

Ready, Set, Go! Get a Positive Start This School Year

Parent-teacher team building early facilitates the continuation of the good start through the rest of the year! Below are suggestions for starting things off on a positive note when school begins!

Meet and Greet the Teacher

Try to meet with your child's teacher before classes start. Many teachers are available getting their rooms ready for a few days before start of the school year. If you can meet, take refreshments!

Make a Folder about Your Child

Make a folder with a few pages of information about your child. This is a great place to put your child's picture. Don't use the regular school photo. Choose a photo of your child taking part in a favorite activity. This makes your child a real person and provides additional information.

Include a copy of your child's IEP. While it may be tempting to go through it or highlight portions for the teacher, resist this impulse. This gives the teacher the respect of assuming she will read it and note important points.

Bring your own IEP copy with highlighted points when you meet with the teacher. The teacher may notice and ask about the highlighted portions. This gives you the chance to reinforce important information, without seeming to tell the teacher how to do her job.

Add a page of information you may have gleaned from last year's teacher. This is information teacher's often do not get. Indicate what worked well with your child and any other positive points from that year.

You might include 1 or 2 examples of your child's work, either from home or last school year. Pick ones that highlight noticeable progress or special talents.

Offer Your Help

Answer questions. Indicate your willingness to your child's teacher to answer any questions she might have about your child. Provide your contact information, especially email. Many times this is the most convenient way for teachers to pass on comments or questions. It also provides documentation for your own files. If you provide phone contact information, include the best time to reach you.

Be sure to record all contacts in your contact log.

Volunteer to help. Ask about any needs the teacher has in the classroom, for volunteers, extra supplies, etc. Many times schools no longer supply these and teachers end up buying them out of their own pockets. Even if you bring in only a few things, it lets the teacher know you intend support, not conflict.

Write a Thank You Note

Follow your meeting with the teacher with a thank you note. Find at least one positive characteristic of this teacher to mention. Even if it is her great smile, or kind tone of voice, whatever you can find. Everyone has some positive things about them.

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Introduce Your Child to the Teacher and the Class

Depending on your child and his/her characteristics, you may want to offer to come into the classroom early in the year to talk with the other students. This works best with the younger grades but can be valuable for both the teacher and the child.

When you bring these things out in the open, kids are more prepared to understand the atypical behaviors they might see. For example, kids may see your child at the store or in other settings and come up to say hello. They understand when your child does not immediately recognize them or respond with their name. This introduction means most of your child's atypical behaviors will not be a distraction to the other kids in class. It helps the teacher by increasing the time she has to actually teach.

Follow-Up With the Teacher Throughout the Year

It's always a good idea to meet with the teacher before school starts. Don't hesitate to ask for a brief follow-up meeting 4 or 5 weeks into the year to go over progress.

Ask how you might continue to provide support to the teacher. Again, refreshments never hurt!

Address Problems Immediately

Address any overt problems immediately. Be respectful when you voice your concerns. If the teacher is the one noting problems, listen and ask clarifying questions. "I want to be sure I understand. I think you said....." Paraphrase what the teacher said.

Sometimes there is a simple technique you have found successful at home. Be willing to share these with your child's teacher. Starting a new school year is stressful for everyone, students, parents and teachers. There are many ways to start the year as an effective team.