

► Parents are People Too

Granted, you may have doubts about this statement after receiving a cranky note from a parent who's perturbed or confused about what's going on in your classroom. But establishing a solid partnership with parents can make all the difference in a child's education. The sooner you make that essential connection, the better your success rate with your students will be. It may be one of the most important things you do as a teacher. Here are some tips for effective parent communication:

- Start off the school year with a letter home introducing yourself, explaining your goals for the students, and letting parents know how they can contact you.
- Send a handwritten (or photocopied) note home to parents on a regular basis, letting them know what their children are learning and how they can reinforce those lessons at home.
- Send "success notes" to parents, applauding the positive things their child has done. Don't wait until a conference to let parents know about any problems or accomplishments.
- When you communicate with parents in writing, be sure to proofread for spelling and grammatical errors. Avoid education jargon; write clearly and neatly. Make a copy for your records.
- Always say thank you to parents for their cooperation and their efforts.
- Keep a log of the phone conversations you have with parents. Include day, time and the subject of your conversation. It's a great memory aid for you and for the parents.
- Involve parents by requiring them to sign their children's homework and permission slips.
- Create a Web site that introduces yourself and your classroom to parents. You can post homework assignments and tips and provide a way for parents to communicate with you.
- If a Web site is a little more than you want to tackle at first, join with other teachers at your grade level and produce a regular newsletter.
- Make sure you check with your district's policy and your mentor about suggested parent communication styles.