide personal individual student details, update records, contact the school, check student grades and attendance, and upload money to a lunch program.

Video conferencing. While the above options aren't a face-to-face conversation, they do allow an electronic dialogue to take place. Facetime, Skype, and Zoom are just a few applications available for video conferencing where parents and teachers can see each other and converse even though participants are not in the same room. They are fairly simple to operate and the download time is negligible. Video conferencing can also allow screen sharing to take place so teachers can display documents for parents to

review. When a parent cannot attend an onsite conference, this alternative is a close second.

Phone or Tablet Applications. Parents who are interested in immediate, frequent communication are downloading teacher-selected applications to their phones, tablets, and iPads. These applications are private and convenient for busy lifestyles. A few suggestions for this type of application include:

Google Apps for Education. These are the most commonly used applications that allow communication through shared documents, drives, and calendars.

Bloomz. When scheduling parent-teacher conferences, providing class updates, sharing photos, and soliciting parent volunteers, this application is very helpful.

Appletree. Formally known as BuzzMob, this application has similar capabilities as the previously mentioned apps. One unique feature is multi-language translation cap-ability.

Remind. This free phone app will help teachers communicate effectively via text with parents and students. Send messages to a whole group or individuals.

Methods

The education of students cannot be reduced to emotionless technology. The combination of people, feelings, and uncontrolled variables requires teachers to make decisions and communicate in a timely fashion. Even when the communication needs to take place quickly, teachers should still be personable in order for any type of conversation to be received well. Remember the basic tenets of good communication whether communication is real time or via electronic medium.

Establish rapport. Common ground is an essential concept for effectively working together. Include something positive to start the conversation, address the concern in question, and then close with another positive point. This helps both parties identify things students are doing well and where the student needs to focus his or her efforts.

Goal setting. Whenever possible, offer some short-term goals to support desired student behaviors. If the behavior needs long-term corrective action, providing some suggestions that deliver faster gains encourages continued efforts to reach the big picture.

Listen first. Talk later. People are more willing to take suggestions if they feel they have been heard. Effectively communicating with parents is critical to the success of the child. No one needs to win. Struggling over who is correct or at fault wastes valuable time. Although parents should be made aware of student behaviors, take the time to listen to their explanations and ideas first. It may help you fit pieces of a puzzle together!

The key for effective parent communication is to realize that communication mediums and methods should be identified and addressed on an individual student basis. Some parents are tech savvy, while others may not even have an email address. It takes time to discover what works best. The earlier in the school year options are outlined, the greater the chance for success for all!