

Communicating with Parents: Keys to Success

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CC 102



Welcome to this session sponsored by the Texas Music Educators Conference. TMEC is your link to the Music Educators National Conference (MENC): the National Association for Music Education. We hope you find the information in this session helpful in your teaching.

TMEC/MENC has many great resources for you. We encourage you to come by our booth in the exhibit area and pick up your copy of the Governor's proclamation for March as Music in Our Schools Month. TMEC is Booth #1330.

Remember to make plans to attend the TMEC "Music For All: Teaching Music in Urban and Rural Schools" Symposium June 15-17, 2009 in Dallas. Registration forms are available at www.tmec.org. To find more information on and to join TMEC, visit our website at www.tmec.org. For more information on MENC, visit www.menc.org.

If we can be of any further assistance to you, please feel free to contact us.

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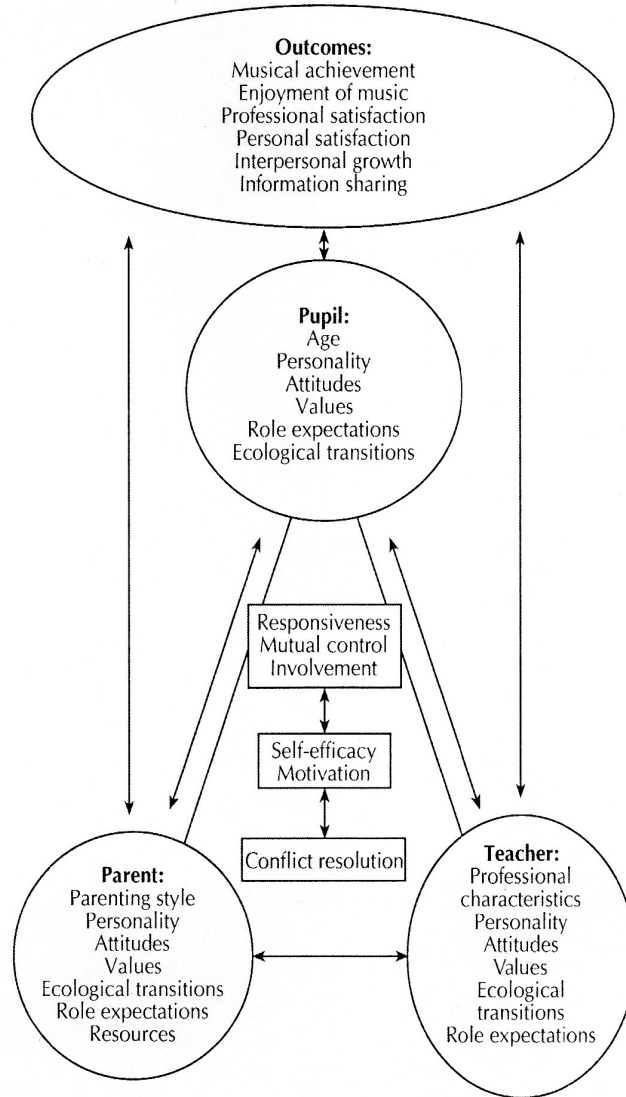


Fig. 1 The interaction of human variables within a musical context

I. Communicating Expectations: The Handbook

Overview of the program (mission statement, goals and objectives, list of performance groups)

Daily Procedures

Classroom Rules

Grading policy

Performance Policy

Rehearsal Policy

Choir Excursions and outings

Academic Eligibility (explain and provide dates)

Taping of performances and rehearsals

Private Lessons

Student Officers

Contests (Solo/Ensemble, Region, UIL

Permission Slips

Endowment Fund

Choir supplies (what is provided, what is not, what are students responsible to keep up with)

Awards

Uniforms

Description (a description of the uniform, what is provided vs. what are the students responsible to purchase)

Guidelines (cleaning procedures, handing in uniforms, hemming instructions)

Choir Calendar for the entire year (to be handed out at the beginning of each semester)

Signature page with student and parent's signature

Parent Volunteer Form

ADMINISTRATION SIGN OFF

Handbooks from Bush Middle School and Spring High School can be found at:

<http://tw.neisd.net/webpages/djarvi/>

www.springchoir.com

TMEA also has sample handbooks online at:

http://www.tmea.org/027_magazine/resource_center/contents.htm

II. Methods of Communicating with Parents

Handbook

E-mail (both individual info and group broadcasts)

Printed version of e-mail

Post info on web page

Calendar in the classroom

Verbal reminders as events are approaching

Display board in a main hallway.

