

Preface

Research clearly demonstrates that the more parents are involved in their child's education, the more successful the student is. An essential key to parental involvement is the strength of the relationship between parents and the school.

Various professional articles speak to the need for strong parent-school relationships and many provide ideas and specific activities that can be employed to encourage parent involvement. However, few resources offer teaching and administrative professionals an in-depth look at how to forge strong relationships with parents and explore the issues and considerations needed to help build and maintain strong partnerships between home and school.

This book gives teachers and administrators the tools to build awareness of their own personalities and communication styles, understand those of the students and parents they are working with, and allow them to look at their constituents in a broader light so as to include parents more effectively in their child's education. Our goal is to help school personnel develop a broader understanding of the populations they serve and increase their sensitivity to the needs of students and their families. In addition, we provide teachers and administrators with ideas and strategies to develop better relationships with their students and families. If the relationships formed are more positive, parent involvement in school will increase. If parent involvement increases, student attendance, behavior, and academic achievement will improve.

This book is based on our extensive experience as public-school teachers and administrators. Additionally, we conducted a six-month anecdotal research study of parent feelings, perceptions, and relationships across several school districts. This study clarified and deepened our understandings of common issues and concerns that can make or break parent-school relationships. Our analysis of the study became the cornerstone of actual practices we put into place and are now presenting in this book. After identifying the common causes of both positive and negative parent-school relationships, we developed

and successfully implemented a management plan for teachers and administrators to reduce the risk of negative relationships and build closer and more positive school-home connections.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

In the following chapters, we present guidelines and strategies to strengthen the school-home relationship, as well as actual situations to demonstrate effective and ineffective practices.

Chapter 1: Committing to the Relationship. The benefits of strong relationships between home and school to the child, teacher, parent, classroom, school, and school district are reviewed. Research is examined and anecdotal situations and results are provided to demonstrate how strong relationships between home and school made a significant difference in the education of the children involved.

Chapter 2: Recognizing Different Personalities. Personality inventories are discussed and one is offered as a tool to use with the stakeholders in the educational environment. How different personalities interact and how we might use our understanding of them to guide our actions is explored. Suggestions are offered to assist teachers and administrators in dealing with challenging parents and situations.

Chapter 3: Identifying Potential Red Flags. Specific situations and issues that impact school-home relationships are identified. A Likelihood Rating Scale is provided in which major issues that appear to impact the quality of school-home relationships are flagged. Suggested actions are provided to help reduce the negative impact of these factors on relationships between home and school.

Chapter 4: Honing Solid Communication Skills. Verbal and non-verbal communication obstacles are discussed. Strategies are offered to help school staff avoid these obstacles. In addition, proactive measures are offered for communicating in tense or conflict-ridden situations.

Chapter 5: Adopting Key Rules. Ten specific actions are identified that will significantly impact the quality of school-home relationships. These practices are discussed and examples are given to demonstrate how they lead to improved relationships.

Chapter 6: Using Flexibility to Enhance Relationships. Six situations are discussed that required school staff members to think

outside the box and use flexibility with specific families. Examples of flexible solutions to challenging situations are provided for consideration and reflection.

Chapter 7: Documenting and Celebrating School Events. The importance of documenting school events and communicating those events to parents is discussed. Common ways to document and disseminate information are reviewed and some lesser-known or little-used strategies are offered to assist with school efforts to build and maintain positive ties to the home.

Chapter 8: Connecting Home and School. Three distinct levels of parent participation in schools are identified and discussed.

Chapter 9: Cultivating Resources. The need to cultivate outside resources for supporting families is overviewed. Strategies for building and providing a community network of support services are presented.

Chapter 10: Summarizing Global Lessons Learned. The big picture of what forges positive relationships between home and school is considered. Six critical behaviors are identified that, when demonstrated consistently and clearly, increase parents' positive feelings about the school and staff.

We encourage you to use this book as a basis for reflection. As you read, consider your own experiences and what the examples, stories, ideas, and strategies reveal about your relationships. Reflect on, analyze, dissect, and ponder your school-home connections and their impact on the level of parent involvement in your program. Begin by understanding why you must commit to building strong parent partnerships. Discover your own personal style and that of those around you, because personalities affect all of our relationships. Look for the warning signs of potential problems and fine-tune your communication skills, for communication is the key to our relationships. Build a repertoire of guidelines to follow, learn to be more flexible, find various avenues for parents to be involved, and document and celebrate your successes. Not only will students and parents benefit, but you stand to benefit as well. Since the quality of your school life depends on the quality of your school relationships, the development of more positive parental relationships will enrich your professional experience immensely.

Note: On the following pages, *I* refers to the primary author, Rosemary Olender. *We* refers to all three authors and our colleagues, who so willingly shared their work, stories, and insights.