Parent-To-Teacher Communication/Parent Advocacy

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Agenda

- What is Advocacy?
- Communicating Effectively With Your Child’s Teacher & School
What is Advocacy?
Plead in Favor Of

Advocacy
The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, policy, or interests of active support of an idea or concept.

advocacy
To change “what is” into “what should be”

Advocate
/verb: to plead in favor of/
/noun: one who pleads the cause of another/

Supporting the needs of high potential learners
Therefore...It’s Our Job

Parents must be their own children’s advocates!
Advocating for Your Child: Communicating Effectively with Your Child’s School
“Do” Principles for Success

- Do Your Homework & Set Realistic Goals
- Start with the Teacher & Build Relationships
- Follow Chain of Command
- Document & Follow up
Advocating for Your Child

Do Your Homework & Set Realistic Goals
Create a Learner Profile

- Know your child
  - Your child’s strengths (academic, social, intellectual, & creative)
  - Positive aspects of child’s learning environment
  - Your child’s struggles (academic, social, intellectual, & creative)
  - Obstacles in your child’s learning environment
  - Your vision of an ideal school day for your child
  - What you want for your child in 25 years
Create a Learner Profile

- Your child must learn to articulate learner profile
  - Your strengths (academic, social, intellectual, & creative)
  - Positive aspects of your learning environment
  - Your struggles (academic, social, intellectual, & creative)
  - Obstacles in your learning environment
  - Your vision of an ideal school day
  - What you want for your life in the future
Advocating for Your Child:

Start with the Teacher & Build Relationships
Start with the Teacher

- Always begin with the teacher!
  - Put yourself in his/her shoes
  - Would you want someone going over your head at work before talking with you?

- Relationship is important: Get to know the teacher early on
  - Open Houses
  - Volunteer in classroom, lunch, recess, PTA, Field Day, chaperone
  - Get a feel for personality, philosophy, teaching styles
  - Little kindnesses go a long way: Emails when your child enjoyed a topic or activity
Start with the Teacher

- Before contact, plan in advance what you’ll say
- Write down observations on child’s abilities
- Stay focused on your child’s characteristics and not a philosophical “gifted” debate
- Remain diplomatic, fair, yet firm

Tips for Teacher Meetings

- **Make an appointment**—don’t drop in or discuss in passing
- **Document**—what your child has done, said, or read
- **Plan**—what you’re going to say
- **Choose your words**—start with something positive
- **Create a partnership**—work as a team; find common ground; where can you be flexible; negotiate solutions
- **Be diplomatic and positive**—tactful, respectful, not defensive
- **Focus on child’s needs**—be specific
- **Listen**—it’s a two-way street!
- **Bring sense of humor**—helps deflect negative feelings
- **Follow up**—summarize discussion, create timeline, and next meeting

Advocating for Your Child

Document & Follow up
Documentation

- Take notes during meetings
- Keep a binder/email folder with all correspondence, along with all data so available at a moment’s notice
- During meeting, repeat back what was heard to ensure all are on the same page
- Manage timelines and deadlines—for both parents and teachers/administrators
Follow Up

- Very important, as lack of communication can make progress uncertain
  - Thank the teacher/principal/superintendent for meeting
  - Follow up with “thank you” email that outlines plan
  - Obtain copies of any learning contracts or information on your child
  - Talk regularly to your child and the teacher to assess the plan
  - Be consistent in whatever was decided to pursue
  - Don’t let the burden of extra work fall entirely on the teacher—help lighten the load any way you can
**Documentation & Follow up**

**Do**
- Document all meetings and specific actions
- Keep a binder/folder at home with all materials & data
- Help in implementing the plan where possible
- Manage the timeline and schedule follow up meetings

**Don’t**
- Walk out of a meeting without clear next steps
- Assume the school/teacher will proactively follow up
- Place the burden for implementation solely on the school or teacher
- Be surprised if you walk into a meeting with more people than expected!
Stay in Touch!

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