Family Communication Plan

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Family communication can be very complicated. Through the use of technology, communication has become more universal and constant. There are a few structures I have implemented to try to foster successful family communication. One is the weekly newsletter, which all of the teachers in my grade compile together. The newsletter features pertinent announcements and 5th grade news, as well as reminders about upcoming events. On the back of the newsletter is the weekly homework template, so family members (and students) know exactly what to expect each night. We send home a hard copy, and put a digital copy online. However, we were finding that with 5th graders, the hard copy did not always make it home. To try to counteract this barrier, we email the digital copy every week. We also change our voice mail message weekly with important info and announcements. This way, we are using more than one method to try to communicate. When I email, I always try to be very conscious of unique family structures, as mentioned in the power point. I always start my emails “Dear Families” instead of “Dear Parents.” I also refer to the children as “students” instead of “son/daughter.” I feel that taking small steps like these can help make everyone feel included.

One challenge I have come across in communicating and collaborating with families is the fear of being “labeled.” I have started to notice trends among groups of families in regards to their attitudes about special education. It seems that parents’ biggest fear is their child being retained. This can be very frustrating to me when it seems like they don’t care about doing anything besides helping their child barely make it to the next grade. Also, it is sometimes difficult to communicate with parents when wording observations or discussing challenges. One successful method I have used is telling family members that I want them to have “a complete picture of the student’s day.” This careful wording prevents me from diagnosing, making recommendations, or passing judgments, which helps keep communication positive. I feel when communicating (especially negative) news with parents, it is best to stick to the facts, and not insert any opinions, although this can sometimes prove very difficult. For example, one of my students (who is now receiving special ed services) was experiencing difficulties completing work and sitting still. When I met with his parents, they told him he needs to “work harder and stop messing around.” It was very difficult to communicate to them that their child might have something else going on that impacts his success. I have noticed that some parents tend to get very defensive when discussing their child’s difficulties in school. In my experience, it helps to remind parents that teachers are grateful for their support in helping their child succeed, and that we are not placing blame. Staying calm and positive, while staying “solutions based” has proven successful for me in the past.