

Best Practices for Parent-Teacher Communication

Offered by Clay Boatright, Parent & Board Vice President for The Arc of Texas

“Unless you are prepared to remove your child from the public school forever, you need to view your relationship with the school as a marriage without the possibility of divorce.”

- Pam Wright of “Wrightslaw”

Elements of a good parent-teacher marriage:

1. Sharing Common Goals and Objectives
2. Frequent and Candid Communication
3. Helping Make the OTHER Person Successful

Sharing Common Goals and Objectives – The Annual Pre-ARD Meeting

- a. Takes place in advance of the official ARD meeting.
- b. Voluntary, not required by law.
- c. Open discussion between the parents and lead teacher only; no other staff.
- d. Assess the child’s development, skills, short & long term goals.
- e. Outline anticipated training, therapies, and techniques.
- f. Active listening. Not a negotiation, always collaboration.
- g. Forms the basis for the official ARD meeting.

Frequent and Candid Communication – The Daily Digest

- a. Teacher sends home a detailed description of the day’s key events.
- b. Very specific. Does not report activity, but rather the child’s unique engagement.
- c. Parent sends a similar report to the school each morning covering the previous night.
- d. This digest captures the child’s true development and frames a common understanding.

Helping Make the OTHER Person Successful – Involvement Beyond the Classroom

- a. A child’s development is a team effort between the school and home.
- b. It is in everyone’s best interest to help the other parties succeed.
- c. Teachers who support achievements at home reap benefits in the classroom.
- d. Parents who positively engage the schools benefit from a foundation of mutual respect.

How to Spot a Good Teacher

by Clay Boatright

I have no doubt that my twins have one of the best teaching teams available, and here's how I know it.

Midway through their Kindergarten year at our neighborhood school, the district asked us to consider transferring our children to a new program they had established a few miles away. At first I was upset, thinking the school was trying to cut corners and not fulfill their legal responsibilities in the local setting.

During a special ARD meeting to discuss this proposal, there was a woman there I did not recognize. She was quietly listening for most of the meeting, and when she finally spoke I discovered she was the team leader for the new program.

After 90 minutes of conversation, I decided to visit the program and consider the move. Knowing how difficult my children can be, I turned to the teacher and said "Your workload is about to increase by 40%...a very active 40%. Can you handle it?" This young woman looked me dead in the eye and said, "Yes we can, and I want your children in my class."

At that moment I realized there is no statement more powerful to a parent, particularly a special needs parent, than the phrase "I want your child."