Phone calls as needed

Posted letters are important: translated letters

III. The Classroom Management Step Plan

Step 1 Verbal Warning

Step 2 Teacher/Student Conference and seat change

Step 3 Parent Contact (phone or e-mail)

Step 4 Detention with teacher

Step 5 Counselor Referral

Step 6 Team Conference

Step 7 Office Referral

- Save all emails; Cc yourself and create a folder.
- Use a form to record all interactions regarding that student, both student and parent contacts.

IV. Strategies for Conferencing with Parents

A. If the parent initiates the conversation

1. Listen carefully. Repeat any unclear parts of the conversation and tell the parent that you are making a written record of their concerns.
2. Ask the parent to tell you what they want. What is their ideal solution?
3. Discuss options
4. Identify solutions
5. Agree on a plan and write it down.

B. If the music teacher initiates the conversation

1. Make a plan, know what you want to say and how you are going to say it. Have a general idea of what you want to happen before you call. Some teachers write an outline of their main talking points.
2. Start by introducing yourself and state your purpose as succinctly as possible. Some excellent introductory phrases can be found below.
3. Discuss options
4. Identify solutions
5. Agree on a plan and write it down.

*** It is very important to follow up. Call the parent back and report the progress made.**

Phrases to implement:

- The purpose of my call is to gather information from you in order to make the most informed decision I can about this issue.
- You are the expert on your child so I'm hoping to get some ideas from you. .
- Let's see if we can come up with a "win/win" situation.
- I want to be fair to your child and at the same time maintain consistency with the guidelines of my program.
- Wow, I certainly can understand where you are coming from. Can we spend a minute looking at my perspective on this issue?
- You are calling to be your child's advocate and that is your place...

Other ideas:

- Find a commonality and draw on that (you have children also, similar background . . . search for something)
- Keep in mind that MOST of the time; an angry parent wants to be heard.
- Sometimes you will have to "agree to disagree"
- Keep the conversation on the issue at hand. Do not let it stray to other areas.
- Keep the conversation on their son or daughter. Redirect any comments they make about other students.
- Make sure you are talking to the legal guardian.
- It is okay to excuse yourself from a conversation

Research notes:

Many educational theorists agree that people function most cohesively together and confidently alone in contexts in which they experience significant others as being both caring and autonomy-supportive (Noack, 1998). The key is supporting students' autonomy by giving them ownership in their education and responsibility for their behavior. Therefore, effective teachers include the student as much as possible in their communication with parents.

V. E-mail strategies

Before you respond to a (potentially) emotional e-mail,

- Consider calling instead; too much can be "read between the lines".
- Have **two** colleagues (not just one) and/or an administrator/supervisor review your response BEFORE you hit the send button!
- C/c the e-mail to your immediate supervisor/administrator/school counselor that the parent is likely to go to next if things aren't resolved. This leaves the parent with the impression that your actions are transparent.
- Emails can be subpoenaed so you must be careful what you type. When in doubt call and take notes.

VI. Relationship Building

Bruenger: The importance of positive communication

Flores: It begins with the kids

Jarvis: Electives fair: Make sure parents know that you will be an advocate for their child.

Lewis: You, the teacher, set the example of building healthy relationships and communications with both your students and parents.

Research notes:

- As parents become more involved with their child's education both parents and children receive tangible rewards, as the child becomes more proficient, the parents gain pride and self confidence from the child's intellectual, skill and emotional growth, this in turn provides more motivation for the parents' continued involvement (Cone, Delawyer & Wolfe, 1985).
- With increased parent participation student achievement will correspondingly increase, irrespective of race, nationality or economic status (Smith, 1991).
- High-achieving students benefited from the support and encouragement of parents who may not have had any formal knowledge of music, but who did take responsibility for helping with home practice and for encouraging their children to gain and maintain good practice habits (Creech & Hollam, 2003).

VII. Parent Volunteers

Flores: The committee system

Jarvis: Building relationships to secure trust (choosing chaperones)

Lewis: Students really do like seeing their parents involved in what they are involved in.

References

- Cone, J., Delawyer, D., & Wolfe, V. (1985). Assessing parent participation: The parent/family involvement index. *Exceptional Children*, 51(5), 417-424
- Creech, A. & Hallam, S. (2003). Parent-teacher-pupil interactions in instrumental music tuition. *British Journal of Music Education* 20(1), 29-44
- Noack, P. (1998). School achievement and adolescents' interactions with their fathers, mothers, and friends. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 13(4), 503-13.
- Smith, T.E. (1991). Agreement of adolescent educational expectations with perceived maternal and paternal educational goals. *Youth and Society*, 23 (2), 155-174