

September 2003: What Teachers Want

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Publisher's Pen: What Teachers Want

Attending my workshops in Buffalo, New York, were teachers with a list of what they wish parents would ask for, related to their child and his/her school progress. Some parents do ask these questions; however, others don't know what questions to ask.

There appears to be a gulf in the communication, as well as in understanding what needs to be accomplished. Parents want to help their kids, and teachers want to help parents. But, the gulf is widening due to a combination of factors.

Teachers are dealing with new standards and instructional plans. Parents are dealing with an ever-increasing fast-paced world for their families, with precious little time left over at the end of the day. How and where do we focus our efforts?

This is what teachers want parents to ask:

- What specific strategies can I use with my child?
- What materials best suit my child?
- How can I support you from home?
- How can I structure my learning environment at home?
- How can I help with behavior management?
- How can I make myself more accessible to you?

This is what teachers want parents to do:

- Spend time reading and writing with children
- Spend time conversing with children
- Plan activities with children
- Set limits with children
- Attend as many school functions as possible
- Keep the communications lines open

Right now, I know there are parents reading this who are feeling frustrated. You have tried some or all of the above and don't feel that you are getting the support that you need from your child's classroom teacher. Your needs will be addressed in upcoming issues. For this month of September, make a point to open the lines of communication with your child's teacher and see where it leads you.

May our efforts be fruitful in this first month of the school year to help our children by forming a strong team to mine the gold in each and every child.

Smiles,

Elaine

Empowering Parents and Teachers:

The National Panel on Reading has given us what they believe are the basic skills for reading and writing according to their own research. I have sifted through the reports to bring you a one-page list with quick tips to help you to diagnose what kids need to improve upon and what you can do to help them in just a few minutes a day.

After the reading tips, you will find a "writing rubric" (scoring guide) used in state assessments across the country. Both can be reproduced and used as blackline masters to be used as a quick reference.

Reading Tips:

What the Research Says Kids Need:

- Direct explanation – telling kids what they need to learn.

- Modeling – showing them how it is done.

- Guided practice – giving them a chance to try while you help them.

- Feedback – praise when they do well; encouragement to improve.

- Application – giving them experiences to use their new knowledge.

Skills needed – “The Big Five”:

What You Can Do:

- Read to your child every day!
- Let them choose books that interest them.
- Ask questions before, during and after reading.
- Take a coaching approach, rather than a correcting approach.
- Have them retell the story to you in their own words.

Strategies to Figure out a Word:

- Chunking it – finding smaller words within a word & putting them together.
- Stretching it – sounding out each part of it while saying it.

- Ideas: the topic is clearly stated with many descriptive details.

- Organization: great opening, organized middle, strong ending, all in order.

- Voice: voice is clearly heard, author's style shows through.

- Word Choice: uses a variety of words in a descriptive or figurative way.

- Sentence Fluency: sentences are complete, flow smoothly, and vary in length.

- Conventions: few or no errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

A score of 3 (meets the standard) will look like this:

- Ideas: topic is stated with some descriptive details.

- Organization: good opening, middle, ending, but may be simply stated.

- Voice: voice is heard through part of the writing.

- Word Choice: uses a variety of words, some descriptive and figurative.

- Sentence Fluency: some sentences are complete, flow smoothly and vary.

- Conventions: some errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

A score of 2 (below the standard) will look like this:

- Ideas: topic is not clearly stated and some details are unrelated.

- Organization: weak opening, middle, ending, not clearly ordered.

- Voice: very little voice heard through writing.

- Word Choice: same words used over and over, misused, not descriptive.

- Sentence Fluency: some sentences are incomplete and are not connected.

- Conventions: many errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

A score of 1 (far below the standard) will look like this:

- Ideas: topic is not developed with few or no details.

- Organization: beginning or ending is missing, with no logical order.

- Voice: voice is not heard.

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