

## Classroom Management: Part I

**Candidate Name: Brett Wilson**

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### Assessment C: Positive Phone Calls

**Due by the end of Week 6**

#### Overview

Over the past several weeks, you read about the importance of building relationships with your students and encouraging camaraderie among them. When students feel noticed, valued, and cared about, they have greater confidence in their ability to succeed. Likewise, building partnerships with parents and guardians goes a long way toward demonstrating your professional investment and concern about their children's achievement. The key to strong relationships with children and their families rests in the style in which you communicate—your words, actions, and listening skills. Consequently, this week you will strategically build relationships with the families of some of your most struggling students.

#### Instructions

For this assessment, you will make a positive phone call to the parents/guardians of 3-5 students who you suspect may present some behavioral issues as the year progresses.

Follow the 3-part instructions below:

1. Select students
2. Plan phone calls
3. Summarize and reflect

#### Part 1: Select Students

- Select 3-5 students who may have begun to show signs of *not* being successful in your classroom. These students might act out and not follow directions, be disruptive, or not complete work or turn in homework.
- Look for the first sign of positive behavior in your selected students (e.g., students raise their hand and do not act out for one full day, students stay on task and do not break a rule for an entire period, students turn in homework on time).

#### Part 2: Plan Phone Calls

- Use this handout to plan proactive positive phone calls. You should:
  - Identify yourself and let the parent/guardian know why you are calling.
  - Describe the positive behavior you want to report.
  - Ask for parental input about his or her expectations (hopes and dreams) for the child.
  - Explain that parental support is critical to the student's ongoing success. Discuss how you and the parent/guardian can keep the lines of communication open. Make sure you listen to, document, and actively acknowledge the parent's/guardian's comments.

- Express confidence that you and the parent/guardian will be able to work together for the student's success.
- **Do not make these calls until you have planned out exactly what you will say using the templates below.**
- Remember to use the communication skills described in the resources.
- Document and save notes from the conversation.
- If a phone call or text message is not possible, send an email or written note home. Regardless of the method used to communicate with parents/guardians, the goal of the communication remains the same.

### **Part 3: Summarize and Reflect**

Complete a 3-5 page, double-spaced reflective summary (excluding references).

Your reflective summary should not simply be your notes from the conversation, but rather a reflection of your conversations. Consider the following prompts in mind:

- What follow-up was discussed?
- What did you learn from the experience?
- Which communication skills were most effective?
- Have you noticed any change in the student's behavior already?
- If not, what do you expect to see?

In your reflective summary, you will want to recall elements of the conversations and tie those into resources from this course. You may also draw on other courses or resources regarding parent communication/classroom management. Provide proper APA citations for resources you reference.

## Part 2: Plan Phone Calls

Student 1

Student's Pseudonym: Aaron Williams

(Your response)

Hi, this is Mr. Wilson from School. I am Aaron's World History teacher. Is this a good time to talk?

The reason I am calling is to tell you how great Aaron has been today. He has been actively participating in class by being the first to volunteer for readings and answering questions. I am really proud of his growth over the past 9-weeks.

I want to continue seeing him grow in my classroom and plan to support his growth as much as possible. What are some expectations and hopes you have for Aaron as he continues moving forward?

Supporting Aaron from both sides as teacher and parent is very important to his success. I want to make sure you are informed and aware of Aaron's performance. How can I best support your participation in Aaron's schooling?

Are there any other commitments besides school that I should be aware of that would affect Aaron's schooling?

I want you to know that I am always available to meet in person to discuss anything regarding Aaron's schooling. I am a partner to you and Aaron's academic success, so please let me know what I can do to help.

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Student 2

Student's Pseudonym: Will Bader

Hi, this is Mr. Wilson from School. I am Will's World History teacher. Is this a good time to talk?

The reason I am calling is to tell you how great Will's has been today. Will has shown initiative by leading his groups project presentation. He made sure his group finished their responsibilities and took charge by stepping in to help his classmates by saying more about their topic. I want to let you know how proud of him I am and the growth he has shown over the semester.

I want to continue seeing him grow in my classroom and plan to support his growth as much as possible. What are some expectations and hopes you have for Will as he continues moving forward?

Supporting Will from both sides as teacher and parent is very important to his success. I want to make sure you are informed and aware of Will's performance. How can I best support your participation in Will's schooling?

Are there any other commitments besides school that I should be aware of that would affect Will's schooling?

I want you to know that I am always available to meet in person to discuss anything regarding Will's schooling. I am a partner to you and Will's academic success, so please let me know what I can do to help.

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Student 3

Student's Pseudonym: Briana Keys

Hi, this is Mr. Wilson from School. I am Briana's Economics teacher. Is this a good time to talk?

The reason I am calling is to tell you how great Briana has been today. Briana is up to date on all over his assignments and has demonstrated a firm understanding of today's lesson on budgeting and w-2 employer forms. She appears to have taken a strong interest in learning more about personal finance; especially, taxes. She is always asking questions about tax responsibilities. I want to let you know how proud I am of her growth in the classroom and I expect to continue seeing her shine in my classroom.

I want to continue seeing her grow in my classroom and plan to support her growth as much as possible. What are some expectations and hopes you have for Briana as she continues moving forward?

Supporting Briana from both sides as teacher and parent is very important to her success. I want to make sure you are informed and aware of Briana's performance. How can I best support your participation in Briana's schooling?

