The Information Superhighway and Your Student: A Two-Way Street

*Strengthening the Parent-Teacher-Student Connection*

*Second in a series exploring the impact of and challenges surrounding technology in schools*

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**Introduction**

Education is more than just what happens in the classroom. Parents want to be involved in shaping and promoting their children’s educational journey. Teachers make sure each and every student is getting the best possible education the school can provide, each and every day. Education needs to be a collaborative effort between teachers and parents to ensure that students succeed academically, developmentally and socially.

**Teachers: How Much Is Too Much?**

Communication between parents and teachers will always be an integral part of a child’s learning journey. Research shows that children whose parents and other caregivers are knowledgeable about and engaged in their homework assignments, talk with them about school, and help plan their education achieve higher test scores, make better grades, have better school attendance, and demonstrate better behavior at school and at home.¹

With the rise of technology-enhanced classrooms, keeping in touch with parents is easier than ever. Connecting with parents and encouraging them to become stakeholders in their child’s education is critical. Researchers at Harvard and Brown University said children in a summer program were 41% less likely to fail courses when their parents received weekly one-sentence messages about their children’s performance by phone, text message or e-mail.²

Building and maintaining this parent-teacher-student connection is a critical component of student success. It allows parents to see their child’s growth and what they may need to work on together, and

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**Tips for Teachers on Engaging Parents**

- Use technology to reach out to parents specifically about their child
- Use technology to communicate class-level and school-level news on a regular basis
- Get to know your students and their families
- Provide parents with opportunities to volunteer in the class and at the school
- Hold parent meetings early on in the school year

Source: *Teaching in a Digital Age*, Pearson Publishing
in turn allows parents to let teachers know what may be affecting their child’s classroom behavior. Nine in 10 teachers and eight in 10 parents agreed that their child’s school helps all parents understand what they can do at home to support a student’s success in school.³

Modern classroom management technology offers teachers a useful tool for observing student behavior and reporting measurable data back to parents. For example, with the new 2.1 upgrade of NetRef’s Internet management system, teachers can access daily Internet history reports for each student with details of Internet activity, including times and the top five websites visited during the school day.

**NetRef Student History Daily Report**

**Parents: How to Help Your Student**

Children don’t always let parents know what’s going on in school. A syllabus is not detailed enough. Email can be a helpful way to contact a teacher about a specific issue, but typically educators don’t send daily reports. Most parents (more than 88%) say that their child, individual teachers, and general written communications from the school are either very important or absolutely essential sources of information about their child’s school.⁴ Content preferences by parents from teachers focused primarily on how well their child was doing in the classroom. Parents want updates on how well their children are doing and how they can help them do better.⁵

Electronic portfolios offer a unique and contemporary approach to help inform parents of children’s efforts, progress, and achievement over time. These reports can contain digital artifacts and offer a storage advantage and can make children’s work portable and accessible.⁶ This free-flow of information can help inform a parent’s decisions on education choices and direct them on how to assist a child that may be struggling in a certain area.

Communication allows parents to become stakeholders in the school community. According to a National School Public Relations survey, two-thirds of parents and non-parents indicated that there are adequate opportunities to express views about the issues impacting the schools, but less than half of parents (47%) and 57% of non-parents believe that their views are seriously considered by the school district leadership. These results indicate schools that invest in communication are perceived to be open to the concerns and opinions of their constituents.⁷
Furthermore, increased communication between parents and teachers can help parents get a better understanding of how technology is used in and out of the classroom. Having parental guidance while engaging with technology is critical; no amount of software and user guides can substitute.

The digital divide—the gulf between those who have ready access to computers and the Internet and those who do not—remains a prevalent factor in American education outcomes. How can parents with little to no practical experience with or access to technology themselves learn how to support their children in an increasingly digital age, let alone what to ask the teacher? Making sure both parents and students know how to interact with the technology used in (and sometimes outside of) the classroom is key to a student’s success in the digital age.

Regular, brief reports from teachers to parents...even via text...can streamline communications and fortify reinforcement of school lessons, policies and practices. For instance, NetRef’s innovative system allows teachers to communicate to parents about progress and/or concerns, supported by factual, in-depth activity updates. Such information helps bring home...literally and figuratively....a full understanding of how a student’s use of technology is helping and possibly hindering learning. Since the platform is easy to use, teachers can access the information quickly and use it to encourage their children to stay on task and become more invested in their education, and guide parents with behavioral data specific to their student.

Creating a culture where teachers and parents are on the same team helps not only the children, but the school system as a whole. Feedback on learning and technology is invaluable when making budgetary decisions or curriculum changes. When parents feel heard, understood, and engaged, it builds a stronger community in which all children can thrive.

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1. The Children’s Partnership
2. The Boston Globe: Interaction by parents, teachers an aid to kids
3. MetLife Survey of the American Teacher
4. Pearson: Teaching in a Digital Age
5. NSPRA Survey
6. Enhancing Parent-Teacher Communication Using Technology
7. NSPRA Survey