

# Dear Families and Educators: Why Parent-Teacher Communication Is More Important Than Ever

By Kim Greene, MA

Dear Families and Educators,

As a parent, spouse of an educator, and former teacher myself, I could never have imagined a school year starting like this one. None of us could. We never expected masks to cover up smiles behind first-day-of-school photos. We never expected that schools would remain closed for so long and that our living rooms would become classrooms *again*.

It's not easy for any of us, as families, educators, and especially kids. Many of our kids who learn and think differently have especially struggled without the services or supports they're used to. Our communication as families and educators is more important than ever. That communication will be key to helping our kids thrive.

## Understanding Each Other's Perspectives

As families, we've done our best to keep up with our kids' learning. Sometimes our best hasn't felt like enough. Or nearly enough. Some of our kids have been out of a school building for up to six months. They've missed out on important services that schools provide. They've missed their friends and teachers. They've been faced with complex questions about race at a time when injustice has been in the headlines.

We're worried about our kids' social-emotional well-being. We're worried about their physical health, especially if they're at high risk of getting sick. We've had to make hard choices and find ways to juggle work and school. We're worried our kids will fall even further behind. And for some of us, we've found comfort in a "new normal" and are hesitant to return to the way things used to be.

As educators, we've done our best to keep our students learning. We haven't been prepared to teach this way. There was no class in college called "Teaching During a Pandemic 101." Our school districts scrambled to put together distance learning plans. And now, with little notice and limited training, we've been told to report to our classrooms or continue distance learning or a little bit of both.

We deeply miss our students. We're worried about our physical health, especially if we (or our family members) are at high risk. We may have struggled with our own mental health concerns, too. We've had to make hard decisions about returning to jobs we love or protecting ourselves and our families.

## Sharing a Commitment to Communication

With this shared understanding, let's make a commitment to each other and to our kids.

As families, we will:

- Share information about our kids that teachers will want to know
- Give tips about what worked—and didn't work—while our kids were learning at home
- Provide updates about what services or supports our kids missed and how it has impacted them
- Share our concerns about the COVID slide
- Do our best to communicate openly, respectfully, and in a timely way, remembering that we may also be juggling jobs and other family responsibilities

As educators, we will:

- Ask questions about our students and their families' concerns
- Give tips about what's working—and not working—as we start the school year
- Provide updates to families with IEPs and accommodations for distance learning
- Share information that families might find useful, including resources for distance learning, health and safety challenges, mental health, and racial injustice
- Do our best to communicate openly, respectfully, and in a timely way, remembering that we have many students to catch up with or families of our own

To be sure, it will be a school year like none other. Together, we'll find our way in this new world with our kids at the center of it.

[https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/choosing-starting-school/back-to-school/dear-families-and-educators-why-parent-teacher-communication-is-more?\\_ul=1\\*un7q1z\\*domain\\_userid\\*YW1wLTZvaDFmVIVzV0k5Ykp6bWpPbUtrSIE](https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/choosing-starting-school/back-to-school/dear-families-and-educators-why-parent-teacher-communication-is-more?_ul=1*un7q1z*domain_userid*YW1wLTZvaDFmVIVzV0k5Ykp6bWpPbUtrSIE)