

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Partnership!

“Have a good evening, families! This concludes our back-to-school night. We would like to thank you for coming out tonight. I know we are all looking forward to a great year of learning. Safe travels home.”

The principal’s message over the intercom filled the room as I stood at my classroom door, saying good night to parents as they exited the room. Mr. and Mrs. S were the last to leave my classroom. They commented on the content shared and revealed they had just moved to the area and were eager to learn more about the school and how they could help.

“Let me know if you need anything. I’m happy to help out in any way I can,” Mrs. S said as they departed.

It was not my first year of teaching, but it was my first year at a new school. I had a supportive grade-level teammate, and I felt comfortable with the curriculum for the year. I was getting to know the students and staff, but as the year got under way I was still navigating one piece: how to best partner with the parents of my students. I had connected with most of the parents at back-to-school night and spoken to several parents on the phone, but I knew I would need to do more in order to really get to know the parents well and for them to get to know me. Then I remembered the thoughtful invitation that Mrs. S had extended. I had a few ideas in mind, so I reached out to invite her involvement. She was thrilled to help, and we spent some time on the phone sharing ideas about specific tasks she could do to support our work in the classroom.

With each week in the classroom, Mrs. S learned more about how I supported student learning, and I learned more about her and her hopes for her child. At the same time, I was learning how to connect with and involve other parents. The strong relationship I built with Mrs. S helped me see the power in building positive relationships with parents and encouraged me to continually seek out opportunities to welcome, include, and partner with parents every year.

The Goal

The relationship between teachers and parents is an essential component in student success. Students experience greater success in school when the adults who care for them and help them learn and grow have a collaborative relationship that allows them to welcome and value one another's questions, ideas, and thoughts. Each new school year brings rich opportunities for growth: improving the delivery of the content we teach; gaining a deeper understanding of the developmental, social, academic, and emotional needs of our students; and strengthening relationships with parents that help to support student growth and success. Relationships take work. Strong relationships include communication, trust, and respect. A strong and successful partnership between educators and parents is no different.

As an educator and the parent of a middle school student, I am aware that there are a variety of views and feelings about partnering with parents. Unfortunately, some views are discouraging—there are both educators and parents who have had negative experiences and may feel that the two groups are like players on opposing teams. That mindset can negatively influence communication and hinder the journey toward a productive partnership.

But working to understand these negative experiences can go a long way toward helping us shift our attitudes, forge strong relationships, and become genuine partners to bolster student success. The impact of a strong school-home relationship on student success is so strong that this work is well worth it. We all have the ability to change our mindset to bring about lasting and positive change. We all have the ability to grow and strengthen our practices and relationships with parents. Ultimately, that is the goal. Within the pages of this book are strategies and ideas to support you in your pursuit of that goal, including relevant stories about real-life connections. My experiences as a teacher and parent, as well as research from the field and experiences of other educators, form the basis of the advice and strategies shared here. My hope is that this book provides a strong and helpful foundation for partnering well with parents.

About This Book

The purpose of this book is to encourage, strengthen, and empower educators in creating a collaborative environment that genuinely invites parents in, and to provide strategies that support educators in effectively communicating and positively collaborating with parents. Each chapter focuses on a different topic that supports the parent-teacher partnership and provides thoughts to ponder, quick tips, and practical strategies. The chapters can be read sequentially, or selected based on a particular need or area of interest.

About the Term “Parent”

Children come from homes with a variety of family structures. There are many adults who care for, guide, and nurture children through the various stages of their lives. These caring adults can be mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, foster parents, stepparents, and other guardians. All of these individuals are to be honored for the attention, time, and care they give to raising and guiding children. It’s difficult to find one word that encompasses all these caregivers. Throughout this book, for ease of reading, I use the word “parent” to refer to any adult who is or acts as a child’s caregiver, caring for, guiding, and nurturing the child’s growth and learning.

As both a parent and an educator, I am constantly growing and learning. There are aspects of teaching and parenting in which I have grown significantly and other aspects I am learning to navigate. In the writing of this book, I have grown through reading, researching, and connecting with many educators and parents. You might find you are in a similar place of growth, looking to strengthen and refine, develop and learn, confirm and validate. If this describes you in any way, welcome!



“People smile.

People know my name.

They listen.”

– Kirsten and Orin, parents of a
5-year-old and an 8-year-old