

PARENTS, DO YOU KNOW WHERE THE QUALITY IS?

Reid Elementary School
Grand Blanc, Michigan

In an effort to improve communication with parents and involve them in decisions which affect the school, we began using a survey each spring. The same 12 questions are asked of all parents, staff, and students. In addition, each participant is given the opportunity to make comments and suggestions. The results of the survey are used in a couple of different ways. Parents' comments and suggestions are reviewed, and when possible, changes are made to accommodate their expectations and concerns. For instance, concerns about consistency in discipline and consequences among classrooms were noted on several surveys. As a result, a Reid School Handbook was developed, and Mr. Baldwin, our principal, explained the school's rules to each class. A copy of the handbook was sent home with each child.

We also compare the survey responses from parents, staff, and students to see if we all have the same perceptions. One glaring difference has been in the opinion of "quality work." The first year parents were asked if their child did quality work, 92% responded yes, compared to 42% of students and 26% of staff. This appeared to be a real communication problem, and so became a focus of our plan.

The survey responses and results are shared at staff meetings, published each year in our school newsletter, shared at PTO meetings and with district administrators. Quality has been a topic in our district and classrooms for several years, due in part to the district's Quality Improvement Process (QIP). Our attempts to align the perceptions of parents, staff, and students on the issue of "quality work" began with a definition of quality in our school newsletter along with an article describing the disparity of perceptions among parents, students, and teachers. Quality has since been discussed in each issue of the newsletter. Our next step was to develop a "quality display" in the foyer of the school. Students were challenged to complete work that met the quality guidelines. Teachers submitted examples that they felt reflected quality. These samples were then displayed in the hallway to show students, families, and visitors how Reid School defines quality.

In an effort to improve the program, we plan on several changes. We will meet as a staff to further define "quality" and assure that standards are consistent throughout the school. We will refine some of the questions in the survey and ask specifically about quality characteristics. Finally, we will create a permanent Quality Board in the front hall.

Parents, in an attempt to be supportive of their children, often think everything their kids do is wonderful. While we appreciate the unconditional love parents give, we are also aware that in this competitive world, mediocrity does not lead to success. Through our survey, it appears we have been generally successful in defining quality for our students and setting a standard they can recognize. Our challenge is to be as successful with the parents. Continuous attention to quality must be given through all communication vehicles. A convergence of attitudes will reflect that we are being successful, as well as continuous improvement in the caliber of work displayed on our Quality Board.

Our second survey last spring showed that 86% of parents thought that their kids were doing quality work. Though a slight difference, this lower number does reflect improvement. Recently several staff members have heard about quality from the students. A first grader, who has struggled in the past, spoke about her classwork, "I never get stars on my papers," she said with a grin, "I get Q's." The adult asked what a Q stood for and the first grader responded, "Duh...Quality!" In a first/second multi-grade classroom, students will ask, when papers are being handed back, if there were any Quality papers. A child walking into the building with his parent was overheard saying, "Mom, check the Quality Board. I've got a paper up there!" It appears that Quality is spreading at Reid.

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