Ideas for Communicating a Great Job or Been Helpful in Class.

When parents don’t return your phone calls, try test and email to quickly update parents, or let them know when their student has done a great job or been helpful in class. Invite students to attend parent meetings, class events or school functions. Get to know your students. In the first week of school, send home a fill-in-the-blank letter in English and Spanish (and in other languages as needed) for parents to write to you about their work and/or children’s strengths and weaknesses, hobbies and interests, and expectations for learning in the classroom.

Invite students to attend parent conferences. Many educators find it helpful and use the opportunity to have the student included in parent/teacher discussions about their class behavior and performance.

Realize that while some immigrant parents are eager to get involved in school, they may not understand the American system, feel welcome, or may feel uncomfortable about their ability to communicate in English. Even if your school doesn’t have a dedicated Parent Resource person, consider one or more students with special needs. When your funds run out, head down. When your funds run out, head down. Even if your degree is not in special education, teacher Ashlee- Nicole Skiles has found ways to incorporate yoga in the classroom to help students navigate the P–12 zone, but through home visits, you may learn a lot more about the lives of your students and their families. Some quick tips:

- Offer alternative times—less parents will say no if you’re flexible, and it parents are uncomfortable inviting you into their home, meet at a coffee shop, a library, or even a park.
- Try some creative community building among parents and families and your school. Tap into the power of your school’s PTA. Find parent volunteers willing to offer rides to parents without transportation so they can attend parent conferences and school events. Providing childcare at school during parent conferences and meetings may also draw in parents who otherwise couldn’t participate.

For Students’ Sake

Ideas for Communicating and Partnering with Parents

Communication and trust help to set the foundation for student success. Yet, connecting with parents can be a challenge for many educators. But there are ways you can increase parent involvement and build meaningful parent-teacher partnerships, and stay connected long after hosting your first Back to School Night! When parents don’t return your phone calls, try test and email to quickly update parents, or let them know when their student has done a great job or been helpful in class. Other ideas:

- Get students to keep parents informed. Have them write and produce a print or online newsletter about classroom milestones, activities, and events. Be sure to include your contact information and any important dates or notifications.
- Get to know your students. In the first week of school, send home a fill-in-the-blank letter in English and Spanish and in other languages as needed) for parents to write to you about their work and/or children’s strengths and weaknesses, hobbies and interests, and expectations for learning in the classroom.
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Course to bring students and parents into the classroom, or launch a series of classes and workshops to introduce immigrant parents to each other so teachers, and to strategies for helping their children navigate the P–12 school system.

Struggling to reach parents who can’t take time off during the day, work nights, or are scared of the school? Make visits to homes an option. It may require some training, training up with another school staff member, and even stepping out of your comfort zone, but through home visits, you may learn a lot more about the lives of your students and their families. Some quick tips:

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Everyone wants to be on—or build—a winning team. In addition to fellow teachers and administrators, recruit education support professionals (ESPs) for your team. They’re the approximately 3 million education professionals—about 500,000 of them are NEA members—who often work behind the scenes to support students and teachers and help schools run smoothly. ESPs are school secretaries, custodians, technical staff, security officers, bus drivers, food service workers, and those who work in health and student services. Paraeducators are also ESPs. They work alongside teachers, and can oversee your small student groups and provide one-on-one instruction. In particular, you should get to know the paraeducators with training in special education and ELL.

INVITE THESE ESPS TO JOIN YOUR TEAM:

FOOD SERVICE WORKERS
Want to give your students a treat of the school kitchen? Let these staff be your guide. Maybe you want to plant a garden? Food service workers make good partners for this activity, too. And some are dietitians who can provide your students with informal lessons on nutrition and health.

TECHNICIANS
These audiovisual, electrical, data processing specialists are good to know when you need to install, repair, or upgrade your computer or your classroom’s network.

NURSES
Some school nurses are ESPs. Partner with them to stay informed about the medical conditions of particular students, as well as about viruses or other health concerns that may impact the neighborhood or school. Looking for health speakers? Invite them to class for informal talks with students that encourage them to maintain good health independently.

CUSTODIANS
Are you thinking about improving your school grounds? Custodians are good to know when you need to install, repair, and upgrade your computer or your classroom’s network. They can often do this work, or can recommend someone who can.

SECRETARIES
They’re your go-to source for sound advice and administrative information about your school and school district processes. Rely on them to promptly deliver messages from parents. Secretaries can usually respond to questions about salary, holiday breaks, vacation rules, board meetings, and more. Of course, new teachers can get some of this information from veteran teachers, but when it comes to administrative support or policies, school change, secretaries are often the first to know.

LIBRARIANS
Some librarians are considered ESPs. They can help with coordinating book selections and lesson plans for your students.

BUS DRIVERS
Although their schedules may keep them from interacting with teachers during the day, get to know your school’s bus drivers. As the first school employees to greet your students in the morning and the last to see them at the end of the day, bus drivers are your extra eyes and ears when it comes to your students’ health and safety. For safety and emergency reasons, consider getting the bus driver’s name and cell phone number.

Learn more about ESPs, visit nea.org/esp.

“Students couldn’t function if we didn’t deliver them to school safely, if they weren’t fed, if they weren’t able to check out library books, if we didn’t have a nurse to take care of them. We connect with the students as much as the teachers do.” — PAULA MONROE, NEA 2014 EDUCATION SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR AND A SECRETARY IN BETHESDA, MARYLAND’S CARDEROCK SPRINGS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.