Learning Guide – Understanding, Supporting and Collaborating with Parents

This learning guide is designed for use by Professional Learning Communities, instructional/learning coaches, teacher-leaders or as a self-paced study to enhance and support instruction, conversation and critical reflection about creating inclusive learning environments. This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip entitled **Understanding, Supporting & Collaborating with Parents** on this website.

Alberta **Regional** Consortia

General Synopsis

Inclusive schools welcome and embrace positive, collaborative relationships between school staff and parents in support of providing the best learning environment for a diverse population of children. In this video you will see examples of inclusive school settings that model approaches that reflect understanding, support and collaboration with all parents, including parents of children with disabilities. For more information from Alberta Education on an inclusive education system please visit http://education.alberta.ca/department/ipr/inclusion/about.aspx

Key Understandings

- Parents are an invaluable resource to teachers, providing them with information about the child's home life, and what works best for that child in terms of learning and positive behaviour support.

- Parents see themselves supporting the school in many ways through activities that provide for meaningful learning for their children, whether that is taking place at home, in a school, or in the larger community.

- Teachers in inclusive classrooms collaborate and communicate with parents and are respectful of the challenges they face. They work hard to understand and be helpful when institutional expectations cannot be met in the way we sometimes expect.

- Most parents do want to be involved, and many are involved in ways not visible to teachers.

- Parents want to feel welcome in the school community and in their child's classroom. They want to have their contributions appreciated, and they want to be connected to a school community through their children.

- Parents appreciate being informed about the learning of their child, and having opportunities to participate in their child's learning.

Key Understandings

- Implementing a inclusive education model requires educators to show sensitivity to the culturally relevant values that influence parents' educational priorities and demands, and recognize that cultural, socioeconomic and gender factors affect how parents participate in their children's education.

- Collaboration is enhanced by a family-centred approach: a set of beliefs, principles, values and practices aimed at supporting and strengthening family capacity to enhance and promote their child's development and learning, recognizing parents as key participants in the education of their children.

- The child is the centre of all collaborative efforts.

- Teachers play a critical role in this collaboration. They offer to families:
  - **Empowerment –** Teachers acknowledge and support each family to identify and communicate concerns about their child.
  - **Enablement –** Teachers assist the family to acquire the skills and resources to help address their concerns.

- As children successfully learn and develop, teachers, parents and children can celebrate the progress, and appreciate the collaboration that achieved the learning outcomes.

- Parents are powerful partners as we move toward one inclusive education system where each student is successful.

For further information on this topic, please see *Tip Sheet - Positive Parental Partnerships and Strengthening Collaboration Between Schools and Families.*

Continuing the Conversation: Questions for Discussion

For all children, including children with disabilities, parents are an invaluable resource to teachers, providing them with information and insight about the child, and what works best for that child in terms of learning and positive behaviour support.

1. What words caught your attention in this statement?
2. What was your first reaction?
3. From your own experience, can you recall an example of effective collaboration with a parent in support of student learning ? If so, tell the group about it.
4. What values are implicit in this statement?

For parents, a critical issue may be whether their child and they, as the child's parents, feel they are welcomed, accepted and respected as part of the school community, as illustrated in the video.

1. What were some observations you made in the video clip that would illustrate this statement?
2. In your own experience, what welcoming examples have you seen or been part of?
3. Think of something you could do in your own class, or throughout your school, that would enhance welcoming behaviour.

Parents in the video said that the more contact they had with the school, the more they felt they were able to provide support for their child's learning at home. By being in the school, they picked up subtle and direct cues about how to help their child. By talking with the teacher, they could ask questions and get information about what was being worked on in class.

1. What are the implications of more contact with parents for teachers, classrooms and schools?
2. What trends do you see emerging?
3. What change, if any, is needed?
4. What are your next steps?

Families may experience a sense of loss and grieving about their child's disability. They may experience a number of conflicting emotions as they anticipate what the future will be like for their child, and how the disability could affect their child's daily life, relationships and future aspirations.

1. What did this bring to mind as you read it?
2. In working with parents, when have you experienced something like this?
3. What is the insight here?
4. How could this statement be helpful in working with parents in the future?

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