

It's Your Call: Share Positive Feedback



Educators often struggle to develop meaningful relationships with parents. It's not uncommon to see them only at the beginning of the year, at parent-teacher conferences, and at school performances and assemblies. But those are not the only times that our students are doing something good.

Year after year, I strove to have a consistent plan for getting the word out about how elated we are about our successes. Every day our students are doing great things, but how often are we getting that word out to parents? Now, I have found a successful, effective tool for doing just that.

Picking Up the Phone

As parents, some of us have received “those” phone calls ... you know the ones: “Hello. I have your child in the office for an incident that happened in class today.” But how many parents get positive phone calls from school?

Last year, I had the opportunity to hear a presentation from Todd Nesloney, co-author of the book *Kids Deserve It! Pushing Boundaries and Challenging Conventional Thinking*. One of the areas he discussed was positive parent phone calls. I became determined to start making those calls.

I told my team my plan. I would make the calls myself because I didn't want to add to their already overloaded plates. I began by calling staff members' parents and spouses, thanking them for having such great children or spouses and saying how lucky I was to have them on my staff. I started with my staff because I knew that if the calls gave them a happy feeling, they would want the same for their students.

I set aside the first two Fridays of the school year for the staff calls. This set the stage for my rollout for students. In my weekly blog to staff I indicated when I would begin my positive parent phone calls. Teachers simply had to send me an email with the name of the students and tell me why they wanted me to call the parents. I figured I would have five to 10 responses, but when I got well over 30 the first week, I thought, “Holy moly, how am I going to be able to handle this?”

I decided to get my assistant principals involved. I wanted them to experience the calls—hopefully this would become a practice that they could use when they became principals. I called them in an hour before the school day ended on a Friday and we made the calls together. I can remember the first one:

“Good afternoon. This is Mrs. Boyd, Mrs. Jurado and Mrs. De Rouen.”

“Um ... is my child OK, or are they in trouble?”

“No, no, no, we are actually calling for a positive phone call. We want you to know that your child's teacher (we always say the child's name) would like for us to tell you that they are so happy to have your child in their class because they always enter the class with giving their teacher a hug, and that makes the teacher feel great.”

“Oh, wow. I’ve never had anyone call me about something good my child has done. I’m so proud of them! Thank you for calling.”

We heard these types of responses over and over, and many calls ended in tears of joy. Who knew that a simple phone call could have such a positive impact?

Now, every Friday afternoon my assistant principals and I make positive calls to parents. Each of us averages 10 to 20 calls. The calls can be about social or academic achievement, and they range from changes in behavior to moving up in reading levels, from mastery of a concept to helping a friend in need, and the list goes on. Many parents have received more than one call.

Fewer Hang-ups

Since these phone calls began, I have seen an already powerful culture on campus get even better. I love it when a student or staff member says, “Mrs. Boyd, thank you for calling my mom.”

These calls are developing a feeling of warmth that is creating and strengthening personal relationships in our school building.

My staff members all have found it quite easy to find the good in their

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students. Even my support personnel are jumping in to say “Please make a call to this child’s parent.” I have also found that if a parent has a concern, it has been brought forth in a much more positive manner than in years previous, especially if that parent has received several positive calls. We have seen that parents have been a lot more apprecia-

tive of teachers, too, and we have seen that parents have wanted to help more this year than before.

The positive phone calls for staff continue, too. Even my parents and husband have gotten calls of thanks from my administrative team. I walked into a leadership meeting one day and was shocked to discover my mom and dad were on the phone. Of course, my mom began to cry, and I’ll admit I was touched. The good comments make everyone feel better and instantly more willing to do things for those who take the time to call.

The only cost is time set aside in your day on a Friday. We have called on Sunday evenings, too, to begin the week on a positive note. These simple phone calls make everyone feel really good about themselves and the work they do. Give it a try. I am confident that it will make a difference in your school. 

Dana Boyd is principal of East Point Elementary School in El Paso, Texas.

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