COMMUNICATION CONNECTIONS

South St. Paul High School
South St. Paul, Minnesota

The South St. Paul High School Partnership Action Team responded to the number one request on a parent survey—to increase communication between home and school, particularly about poor student status *prior* to midterm and about *positive* efforts from home and school. The Communication Connections program was for grades 7-12, which includes 100 teachers and approximately 1500 students.

Our Communication Connections program included three communication pieces that could be mailed—Good News Notes and Student Performance Notes from teacher/staff to parents/students, and Something Special at South St. Paul High School postcards from parents/students to teachers/staff—and a monthly Parent Involvement page written by the Parent Advocate in the principal's newsletter to parents.

- Good News Notes were designed for parents/students to receive positive communication from the school.
- Something Special at South St. Paul High School postcards were designed for teachers/staff to receive positive communication from parents/students.
- Student Performance Notes were designed for parents to receive timely information regarding poor/failing student performance while there was still time to get help and make positive changes. The note was designed for quick and easy use by teachers. They simply fill in their name, student name, class title, and check the box(es) that appropriately describe their concern(s).

To make it as easy as possible for teachers, other school personnel addressed and stamped the mail. When left up to the teacher, addressing the postcards significantly reduced the number of pieces sent, because our teachers do not have easy access to student addresses. The biggest challenge was getting teachers and families to use the postcards. We ran weekly drawings for those teachers who sent Good News Notes. E-mail reminders were sent at week 2 and week 6 of our terms, asking teachers to send out a Performance Note to parents of students who were falling behind. As the Parent Advocate, I mailed home the Something Special at South St. Paul High School postcards (4 copied on a 8-1/2 X 11 sheet that students/parents could cut apart) each quarter in the principal's newsletter, and had them available at conferences. New ideas could always be used to increase participation from both home and school.

The program supported our school improvement goals of “increased family involvement” and “higher attendance rate” by making it easier for both families and teachers to communicate with each other, and catching poor student performance before midterm, giving students a better chance of being successful, and therefore making them more likely to attend school.

All of the notes were received with great enthusiasm. The families loved to get the Good News Notes, and we also received comments of appreciation from parents who received the Student Performance Notes. The teachers/staff appreciated any positive feedback they got from families as well. I believe that the longer we use these notes, the more communication between school and home will increase, because both parties will realize how good it feels to give and receive positive comments.

Parents have told me that the Parent Involvement page of the principal’s newsletter is the first page they read of every issue to see what’s going on for parents or to get a tip on how they can help their children. We also included a hotline phone number where parents could call and leave anonymous questions or comments. The questions/comments, along with the school’s responses, are printed in the next issue.

The three note cards were designed by our district graphics department, copied and printed by our district duplicating department, and postage was paid by the building budget. It is quite easy to implement this program if other schools have the same support for copying, printing, and mailing materials. If other schools do not have the same building or district support, they could probably get the copying and printing donated by local businesses. A parent group could help support the postage expense.

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