Parent Involvement in the Classroom

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 I am working in a kindergarten classroom in San Jose, California. My classroom is a very home-like environment which is very welcoming, and there is a great variety of diversity in the environment. I am the lead teacher, and I have one associate teacher, Ms. Ormsby, who works with me in the classroom of 18 children. We have one occupational therapy/speech therapist, Ms. Perales that comes in twice a week for three of our children, each thirty minutes at a time. In our class, we focus on developmentally appropriate practices, and try to implement a great family-like environment. We strongly encourage parents, grandparents, and other family members to become involved with their child in the school environment. Through many aspects to parent involvement, our classroom will implement various ideas to get the ball rolling and encourage parents and other family members to become active in the classroom as much they can or would like. The goal is to create a welcoming environment not only for the children, but for the family as well. I want to make sure that parents know that I have an open door policy, and parents should be able to come to myself or my associate teacher at any given time with any questions, concerns, or new ideas.

PARENTING

 To begin off the school year, parents need to have a base of what would be going on in the classroom. To get parents involved, I will invite parents to a workshop within the first week of school in order for them to get further information and get to know myself, Ms. Ormsby, and Ms. Perales. “Studies have shown that parent-teacher collaboration becomes critical during the early childhood years as children transition from home to Kindergarten,” (Pattni-Sha, 2008. 27). I want to start off on the right foot and with good impressions, so this welcome meeting event would be a good idea. This is also a great time to let any parents communicate any right off the bat concerns or questions about the upcoming school year. This one-time event will last about an hour, not including questions and answers that may follow. It will be held two times in the week, just in case parents cannot attend one of the nights. This workshop will only be needed to be attended at one time, so parents have the choice to decide which night they want to go.

 This workshop will start off with basic child development information regarding to their children’s age group. I will talk about developmental milestones, what the goals are for the school year, what will be worked on, and what skills will be developed throughout the year. I want to stress to all parents that not every child is going to learn at the same pace as others, and it is important to focus on what their child is doing, not necessarily where other children are at. Children will learn the basics of the alphabet, numbers 0-10, and be introduced to basic math such as addition and subtraction. My kindergarten class will learn a lot about rhyming, reading and writing, and overall reflection and communication in the classroom. I really want to focus my program on socio-emotional development because along with many other aspects of learning, these children will use their socio-emotional skills throughout all years of life. My students will learn to communicate and regulate feelings, be aware of the feelings of others, and be able to communicate verbally instead of resulting to actions. By having this workshop the first week of school, I feel that it will give the parents a good base of what will be going on in the classroom. Following the meeting, parents will be given the chance to ask questions, express concerns, and give thoughts and ideas on the whole classroom environment or program. I want to make sure that parents have a say in their child’s learning, and I want them to feel appreciated and that their opinions are valued. I feel that this will give a great base to building positive relationships with the parents along with the students.

COMMUNICATING

 Communication will be a huge aspect in my classroom environment and overall success. Communication is not only through students and their peers, students and their teacher, but also through teachers and parents, and students and parents. For a classroom to be successful there has to be great communication. Each child in my classroom will take home a journal every week, and this journal will be used at home, and brought back to school on a weekly basis. This form of communication will keep parents involved in the classroom. “The research has shown that parents can be involved in their children’s education in an number of different ways,” (Pattni-Sha, 2008. 29). Each child will take a journal home every week, and write a journal entry. It can be about anything that is going on at home, school, or anything the child decides to write about. They will also draw pictures that go along with the messages they are writing. After each journal entry, the parents will be encouraged to write a short message about anything they would like to express about overall improvement of their child. This journal will be kept throughout the school year. When students turn them in each week, me and my Ms. Ormsby will review what has been written and reply back. This is also a great way to teach children about writing letters and having pen pals—even though they are not far away from us. Along with this, children will develop penmanship skills and practice writing sentences and conveying thoughts.

 I feel that this form of communication is very simple, and it keeps good records of what is being communicated through the teacher, parent, and student. It will also come in handy if I need to write little reminders for the students or the parents, or vice versa. Parents sometimes do not make an effort to communicate with the teacher for many reasons, but I feel that this way of communication will be great because it involves the student, teacher, and parents all collaborating to create a relationship. This journal is also great for the parents who are shy and would rather write things down than to come to face to face contact.

VOLUNTEERING

 Parents will be encouraged to volunteer in the classroom and overall in the school, though they are not required to. A great way for parents to volunteer can be from many ways. Parents can volunteer in the classroom in any given lesson they would like to participate in. This can include read-alouds, coming in to work on an art project, coming in to visit during snack time, or even participating in during gym time and playing games with the children. I think this will be a fun way to get parents involved in my classroom, as well as getting them comfortable in the classroom environment. I know that parents have a busy schedule, but they can come in for even 15 minutes if that is all they can do. Any type of interaction would be great for the children. Parents can also volunteer as chaperones on field trips, working yard duty during recess, or helping out with after school events such as passing out programs at school plays or music recitals.

