

Parental Communication



Sample Phone Conversation

Sales Pitch

Make sure you are physically smiling while speaking! Use student's name frequently during conversation. Make the conversation personal.

Hi, I'm Bill Hanlon, _____'s math teacher. Is this a good time to talk with you?

I want you to know I am excited to have _____ in my _____ class. He/she is a very nice young man/lady and I am looking forward to working with him/her this year.

Let me tell you that I am going to do anything I can to see _____ is not only successful in math, but will also excel this class so that success translates to earning an "A".

In the past, how has _____ done in math? Has _____ ever come home with homework he/she couldn't do? That can be very frustrating, can't it? I will do my best to ensure that doesn't happen.

Let me go over some of the strategies I intend to use to help ensure _____ success. First, I will do everything I can to make sure _____ understands what is being taught by developing concepts or skills thru visuals and patterns. What that means is math won't look like magic - simply memorizing without understanding. I will also connect what I am teaching to what _____ has learned before or outside experiences so _____ is more comfortable in his/her knowledge and understanding of math typically before being given a formula or procedure. That will also provide us an opportunity to review and reinforce skills. And I will use simple straightforward examples (nice numbers) so students are not distracted by arithmetic.

Second, I will use a "highlighting" system to assist students in preparing for tests. I call it the star system. If I tell the student to mark something with 3 stars, that means that WILL be on the test. Three star questions for me is math students need to know to be successful, they are typically definitions, formulas, or procedures. While we want student understanding, these are items that need to be memorized. There is **no computation, no manipulation**. I will have students label that information in their notes as 3 stars as well. Two stars means they will have problems "just" like these – using different numbers on the test. So there are changes and there is computation and manipulation. One star questions are conceptual based or problem solving type questions that are found on high-stakes test like EOC exams or SBAC.

Third, to set students up for success, I begin class with a QCPR and check for proficiency as a reminder to help them with the day's lesson. During instruction, I will set up student notes so they can study more effectively and efficiently. I will tell them what they should have in their notes, how they should write them, leaving white space, so they don't have visual overload. Notes are very important; it's what students use to record what they are learning, complete HW assignments and prepare for tests. So, I will demand they have their notebook in class every day. The notes will also contain their guided practice problems. You should also be able to see the stars as highlights. A practice test for each unit should also be contained in the notebook.

Fourth, you mentioned that _____ has come home with HW he/she has not been able to do. I will do my best to try to ensure that does not happen. I don't send students home with exercises they can't do – at least I do my best not to. To help with homework, homework assignments will reflect and support the instruction and notes. That means, if I taught a formula, procedure or definition, those items will be assigned as HW, and _____ can find those answers by just referring to his/her notes. And, if he/she can answer those questions, then the probability of _____ being able to do the exercises increases dramatically.

If _____ complains he/she cannot do the HW, call me. That means either I did not do something I am promising I will do or you are not getting the facts. In either case, students should always be able to answer the first few questions because they come directly from the instruction, should be in the notes and set students up to be successful completing the HW assignment.

Fifth, as I introduce new definitions, procedures or formulas, I will place those on the board, read them to the students so they know how to read, write and say them correctly, then we will have the *entire class recite the expectations out loud, together* to help embed them in short-term memory. The next day, we will chorally recite them again, as _____ should do for HW to further embed them in memory.

Next, I will provide all students a parallel constructed practice test and post it on the web with the assigned number of stars about halfway through the unit so _____ knows exactly what to expect on their unit test. My belief is no one should be surprised by items on the test. To ensure students are ready for a unit test, a couple of days before the actual test, I will go over and pace the students through the practice test with them by having the students do one problem at a time, and as they finish each problem, then I will do it to ensure they know how to do it. If I notice any difficulties or hesitation, I will have time over the next two days to address those issues and make sure _____ is coming into the test with an expectation of earning an "A" on the test.

My job is help _____ feel comfortable in his/her knowledge, understanding and application of math. I promise you I will do all I can to ensure that happens. I will help students think about how they learn most effectively so we can build on what they do so they he/she studies more effectively and efficiently and then has a better idea of what do to what if he/she gets "stuck".

In short, I'm here to help. I'm available before and after school and at lunch, I will do whatever it takes to ensure _____ is successful. I'd like to see _____ earn an "A" in this class.

Do you have any questions or concerns up to this point?

If you think of anything that might help me help _____ be more successful, please let me know.

Close the deal (Make sure you continue to physically smile while talking)

Knowing that I will use these strategies, I'd like to have your support. If for some reason _____ decides not to participate in class. For example, when teaching a new definition, formula or procedure, I mentioned I would have the entire class recite out loud, together so they know how to read it, say it, and help embed the information in short term memory. If _____ does not recite with the class, with your permission, I would have him/her write that information 25-50 times. Again, this is typically information students NEED to know to be successful. And recitation is a great memorization technique. Is that alright with you?

The same with notes, if for some reason _____ doesn't want to take notes, is it alright that I have him/her in before, after school or at lunch time to copy my notes. Again, notes are important, that's what students use to complete homework, practice in class, and prepare for tests. Is that okay? Again, thank you.

Now, remember, I want _____ to be successful. So we are using a highlighting system, the star system, to set students up for success. You might remember, a 3 star question has no computation or manipulation, but it is information students NEED to know to be successful. While we want understanding, we have to have memorization. If _____ misses a 3 star question on a test, I'd like to permission to write this/her hand off. Missing 3 star questions is simply not acceptable.

This is where parents will stop you to determine if you are being a jerk or really trying to help their student succeed. So be pleasant, keep smiling, and explain that if they cannot answer these questions the likelihood for success is not great.

Remember, 3 star questions are memorization – hopefully with understanding, students are told during instruction that an item is 3 star, it is labeled in their notes, on their homework, and it is on their practice test labeled as 3 stars meaning it is on the test exactly the same way – absolutely no changes. There is no computation, no manipulation – strictly memorization, but hopefully with understanding. But what we know is true, is if they don't know the formula, identification, definition or procedure, chances are great they won't be able to pass the test.

Also, since the tests are parallel constructed, if the 3 star question is item 4 on the practice test, it will be item 4 on the real test. Again, my motive is help _____ succeed. Is that something you can support? Thank you, I really appreciate your support.

For students to perform best, they really need to focus on the lesson being presented, Multi-tasking does not work in the math arena. Having said that, I don't allow students to have their cell phones out during the class period. Can I count on you to support me on this issue? Thank you.

And thanks for taking the time to talk with me. I'm looking forward to a great year in having _____ in my class. I'm pretty sure if I do the things I have told you and we hold _____ responsible for his/her part, _____ should make an A.

During the year, if you have any concerns, please call me immediately.

If you know of anything I can do to help ____ be more successful, please let me know. My only job is helping _____ truly achieve in math and be comfortable in that knowledge, understanding and application of math. I'm sure by the end of the first semester, he/she will like math so much, he/she will want to have math parties at your home. Here's my contact info, phone and email.

I'd appreciate it if you let _____ know we spoke and we are in agreement. Again, I'm very happy to have _____ in my class. Thank you.