Are there any other commitments besides school that I should be aware of that would affect Briana's schooling?

I want you to know that I am always available to meet in-person to discuss anything regarding Briana's schooling. I am a partner to you and Briana's academic success, so please let me know what I can do to help.

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Student 4 (optional but encouraged!)

Student's Pseudonym:

(Your response)

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Student 5 (optional but encouraged!)

Student's Pseudonym:

(Your response)

## Reflective Summary

Family engagement has been a struggling area of growth in my classroom. Patrikakou (2008) acknowledges important findings indicating “that high school students believe they can do better at school if they know that their families are interested in their schoolwork and expect them to succeed, thus challenging the prevalent view that adolescents do not want their parents involved at all.” Parent involvement is crucial to my student’s academic achievement and continues to be an area of growth in my first-year teaching. On day one, I sent home a parent form including the course syllabus and a family questionnaire asking for appropriate contact information and details about their child, but approximately 25% of these parent forms were returned completed. Most numbers in the school database are outdated and I have struggled to obtain updated parent contact information. The three families I contacted above fortunately had updated contact information. In the past, I have attempted positive phone calls home and have noticed improvements in mood and leadership in my classroom. Some students brought up the conversation the following day showing signs of joy and relief. Families I have been able to contact show strong interest and encouragement in their child’s education saying statements such as “Please let me know if I need to come down there” or “I appreciate the consistent updates through the Remind app”. On the other hand, the majority of families have been challenging to get a hold of and thus limit the opportunity for potential aforementioned improvements requiring affirmation in different methods (i.e. personal notes/letters to students). Figuring out how to improve family engagement in the classroom begins with consistent parent contact and informing families that I am a champion of their child’s education.

Each student above has demonstrated exceptional growth over the semester, and I have had the pleasure of formulating stronger relationships with these three students. However, each student has areas of growth that limit their academic achievement including excessive talking, missing assignments, and poor use of class time. I have attempted multiple interventions with

each student to address any issues and worked with each student to create a learning action plan. Generally, the conversations and plans have shown positive results through improved performance and behavior, but a missing component has been parent contact. After searching for parent contact information via third-party contact lists (suggested by another teacher; i.e. college/career advisor and athletic clubs), I was able to reach out to the three student's parents.

After multiple phone call attempts to Aaron's mother, I was able to reach her in the early morning. Aaron's mother works second shift, which clarifies why most of my phone calls went unanswered. The conversation went well considering I caught her at an appropriate time. She sounded grateful to hear about Aaron's performance and seemed concerned about his schooling considering she is not always around in the evening to see him. She talked about how Aaron is usually responsible for himself in the evening while she works. We planned to keep in regular contact (monthly) to discuss Aaron's performance and she reassured me she would be open to meeting in the morning to discuss any issues. Following the conversation, I gained tremendous insight into the life of Aaron Williams and the responsibilities he bears every day. Aaron made me aware that he knew his mother and I talked about his schooling. Since then he has appeared more attentive in class and willing to acknowledge behavior corrections.

In contrast to Aaron, the conversations with Briana and Will remained short but appreciative of the call home. Briana's father appreciated the initiative and made me well-aware that he will come down to school in a moment's notice to address any behavioral issues. Whereas Will's mother, who has recently been laid-off, informed me she will make sure to check-in with Will more often about his schoolwork and to let her know if there are any issues. Both were surprised to hear that the call home was positive leaning.

Walking away from all three conversations, I learned a great deal about the livelihoods of three of my students. Patrikakou (2008) notes "With the increase in single-parent households and the dramatic change in the work force, with mothers of school-aged children entering it in great numbers, time has become a valuable commodity for parents who struggle to make ends

meet.” Aaron’s mother and Briana’s father discussed the challenges of their work schedules and other family conflicts that present challenges to playing a more active role in their child’s education. Both are single-family parents who must meet the intense demands of raising children, work, and their personal needs and wants. As a result, addressing their child’s school needs may not be the first priority for these two parents when they’re more preoccupied with putting food on the table and paying bills. The CDC (2015) states that “schools need to identify ways to sustain parent engagement by overcoming challenges that keep parents from being connected and engaged in school health activities.”. Both parties need to find an effective strategy to keep one another informed and the strain daily routines tends to limit possibilities for in-person connection. Nevertheless, technology does make school to parent connection much easier. The CDC suggests incorporating parent newsletters where updated classroom information is posted. This may include access to course websites (e.g. Google Classroom), using a communication app (e.g. Remind), or general calendar dates to keep parents informed of their student’s school activity. Moving forward, I learned I need to figure out how to keep parents more informed of their child’s classroom performance. Simply expecting parents to check their students grades online does not provide enough insight into their student’s performance.

The close-knit family culture in my community primes student’s to raise the bar in their academics. Todd Finley (2014) makes a point about teachers having “cultural competence” when building relationships with their students beginning with teachers who perform daily check-ins and establishing an understanding of a student’s life. My students talk fondly of their parents and strive to make them proud by becoming successful. The phone calls home begins to tear down the social barriers that limit a greater connection with my students and recognize the small and large successes occurring in the classroom. My students become more aware that I notice them beyond who they are in the classroom, but acknowledge the people who

influence them outside, too. This opens the door for further opportunities to create a connective circle of influential parties who are critically important to the development of each student.

## References

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