 I think this is a realistic way for parents to volunteer in the classroom while having the experience with the children. They also will be able to see firsthand what happens in the classroom, and how activities and lessons are ran. Again, parents will not be required to do this, but it is strongly suggested at least once in the school year. Parents are welcome to volunteer as much as they like, as long as it does not interfere with the children’s learning.

LEARNING AT HOME

 It is my job as a teacher to focus on what I am teaching to the children, and having the parents of the children promote learning at home as well. “Therefore, a home-school partnership is a way of thinking about forming connections between families and schools, and the goal is to develop an intentional and ongoing relationship that is designed to enhance children’s learning, and to address any obstacles that may impede this learning,” (Pattni-Sha, 2008. 26). A great way for parents to become involved with at home learning would to give them a ‘cheat sheet’ of what has been going on that week. These can be given out every week, but also can be varied to two weeks; depending on how large the theme or sections can take. In order to get parents involved with at home learning, I want to make sure that what has been taught in the classroom is being implemented at home in their everyday lives.

 This overview of what is being taught in the classroom is a friendly guide for parents to make sure that what’s being learned in the classroom is also being implemented at home. For example, if children are focusing on finger spacing between words in their writing, then parents will know to watch for that as children write. If children are only implementing new skills at school and not at home, then they are not going to learn efficiently. If their student is not using finger spaces between words at home, it is the parents’ job to jump in and remind them of it. This way, parents feel like they are making an impact on their child’s learning, and will help parents stay active in the school setting, even if they are not physically at school. Please see example sheet that would be provided on a weekly basis for parents to keep an eye on at home.

 This sheet is also a great checklist for parents to use as they see their children grow. This can be a great evaluation tool to make sure their child is learning at school, and using their skills efficiently. This helps open the door to parents providing feedback for myself and my associate teacher because they will comment on the child’s progress, or express concerns on areas that they do not see their child excelling in a specific area. This is great for me as a teacher because if there is something that a student is still struggling with, I can make sure to touch back on it in class and help that particular child understand the lesson better. Learning at home is a huge part of the child’s overall learning because the majority of the child’s time will be at home and with the family. I can only teach them so many hours of the day, but the real learning continues outside of the classroom.

DECISION MAKING

 Since we live a busy lifestyle and cannot commit to regular weekly meetings for feedback or suggestions by families, I have decided to have a suggestion box available to parents and family members any given day. This will help parents stay involved and help with decision making. I feel that it is important to have the parents voice their opinions, thoughts, and concerns about any given situation or approach to my teaching and the child’s learning. Every week, I will have one or two main questions that will drive the parents to use the suggestion box. These questions can be used as reflection on a given theme we are working on. For example, we can be focusing on feelings and emotions one week, and the question for the suggestion box can be as simple as, “How are your children communicating their feelings to you, family members, and everyone else in their environment?” This is a great way to get feedback on what is going on at home. These pre-made questions will draw the parents toward the suggestion box in the first place. They can answer the question, and since they are already there, they can express any concerns or offer any suggestions regarding anything in the classroom. I want parents to know that they have a say on what happens in the classroom. It also gives them time to anonymously give feedback on what is going well in the class and their child’s learning, and what is not going so well and should be improved.

 Though the suggestion box may seem very simple and ordinary, it provides parents with a great source to voice their opinions. I will make sure to read what the suggestion box has every couple days, and try to implement what is written down in order to create a better classroom learning environment. By implementing new ideas given by parents, this will help them feel comfortable being a part of the classroom environment and become more active in their child’s learning. I think this is a great and easy way to get the parents’ feet in the door when it comes to becoming actively involved in the classroom.

COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY

 A great way for parents to become involved in the classroom as well as the community is to volunteer at non-profit organizations such as soup kitchens or food banks and give back to the community. There are many things that can be held in a town or city, and there are many opportunities for volunteers to give back. This would be a great way for parents to show children what giving back looks like, while participating in doing good deeds. By volunteering at a soup kitchen or food bank, it will provide both parents and children life experiences they may not have otherwise.

