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## **NEW NOTES IN '99**

### **Fayetteville Elementary School**

#### **Fayetteville, New York**

The Fayetteville Elementary Site Based Team concentrated on developing more effective two-way communication between parents and teachers. While we sent plenty of paperwork home to parents, i.e., newsletters, children's work, notices, etc., we lacked a method for parents to communicate easily and consistently back to school. On a daily basis, teachers received multiple kinds of paper from parents: notepaper, notebook paper, scrap paper, and others. There was no easy way for teachers to distinguish absenteeism notes from other notes related to academic achievement, or personal information about things going on in the child's life.

The team decided to create a new standard notepad that would be handed out to all parents and teachers. The design included a logo at the top of the page to show two-way communication between school and home. Because of homework helpers and other types of communication currently in place for age appropriate academic feedback, the form was kept general and did not specifically focus on academic achievement, though it certainly could be used for that purpose. The notepad was a bright color making it easily identified by both parents and teachers as it traveled back and forth. The pad was also bound, rather than copied as single sheets of paper, to make the pages easier to contain. An additional item added to the notepad was a checkmark box to alert the parent or teacher if the information had been shared with the child. Once the design was chosen and reviewed by the staff, the school district copying center made the notepads.

Next the team decided on how to implement the notepads in the school. In the first year of implementation, the principal sent letters home to make parents aware of the new notepads. The school handed out the notepads after the first marking period along with a letter explaining their use. Optionally, teachers handed out the pads at parent-teacher conferences and explained their use to parents. In the future, we plan to distribute the notepads in a school packet created by the Home School Association at the beginning of the year, along with an explanation of the notepad's use.

This two-way form of communication produced results almost immediately. Teachers reported getting forms back daily. Initially, there was some confusion as to the purpose of the form; it was

also being used for absenteeism excuses. When this happened, teachers sent the explanation of the form to the parents as a reminder.

Teachers love the form. One teacher said, “It makes it so easy for me to go through my notes quickly in the morning and determine the notes which need to go to the office (absenteeism excuses, doctor’s visit excuses), and which notes I need to set aside and take time to read.” Teachers find it a very effective method of communication with parents.

Parents are also thrilled. The notepad paper is easy to identify when it comes home because of its distinctive color. One parent noted: “It’s very easy to see when I go through my child’s papers when there’s a note from the teacher. I know this is something I need to read.”

While results have not been formally measured, teachers report that they see extensive use of the form from parents to school. The Site Based Team feels that the implementation of the notepad communication at Fayetteville Elementary School has been extremely effective, and has improved two-way communication between parents and teachers.

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