

Parent Involvement and Awareness:

Basic Assumptions in Working with Parents

by Paul Giganti,Jr., CMC Math Festival Program
pgiganti@berkeley.edu



Educators who have worked with the parents and guardians of students will readily acknowledge two truths: first, these individuals play a critical role in the education of their children; and second, working with parents is often not easy! I have found that recalling a few basic assumptions before I work with parents can help make those occasions more productive. Here are a few truths that I have learned in my work with parents.

Parents are concerned, first and foremost, with their own child's education—not necessarily that of ALL children.

We often begin our conversations with parents by telling them that we are creating a learning environment where all students can achieve to their fullest potential. While we as teachers know this is the ideal goal of any classroom, parents have one concern—their own children's learning—that must be addressed first. It is not that parents aren't concerned about other children, but that their primary responsibility is to their own children first. When we speak with parents, first discuss the progress of their child. When they are satisfied their child's needs are being met in your classroom (or school), then it is very appropriate to talk about ALL of the children in your class.

Parents have only their own personal experience with mathematics as a reference to compare with their child's.

Teachers must always remember how different the educational experience of the parent might have been compared to the present experience of their child. Yet their experience is all they have to relate to, though most likely it was a very different experience. In mathematics especially, many parents did not have a pleasant experience—in fact many parent's view of mathematics is colored with the dark glasses of their own negative experiences in mathematics class. Explain carefully and patiently that each child CAN learn mathematics, and that good mathematics teaching can give their child a positive experience and a lifelong benefit. Then proceed to demonstrate

to parents how the subject we love is taught now.

Parents trust their own child's teacher more than any other educator.

We are often told in the media that public education is bad and getting worse. However, no matter what parents have heard about "public education" they generally hold one strong belief that gives us a tremendous advantage in our work with parents. The vast majority of parents believe THEIR SCHOOL IS WONDERFUL (it is the other schools that have the problems). In addition, parents in general have more respect for their own child's teacher than any other public figure. While this trust should not be abused, teachers going into a meeting with parents can take comfort in this trust and use it to develop a mutual respect of each other's role.

Parents are sensitive, caring, intelligent people who want information about what you're doing with their children. They want to understand, and most want to help!

We sometimes think the worst of parents when their students misbehave or fail to learn. Since the majority of teachers are also parents, we know better than most that parents are doing the best to raise their children to the best of their ability and knowledge. While there are exceptions, it is to a teacher's advantage to assume the best about parents and help them learn the knowledge and information that will improve their ability as parents to support and help their children.

It is now critical that we work together with parents to educate students. It is through a successful partnership of parents and teachers that students best prosper and achieve. Learning to work positively with parents and guardians is as valuable to children as our good teaching.

Permission is granted to reproduce and share this article for instructional use by parents, guardians, teachers, and families—provided it is duplicated with full credit given to the author, the California Mathematics Council, and its Journal, the ComMuniCator.

Parents are concerned, first and foremost, with their own child's education—not necessarily that of *ALL* children.

Parents have only their own personal experience with mathematics as a reference to compare with their child'.

**Parents trust their own
child's teacher more than
any other educator.**

**Parents are sensitive,
caring, intelligent people
who want information
about what you're doing
with their children. They
want to understand, and
most want to help!**