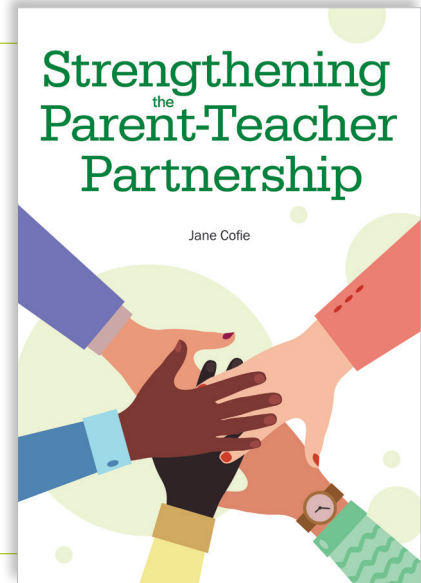


Discussion Questions for

Strengthening the Parent-Teacher Partnership

By Jane Cofie



Introduction

Author Jane Cofie writes, “You might find you are . . . looking to strengthen and refine, develop and learn, confirm and validate” in your efforts to collaborate positively with parents. What specific areas of your partnership with parents are you interested in improving or deepening? What are your goals as you read this book?

Chapter 1: A Place Where Every Parent Is Welcome

Think of a time when you found yourself in a new environment. What factors in that environment made you feel welcome and gave you a sense of belonging? What factors worked against those feelings of belonging? How can you take those elements that support belonging and apply them to making the classroom a welcoming place for your students’ parents?

How can you connect with parents authentically in both formal and informal ways?

What specific ways can you welcome and connect with families at the start of the year to set the stage for sustainable, regular communication throughout the year?

Chapter 2: A Culturally Plural Classroom

In order to nurture a culturally responsive classroom, educators must take the time to get to know their students individually, academically, developmentally, and culturally. What specific steps do you plan to take to get to know your students? Think about which students you would like to build stronger relationships with. How can you go about doing that?

How are your students’ interests and cultures represented in the physical classroom? Take some time to review your classroom library. Do the resources and books reflect the cultures

and backgrounds of all the students in the classroom? What might you change or add to ensure that your classroom is representative of the students you teach?

In preparing to interact with parents who have a different culture or background from your own, how can you learn about that culture to foster understanding and cooperation for the success of the student?

Take some time to identify colleagues who can support your efforts to create a culturally responsive classroom. What are the best ways to utilize their help?

Chapter 3: Communicating With Parents

How do you establish the right frequency of communication with parents? What methods (email, texting, phone call, newsletter) have proven most effective for particular situations (feedback, field trip notification, general update on recent lessons)? What are some specific, sustainable ways to keep up contact with parents over the course of the school year?

Considering your daily schedule, what is a reasonable time frame for you to respond to parent inquiries? How do you convey communication expectations to parents?

Think about a time when you struggled to maintain positive, constructive communication with someone. What methods did you use to restore positive, effective communication?

Chapter 4: Partnering Through Parent-Teacher Meetings

In a parent conference, what questions do you like to ask in order to elicit meaningful information about your students?

What frequency and format works best for both you and parents for meetings throughout the year?

What resources exist in your school to maximize parent meetings' effectiveness (technology, counselors, etc.)?

What is your system for keeping records of conferences and follow-ups?

Chapter 5: Strengthening Connections: Providing Engagement Opportunities

Jane Cofie writes, "It can be tricky to establish effective involvement opportunities if we are uncomfortable with parents participating in various tasks, events, and activities in our schools or classrooms. During my first two years of teaching, I was nervous, even a little fearful, about having parents in my classroom. I was worried that a parent would question or judge the way I taught or compare me to the previous teacher." What are some of your

own feelings about parent involvement in the classroom? If you have hesitations or doubts about parents' presence, what steps can you take to think about parental presence as a positive? If you have positive feelings about parent involvement, what are some ways you can encourage a colleague or teammate who might be hesitant?

What engagement opportunities can you identify for parents?

What do you see as some of the differences between parental involvement and parental engagement? What can you do to boost parental engagement?

Have you had an experience of successfully integrating parental involvement in the classroom? What specific factors made it work? How can you build on that successful experience?

Chapter 6: Working Toward a Common Goal: Teaching Self-Discipline

According to the author, “The word *discipline* can provoke a wide range of thoughts and feelings.” When you think about discipline, what are some of the words and feelings that come up? How can you use these ideas and emotions to bring an attitude of empathy to parents?

What is your approach to teaching self-discipline? “Know your approach,” writes Cofie. “Being familiar and comfortable with your approach to discipline is important in being able to effectively communicate the approach to parents.” What specific language would be most effective for you to explain your ideas about teaching self-discipline to parents?

Have you ever encountered a parent whose approach to discipline was very different from or even in conflict with yours? If so, how did you find common ground?

Chapter 7: Challenging Encounters

In order to avert potential challenging encounters, Jane Cofie suggests identifying “some of the most common situations that lead to potential conflicts with parents, such as misunderstandings about assignments and homework, surprises with report card grades, and behavior struggles.” What proactive steps can you take to mitigate the possibility of conflict with parents?

If a challenging encounter with parents does occur, what are some ways you can de-escalate the situation? How can you foster a solution-oriented framework for all parties? What communication techniques can you use both in a meeting with parents and in follow-ups to facilitate a constructive outcome?