 This can also get parents open to ideas of finding places to become involved in the community. I feel that along with allowing parents to help make decisions, it can easily be implemented when giving back to the community. By collaborating with the community, both parents and children will learn about community service and increasing social interactions. I think that giving back to the community is important, and it is important to teach children that at a young age. Getting parents involved with the community will get children excited to be a part of something that their families are involved in as well. By allowing parents to provide ways to collaborate with the community, it allows them to make decisions and put on events for the class. I will provide events and ideas based off of what is being advertised each week, or within the upcoming month, but I will ultimately leave the decision for parents to jump in and make the ultimate decision on how we should give back to the community. By doing this, local companies and non-profit organizations will become involved in the school system, which allows our community to become much closer.

Through the important ways of parent involvement, I feel that my classroom can be very successful. Learning does not only happen in the classroom. It happens inside the class, at home, in the car, the grocery store, and anywhere else a child can experience. That is why it is crucial for parents to become involved in the classroom as much as they can, and it is my job as a teacher to open the door for parents. Parents are likely to become involved when they are invited in, and I want to make sure that Ms. Ormsby and I will be very welcoming and warm hearted. I want my classroom to be successful, and without the involvement of parents, children will not get the learning experience they should be getting. Though I can provide education for my students, the interaction and involvement a parent has in the child’s life makes the most impact.

Reference

Pattni-Sha, Keenjal (2008). *Bridging the Gap: Home-School Partnerships in Kindergarten*. Ann Arbor, Mi: ProQuest LLC.

 Cheat Sheet! Week of: May 5-9

Hello!

This is what we will be touching on throughout this week! This week our focus is on spring and sports. We are going to implement various strategies for the children, as well as reading various books and learning about spring! Below is a list of things that we are working on, and my goal is for each and every one of your children to implement these skills at home. Please observe and make notes of things you do or do not see, or what should be touched on a little more. My goal is for the children to use these skills not only in my classroom, but at home with their families as well! Please provide feedback, especially if your child is not expressing skills or using these strategies at home. Have a great week!

**Language Arts:**

This week we will be focusing on recognizing the vowels of the alphabet, A, E, I, O, U and sometimes Y. We will be looking through magazines to help our recognition skills in these letters.

We are also working on Phonetic spelling. Phonetic spelling introduces the children to sound out the words on their own based on how the words are sounded out. Students will learn to sound words out and write words down as they hear it. This will help children learn a lot of vocabulary words on their own. Please take note on which words they are sounding out correctly, and do not try to correct them too much if they are wrong. This is just the beginning of phonetic spelling, and they will progress!

Along with phonetic spelling, we are heavily focusing on finger spacing between words in our writing and journals. It is very simple! Once they end one word, place a finger next to it, and there is your space for the next word!

Since we are dipping into spring, we will be reading lots of books about flowers and springtime activities! We will be reading ***Hurray for Spring!*** by Patricia Hubbell, [***Inch by Inch***](http://store.scholastic.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/ProductDisplay_Inch%2Bby%2BInch_12542_-1_10052_10051) by Leo Lioni , and finally, ***Mouse's First Spring*** by Lauren Thompson.

**Science:**

Since we are focusing on spring, we will be doing a section on overall nature and environments. We will walk outside in the field area and take a look at the flowers, trees, grass, and try to find any insects or bugs. Please encourage children at home to explore their environments.

**Math:**

This week we are learning about subtraction. Last month we finished up our section on addition, and now it is time to take it to the next level! We will be learning how to subtract by doing a fun activity that involves bowling. Children will have fun bowling while learning to subtract numbers from 10. This helps children relate math to real life scenarios. Children love bowling, and I bet they did not know they were using subtraction for it!

**Social Skills and Manners:**

Students are being taught manners this week. Things that will be taught are simple sayings such as ‘please, thank you, no thank you,’ and so on.

We are also working on table manners as well as verbal manners! We will be using napkins, eating with utensils, and keeping elbows off the table!

We will be focusing a lot on collaborative group work, working together, and sharing with one another. This will be a great thing to implement at home if your child has younger or older siblings! We will work in groups during play and learning time.

**Other Activities and lessons:**

We will be doing an art project with watercolor paints on Friday. Children will discover the use of mixing paint and water to create a new effect of painting. They will be painting their own flowers and kites they will be creating in art. Children will be encouraged to use a variety of colors and be able to explain which color they used and why. At this point, each child should know their colors. Since watercolors like to bleed into one another, two colors can mix and create a new one, which they will learn to discover. See if they are recognizing color mixing in their environments such as blue and yellow making green, or mixing all colors together creating brown.

Though this list touches on many points, we are going to have a blast in the classroom while learning these new skills! The children will learn to use manners, learn about nature and the environment, be introduced to phonetic spelling, and creating art projects. Please observe your children and try to implement these skills at home so they are using it in their everyday lives. Also, please let me know if you have any questions or concerns, I always have an open door! Thank you and have a great week!

Ms. Trujillo