

What is a Parent-Teacher collaboration?

Parent-teacher collaboration is an important part of a student's education. When the family of a student is able to communicate with their child's teacher, the two sides can work together to build a relationship and create an optimal learning environment, both at home and at school. Plus, they can commiserate on the student's strengths and weaknesses, create a plan of action to strengthen those weaknesses, determine which factors may be amplifying or hindering the student's learning capabilities, and become a united support system to help the student become their best academic self.

For example, if a student is struggling in math and hasn't necessarily told their family, the family may get that information from the teacher and from there, the two can work together to create a more favourable learning environment. This can mean getting more one-on-one time with the teacher, the family taking on projects at home to supplement the student's in-school lessons, or even hiring a tutor.

On the other hand, if a student is struggling in school because of complications at home, the family can alert the teacher. Or if that information isn't shared, the teacher can ask the family if anything at home may be causing issues for the child. Through trust and a good relationship, the teacher and family can communicate about the issue and create a plan to help the student thrive through a tumultuous time.

Teachers are often expected to be mind readers when it comes to their students, but by forging a strong collaborative relationship with a student's parents or family members, a teacher can gain the insight needed to provide support for the student.

What are the benefits of Parent-Teacher collaboration?

There are countless benefits associated with parent-teacher collaboration, but some of the key benefits include:

- Building a positive relationship and trust with the student and their family.
- Creating open lines of communication that support the student's academic pursuits.
- Creating a more welcoming space for the student to learn.
- Getting to know more about the student and how they learn.
- Creating understanding between the teacher and the student's parents, ensuring all are on the same page about the student's goals and capabilities.
- Keeping parents abreast of their student's progress, both academically and socially.

Parent-Teacher collaboration struggles

Teachers who want to lay the groundwork for successful collaboration with their student's families have a number of avenues available to them and it's ideal to leverage several at a time. Some of the collaborative avenues teachers should explore include:

Communication: There are a variety of options available to teachers under this category, such as:

- Encouraging parental involvement such as volunteering at school events.
- Making routine phone calls to the student's home to connect with parents and family on a regular basis.
- Creating a weekly newsletter that can be sent to all family members for every student to convey generalised information.
- Trying Apps to get information about school happenings or events to families via text, e-mail, or in the app itself.
- Creating an action plan for setting and achieving academic goals and including the family in those plans.
- Encouraging the student's family to reach out to you for anything related to the student's schooling or educational needs.

Coordinating Supplementary Activities: By encouraging a student's family to engage in activities that supplement or contextualise what they're learning in school, a teacher can help foster learning outside of the classroom and make it more fun for the student.

For example, maybe the local museum has an exhibition that correlates with a recent lesson and can extend their learning through a family field trip. Or perhaps there's a math or science camp that takes place over a week during the summer that could bolster their in-class lessons in those fields. If a student's family needs help choosing activities that can enrich their child's in-class learning, teachers can offer specific suggestions or share resources to help guide the family in their choices.

It's also recommended to share more insight on how this approach to out-of-school learning can complement their in-school efforts, while also helping the family to understand the curriculum and how they can support it during out-of-school hours.

Feedback: Telling a family that their student is doing well can be a wonderful feeling. But relaying that they're facing challenges can be challenging. Providing feedback on a student's progress is important for the student and helpful in building on the parent-teacher collaborative environment. When giving feedback about a student, remember to:

- Be clear.
- Be encouraging.
- Celebrate the positives.
- Don't shy away from discussing negatives.
- Offer constructive ways to help the student improve.
- Offer insight into how the parents or family can be part of a student's success.
- Make the family a partner in supporting the student through their challenges.
- Work together to create a plan going forward, whether it's keeping the student focused on their current path, or creating a new path to help them excel.
- Be open to feedback from the parents and communicate with them to address their concerns.
- Remember that teachers and a student's family are a team and communicate as members of the same team.

Community-Building: Building an entire community around family-teacher collaboration is a great way to help students realise their academic goals and prepare for the next step on their education journey. While Parent Teacher Organisations can be a great way to collaborate with parents and make them an integral part of the school, not every parent has the time to commit to being a dedicated board member.

But by creating events, fun educational activities, and other social opportunities that parents and family can attend à la carte, a student's family can still find ways to be active members of the school community and contribute. And by encouraging collaboration between families, students have even more opportunities for educational growth as supported by the community at large.

Empowerment: To provide the most enriching environment for their student to excel, parents need the resources and confidence to contribute to their child's education. Educators can cultivate that confidence by including their students' families in conversations and events that affect a student's in-school life and also direct families toward tools that can assist their students in realising their goals. Additionally, teachers can also empower themselves through education by pursuing supplemental degrees or working toward an advanced degree in their field of choice. Parents notice this commitment and appreciate that kind of dedication to their child's education.

Collaboration tools

To foster effective family-teacher collaboration, teachers and educators should recommend the following tools:

- Email: Email can be a quick and easy way for teachers and parents to stay in contact with a student. Rather than opting for in-person meetings or even a phone call, the communication can be less regimented and easier to schedule and it gives both parties a record of communication that can be referred to when making plans and problem-solving.
- Video conferencing software, such as Zoom: For parents or families who prefer face-to-face communications but don't have time for in-person meetings, Zoom is another convenient way to address family-teacher collaboration. Teachers and families can set a predetermined time to meet online, and easily talk through a student's triumphs or tribulations.
- PTO or PTA membership: By becoming a part of a parent-teacher organisation or parent-teacher association, parents and families can become more involved in school events and activities and have more opportunities to collaborate directly with teachers and educators.
- Apps such as Remind or ClassDojo: There are a variety of apps that make teacher-family collaborations a cinch. Apps like Remind allow teachers to text important updates to their students' families without revealing their phone numbers and send file attachments or photos as needed to individual parents or family members, select groups, or the entire class. ClassDojo goes further by offering a classroom management system and a behaviour management system, so families can monitor reports on their student's advancements and behaviours.

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