



MAKING THE CONNECTION



ON RIGHT, TEACHER EDIE MILEHAM
MTI/WEAC MEMBER
ON LEFT, PARENT ELLEN CARLSON
LOWELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
MADISON, WISCONSIN

With each school year comes more than new classroom supplies and friendly faces to learn – it also means a new teacher for your child and learning how you can best communicate with each other to advance your child’s academic development.

Edie Mileham is a kindergarten and first-grade teacher in Madison, a Madison Teachers Inc. and WEAC member with nearly a decade of teaching experience. We asked her and Ellen Carlson, a Madison parent whose son was in Ms. Mileham’s class, to share how they communicated so well, and how others can, too.

WHAT MAKES FOR POSITIVE PARENT-TEACHER INTERACTION?

Teacher: Showing your love for this brilliant, talented child. That’s not just something for teachers either. Parents, remember not to be too critical of your child at a conference! Play up your child’s strengths. It may be that the teacher wasn’t even aware of a particular area of strength for your child – and he or she can use it as a springboard for new learning.

Parent: At our first quarter conferences I shared with Ms. Mileham my son’s love for complex spatial games. She related that to his love for the paper folding she saw in class and adapted his math lessons to include more challenging patterns and spatial learning.

HOW CAN PARENTS PREPARE FOR PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES?

Teacher: Ask the tough questions and be prepared to be part of the solution. Instead of “what can you do?” consider asking, “what can we do?” Also share with teachers what your child is telling you at home.

Parent: My son often gives one-word answers about his day, and after learning about his accomplishments and struggles during conferences, I could ask more specific questions about his friends, topics and activities. Together we worked on turning his frustrations into learning experiences.

HOW CAN TEACHERS BEST COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS?

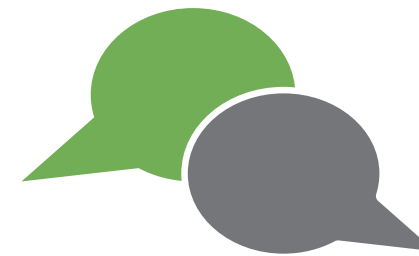
Teacher: I send home a weekly newsletter each Friday. It serves as a simple reminder of important dates and also outlines what we studied during the past week.

Parent: I loved the newsletters.

WHAT’S THE BEST WAY TO LAY A SOLID FOUNDATION OF OPEN COMMUNICATION?

Teacher: Start with a face-to-face meeting. I know that parents have complicated schedules, but most teachers are flexible to meet those needs. From there, we can better communicate via phone or e-mail.

Parent: For me, it was attending the open houses and potlucks, and relating what I read in the newsletters to my son’s classroom, in addition to spending more time with Ms. Mileham and my son’s classmates.



MS. MILEHAM SHARES OTHER TIPS FOR POSITIVE PARENT-TEACHER ENGAGEMENT:

Be a force for parent involvement: ask how you can help and volunteer in the classroom.

Get other parents involved: the collective power of parents can make for a strong school and community.

Consider parents and teachers as teammates in your child’s education: teachers want to learn from parents as much as parents from teachers.

MS. CARLSON SHARES HER TIPS ON HOW TO BE AN ENGAGED PARENT:

Remember that the teacher is working for families to best teach their children.

Visit – the school is always open to parents.

Ask your child’s teacher what the best way for them to communicate may be.



Parent Ellen Carlson and teacher Edie Mileham share more ideas about parent-teacher communications at weac.org/parents.