Chapter 9

Engaging Families in Their Children’s Learning at School and Home
Communicating With Families on Standards-Based Curriculum

Guskey (2004) offers valuable advice for teachers working with parents to explain different levels of student performance based on learning goals or standards.

1. *Be consistent in your grading practices and knowledgeable about the grading system:* Parents are used to letter grades as a basis for interpreting their child’s progress. They may query you about the grade equivalent and ask questions such as “Does receiving a *proficient* translate to an A or a B, grade-wise?”

2. *Avoid language that compares students:* Parents should revise their perspective from “How is my child doing compared with others in the class?” to “How is my child performing in relation to the learning expectations at this level?” Help them understand how these expectations relate to grades.
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3. Be prepared to present student work samples at various performance levels: Examples of student work at various levels, illustrating terms such as beginning, novice, proficient, apprentice, distinguished, or exemplary, should be displayed and explained to parents.

4. Be prepared to illustrate other assessment concepts: Indicators of what students are able to do (quality of work) can be confused with how often they do it (frequency of display). Parents might ask what frequency of display means; be prepared to provide examples to illustrate terms such as rarely, occasionally, frequently, and consistently. (p. 328)
Collaborating With Families on Classroom Behavioral Challenges

Stay objective. When families are upset, they may struggle to stay composed. You, too, may have trouble staying calm if accusations are leveled. Don’t return the anger.

Listen actively. Allow the child’s family to have their say. Try to see their point of view and reiterate it. For example, “I can see why that playground incident last Tuesday would have upset you.” Pinpoint the event if possible to keep the conversation specific.

Look for common ground. If you aim to resolve the problem, you need to be willing to compromise. Taking the high ground and “winning” will stymie your efforts to forge effective partnerships with families. Mutually acceptable solutions can be agreed on. (Truby & Dollarhide, 2006)
Be prepared for questions that families may pose about homework

1. *Time concerns.* Should it be taking my child this long to complete the assigned homework? My child rushes through the nightly homework in 10 minutes; is this enough time? When my child says something is due in one week, shouldn’t he be starting the work well before it comes due?

2. *Homework assistance.* Should I help my child with challenging assignments? Are we supposed to do this activity together? What should I do if I am asked for help and I don’t understand how to solve the problem or answer the question? If I provide help with homework in some way, is that considered cheating on my child’s part?

3. *Record keeping.* Should my child be keeping a daily assignment notebook to keep track of homework? What if she leaves it at school and can’t remember what was due? Is there another way to retrieve the assignment, such as a homework telephone hotline or website list? Should I check my child’s assignment notebook daily to ensure homework is completed?

4. *Grading homework.* How do you grade homework? What percentage of the total subject grade is part of the homework? If my child is absent and unable to complete the homework, what is the grading policy then? Are make-up homework assignments given if my child completely misses the point of the homework? Do you formally grade every assignment; if not, how do you manage feedback?
Some suggestions for improving homework practices with Latino or other non-English-speaking families

- Organize a public announcement with Spanish radio stations that suggests ways for families to help children with homework.
- Set up a bilingual hotline number that families can call to get advice on helping their children at home.
- Develop individual contracts with families and students, with all three of you agreeing on homework responsibilities. Consider recommending study groups as a form of homework support.
- Open a bilingual homework center along with offering workshops for families and students. (Delgado Gaitan, 2004)
Summary

By recognizing families and communities as children’s first and most influential teachers, you can collaborate effectively with them to support your students’ learning and development through home learning activities. Your role as a teacher also involves helping families better understand the terminology and concepts of the current standards-based curriculum and collaborating with families to address students’ behavioral challenges. Partnering with families also means actively seeking and providing a variety of opportunities for volunteers. Successful family engagement includes both understanding and appreciating families and implementing supportive classroom-family engagement practices.