

The Barron Park Elementary School School – Parent Partnership

What is the Barron Park Partnership?

One of the things that make Barron Park Elementary School special is that parents and teachers share the goal of creating a wonderful and supportive school experience. Just as we want our children to treat each other considerately, we encourage parents and teachers at Barron Park to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect. For many, joining a public elementary school community is a new experience. It takes time to learn how the system works, and each school community is a little different. Understanding our children's academic and social development in the classroom and on the playground can be an enormous challenge. The Barron Park Site Council created this partnership to provide guidance to parents and staff on working effectively together.

The strategies outlined in this document are geared toward strengthening and reinforcing the shared goals of parents and teachers. Specifically, these goals (as reflected in the Barron Park Partnership) include:

- Creating a more productive learning environment for our children, and building a strong resourceful school community;
- Continuously building trust between parents and teachers;
- Promoting positive relationships between parents and teachers; and
- Providing parents and teachers with specific steps to resolve concerns.

Basic Principles

The following principles characterize the Barron Park Partnership and can serve as guidelines to help parents and staff work effectively together:

- 1. Assume Good Intentions:** Parents and teachers all care about children. Our shared goals form the basis of the Partnership.
- 2. Build Positive Relationships:** Showing appreciation when things are going well will go a long way toward creating good will between parents and teachers.
- 3. Be Respectful When Communicating:** Being respectful of time, feelings, and privacy in all of our interactions can lead to better communication.
- 4. Solve Problems Effectively:** Productive resolution of problems is possible when we focus on the child; share ideas and feelings only with those directly involved; and remain focused, respectful, and honest.
- 5. Be a Role Model:** Parents and teachers who work together successfully can act as role models for others.

Specific Ideas and Strategies for Parents

To help every child at Barron Park work towards reaching his or her potential, it is important that parents, teachers, and school staff work effectively together and communicate to achieve this goal. The tone of these interactions, from the casual setting of the playground

to the formal parent-teacher conference, all work together to create a positive atmosphere at our school.

1. Assume Good Intentions

What motivates both parents and teachers is their love of children. We all want to create a positive, supportive learning environment. A diversity of teaching styles and methods is a valuable asset for the school, just as a diversity of students and parental styles reflects the richness of the Barron Park community.

A parent with older children was disappointed that her youngest child's teacher, who was new to the school, didn't start the day with parent-child reading time as all her other children's teachers had. The parent was upset with the change and was going to confront the teacher. However, instead of confronting the teacher with, "Why did you change the morning routine? We never did it this way before," she decided to ask, "I was wondering why we don't start the day with parent-child reading time? I always enjoyed that time with my older children." After talking to the teacher, the parent discovered it was a grade level decision made because too many children were coming in late, and those children whose parents couldn't stay to read with them were feeling left out. After some reflection time, the parent felt that the teachers had made a good decision.

2. Build Positive Relationships

At Barron Park, we are proud to have thoughtful and dedicated teachers. We are equally as proud of our supportive and caring parent community. We all benefit from building positive relationships. In your discussions with other parents and the community, share good news and appreciation as often as possible, for this will help build relationships. Sharing the positive will lay the foundation for productive and thoughtful interactions throughout the year, especially when issues do arise.

We welcome all of our parents to share successes, questions and concerns with the classroom teacher and school staff. There are a number of ways to do this: note to the teacher, phone message, email, visit to the classroom, or contact with the Home-School Liaison.

3. Be Respectful When Communicating

Drop-off and pick-up times are rarely good times for teachers to hold a thoughtful conversation with parents. Email is often an effective tool to use when either alerting your teacher to a concern or trying to set up a time to meet. However, you should avoid using email if the situation is very complex. Just as in face-to-face communication, in email you should focus on the problem you are trying solve and not on assigning blame or being negative. When you talk to your child's teacher:

- Allow time for dialog and response. Some problems can't be addressed immediately. Schedule a time that is mutually convenient. Let the teacher know what day(s) and times are convenient for you.
- Discuss your child – not others. Parent should frame their concerns and question in terms of the effect they are having on their child only. For example, saying, "I am really concerned about my son. He doesn't feel that he has any friends in class. He feels that the boys he was buddies with are now leaving him out of their group" is a much more appropriate approach than, "Marcus and Andy are being really mean to my son! Those kids are real bullies. What are you doing about their behavior?"

- Use "I" messages that frame your concerns from your perspective. For example, you could say, "I am concerned that Amy has more homework than she can handle" rather than, "Why are you assigning so much homework?"
- Follow up with the teacher. If the teacher handles the problem well, take the time to thank him/her. If the problem is unresolved or resurfaces, communicate clearly and promptly.

4. Solve Problems Effectively

Even in the best circumstances, inevitably questions and concerns will arise. When they do, the first step you should take is to talk to your child's teacher. Classroom teachers want to work with you to resolve any concerns.

Some examples of common concerns:

- *"My child tells me he/she has no friends."*
- *"My child tells me he/she is being teased on the playground"*
- *"My child tells me someone in the class is being mean to him/her."*
- *"I am concerned my child is struggling with _____."*
- *"The homework is too hard or too easy for my child."*
- *"My child says that he/she is bored in class and is not being challenged."*
- *"My child doesn't know how to approach you or when to ask questions."*

If you do not feel that your concerns are adequately addressed, make an appointment with the principal or ask the teacher to include the principal in your next discussion.

5. Be a Role Model

Help model positive behavior for other parents. If another parent or group of parents is sharing rumors or unproductive information about a teacher or staff member, encourage them to approach the teacher individually with their concerns. Take the parent aside, if possible, and refer him/her to these guidelines or to the principal for help on how to approach a teacher.

"I heard you complaining about your child's teacher. It would really be more effective if you talked to her directly. I had an issue with my child and her teacher, and by discussing it directly with the teacher we resolved the problem."

Be a champion and play to your child's strengths. Take a moment to reflect with your child on the best part of their day, and help them focus on the positive. You can ask them questions like, "What made you feel the most proud today?" "What was the most fun part of your day?" "What was the most interesting thing you learned today?" "How did you make a difference today?"

If you follow the processes outlined in the partnership and still feel you have unresolved issues please refer to the following Web site for Palo Alto Unified School District guidelines and procedures:
http://pausd.org/community/complaint_policies/index.shtml.