

# Figure This!



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# Getting to the Point of Communicating to Parents

All of the following information was edited from *Mathematics Assessment: A Practical Handbook for Grades 6 – 8*, NCTM, 2000.

It is difficult to think about starting the next school year as teachers are getting ready to close down their classrooms for the year, but it is important to reflect on the years teaching and consider changes for the next school year. Communicating to parents about your teaching practice is the best way to help engage and improve student learning.



Communicating with parents and other caregivers about our goals for assessment, how we have set up our classroom assessment system, and the types of assessments we use invites them to be part of the process. Unfortunately, most parents and caregivers are unfamiliar with the different types of assessment. It is important that we give parents and caregivers the opportunity to understand the changes occurring at the classroom, state and national levels.

Here are two sample parent letters, written by teachers to communicate assessment results to their students' parents. Compare the styles and information provided in each letter.

Please feel free to use and revise the sample parent letters for use in your classroom.

## Parent Letter 1

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Attached you will find \_\_\_\_\_'s growth-folio, which contains several important assignments and activities selected from this term's work in math. Please set aside about 30 minutes to have your son/daughter *present to you* the eight items in their growth-folio (each item has a colored quarter-sheet of paper attached to the front). Then write a short note at the bottom of this page reacting to the work demonstrated.

Please keep in mind that learning to make in-depth self-assessments of one's work takes time. For many of the students, this is their first experience analyzing their own efforts and achievements and looking for evidence to support their analyses. The attached sheets, "Evidence I am growing I and II," describe what the students and I watch for as indicators they are growing as mathematicians. I encourage you to point out evidence of growth that you notice during your child's presentation.

The students will add to their growth-folios next term and repeatedly throughout the year. Each term you will be asked to listen to a growth-folio presentation. By the end of the year, this should provide a broad picture of your child's mathematical achievements, understanding, and growth.

Please call me at 555-5555 if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

My child explained each of the eight items in this growth-folio to me. Some reactions that I have are:

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent(s) or Guardian(s)

Please return this note and growth-folio to school by \_\_\_\_\_

## Parent Letter 2

Dear Parents/Guardians:

As we begin this school year, I want to share with you some insights into what is happening in our math classroom. Communication between home and school is very important for you and especially for your son/daughter.

Since it seems things are a bit different since you and I were in school, I would like to share some of the goals for the class and expectations that I have of your son or daughter.

### Here are the goals:

1. To communicate mathematically through
  - ✓ Representations (graphs, diagrams, charts, tables, etc.)
  - ✓ Math language
  - ✓ Clear presentation of work
2. To demonstrate problem solving by
  - ✓ Showing understanding of the tasks
  - ✓ Using approaches, sometimes more than one, that show good sound mathematical thinking
  - ✓ Explaining decisions along the way
  - ✓ Connecting, extending, applying, and generalizing answers
3. To develop number sense by
  - ✓ Assessing when an answer is reasonable
  - ✓ Using mental strategies to do computation and estimation
4. To understand and apply math skills and concepts
5. To solve problems cooperatively
6. To apply math outside the classroom
7. To grow in self-esteem and self-confidence as a person and a mathematician

### Here are the expectations:

1. Daily homework that should last between 15 to 30 minutes. The homework is not traditional textbook homework but questions that require a lot of thought and explanation on the part of the teacher.
2. I expect that sometimes your son or daughter will get frustrated. I am trying to teach them that math is not always an 'answer' but a thought process, and sometimes the work turned in might be methods tried that didn't

necessarily work or questions that they might have to get further in the problem.

3. Your child will learn to score his/her own work, assess him or herself, and discuss a grade for the marking period with me.

Here are some suggestions that will enable you to share in your child's experiences in learning mathematics and help you to create an environment in your home that provides encouragement for your child.

- ✎ Show interest in your child's experience in math class. Ask him/her to tell you about class activities and show interest in them. Ask your child to explain the concepts and relationships he or she is studying. Be concerned with the process as well as the answer. Let him/her explain their thoughts to you often.
- ✎ When your child has a question, try not to tell him/her how to solve the problem. Ask questions that will help him/her think about the problem in a different way.
- ✎ Encourage your child to draw diagrams, models, or sketches to help explain or understand a concept or problem.
- ✎ Provide a special time or place for study that will not be disrupted by other household activities.
- ✎ Encourage your child to form study groups with classmates. By discussing concepts with others, rich insights will emerge.
- ✎ Engage your child in home activities that draw on a variety of mathematical skills. Games and puzzles, estimations, and math talk at meal time are good ways to do this.
- ✎ Come and visit your child's math class.

The goal and expectations are strongly related to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics* (1989). Teaching math where kids are involved in the process makes math more meaningful and useful. Students will see that it isn't 'magic' but they will know why and how things work.

I'm looking forward to seeing you at open house. Let me know if you have any questions or concerns. I'm excited about the school year ahead and look forward to working with your child.

# Communicating to Parents... Tips from Teachers

- ☞ Try to let parents know specific goals for assessment. Send a letter home at the beginning of the year.
- ☞ Explain the type of homework that will be given and show examples of open-ended questions or projects the children might bring home.
- ☞ Describe the grading system to parents because it is quite different than the ones they had in school.
- ☞ Provide parents a specific list of suggestions explaining how to help their children with their assignments.
- ☞ Require the students make presentations to their parents about what they know and can do.
- ☞ Send home a monthly newsletter containing information about the mathematics classroom, highlighting a different component of the assessment system each time.
- ☞ Send home homework for parents to do together with their children. Include a form where the parent writes responses to questions such as “What mathematics did you use to solve these problems?”
- ☞ Have parents read the child’s portfolio at home and write comments about it.
- ☞ Invite parents to mathematics workshops.
- ☞ Ask parents to help score papers.
- ☞ As part of Open House or Math Night, conduct a workshop about the types of mathematics problems and assessment strategies you are using.
- ☞ Show parents the types of items that are on “high-stakes” tests, especially open-ended and essay questions.

## Read About ...

- ☞ “Math Portfolio Night” in *Mathematics Assessment: Cases and Discussions for Grades 6 – 12*, by William Bush, NCTM, 2000.
- ☞ “Accountability” in *Mathematics Assessment: Cases and Discussions for Grades K – 5*, by William Bush, NCTM, 2002.
- ☞ “Integrating Assessment and Instruction” in *Assessment in a Mathematics Classroom*, by Donald Chambers, NCTM, 1993.



In Memory of Judy Lambie  
February 22, 1945 - January 19, 2002

Judy was a Kindergarten Teacher at Alameda Elementary School and gave much of her time helping with the development of the new KDPR. In her honor, APS has dedicated the new KDPR in her memory. We will miss her loving spirit.

