



# Setting the Stage

## How to Quickly Establish School-to-Home Relationships while Building Teacher-Student Rapport

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### The Time is Now

The back-to-school season only comes once a year, and there's no returning to it once it has passed. This is exactly why it is crucial to take advantage of this time of year to reach one very specific goal: **establish positive rapport with every student and their family as quickly as possible.**

Regardless of the grade or content, forming a solid learning partnership upfront is the single-most impactful thing a teacher can do, as it ultimately affects every facet of the classroom experience for everyone involved the entire school year. The following are some tips and strategies to consider when forming that powerful school-to-home alliance.



## Warm & Fuzzy Postcard

As routines and procedures are put into place and practiced, teachers should go on “the hunt” and become a student “detective”. These initial few weeks are not just time to determine how the classroom will run or learn all of the students’ names, but teachers should be actively observing and listening for things the students do or say that fall into these two categories:

### 1. Specific Events or Interests Currently Occurring in their Life

Maybe they got a puppy named Winnie over the summer, they just found out they are getting a little brother, or they’ve been in gymnastics for two years. Whatever it is, write it down!

### 2. ANY Positive Moments or Interactions that Occur During the School Day

If they helped the art teacher by staying after class to clean up supplies, they led a focused collaborative conversation at their table during social studies, or maybe it’s their general polite and well-mannered disposition that impressed you. Whatever it is, write it down!

After just the first week or so, you will be surprised at the amount of extremely specific information you now know about each of your students. The next step can be time-intensive but well worth it! During the next week, try to write 5 postcards or short notes a day. It is important to note here that these are not calls, texts, emails, or even notes sent home in backpacks. Take the time to drop these in—you guessed it—snail mail! Most sites/districts have their own mail room and system, so they are usually able to assist with the logistics and cost.

You will not just let them know how excited you are to have them in your class, (because anybody can say that), you will make sure to mention 2–3 very specific items from your observations. Positive interactions you’ve noticed, specific events from their life, as well as the time and attention it took to write and send a special hand-written note lets the parents know that you possess an active role and vested interest in their child. This effort—though it can take some time upfront—acts as a springboard into some powerful and long-term benefits.

Launching the year with this positive interaction will help ensure that a call will be much easier to make, should any challenging issue that requires parental support arise in the future. That call or that meeting to schedule will be easier because you’ve already put forth that team effort and established the partnership upfront. Forming a positive and strong school-home connection is next to impossible if the initial communication is negative.



## Secret Code

Now that you've established a solid school-home relationship with your students' families, choose a "secret code word" and communicate it with them at parent night. Ask parents to text or email you this code word if their child had a particularly difficult time or challenging experience either that weekend, the evening before, or even that morning during breakfast.

Tell them that you don't need specifics and will not ask, but that when you receive that code word, you will make an extra effort that day to make sure their child feels appreciated, valued, and special and that you will also go a little easier on them than normal if issues arise during the day.

We all have bad days, and instead of compounding that, teachers can be a light in a child's day or week and even indirectly help them heal from whatever it is they're going through. Students should view school as a happy and safe place that can sometimes be their refuge from any negative things or possible chaos in their lives outside of it.



## Superpower Survey

"Getting-to-Know-You" activities are nothing new. Teachers all have their favorite ice-breakers to conduct during the first day or weeks of school every year, including interest surveys. Why not take this idea and make it more strategic; benefiting not only the student, but allowing the teacher to customize how they present content specifically to their learners?

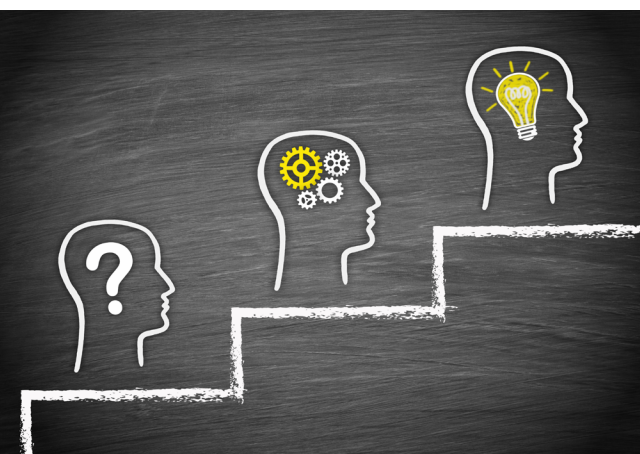
Knowing how students see themselves as a learner in a variety of settings and/or content areas is crucial. Students don't just fit into one box of either being a good or struggling student. They all have their superpowers! Whether they are an expert on dinosaurs, puzzles, or they gravitate toward graphs and data more than numerical operations. For example, many of us can remember rocking algebra in high school and then getting to geometry, where it seemed like a different language (or vice versa)? How about that student who is obsessed with graphic novels or comics, but it's like pulling teeth to have them smoothly transition to their science text? That informational text might seem like torture to them because they have already established a perception of what kind of learner they are in various venues.

## Superpower Survey (continued)

The goal here is two-fold:

1. Figure out the “learning language” for every student to have them willingly and enthusiastically engage, regardless of content.
2. Debunk their perceptions of what type of learner they are or any negative attitudes they may have toward specific content.

During the first weeks of school, consider putting together an attitude or “Superpower Survey” to find out how they feel about certain content areas and various modes of learning: the WHAT’s and the HOW’s of their learning.



- How do they learn best?
- Do they prefer working alone?
- How do they feel about participating or presenting to the class?
- What will encourage them to feel safe in order to actively engage?
- What kind of products do they like creating to communicate their learning?
- What sort of activities in the past did they really enjoy and why?

Questions like these will not only make you aware of their general feelings about school, but also how you can speak their “language” and invite them into content they may not be crazy about in a way that really aligns to how they learn best. They will also feel valued as your learning partner and that they have a voice and choice in the way they will learn. Students often have preconceptions about certain content areas or anticipate experiencing the same obstacles they have in the past solely based on a prior teacher’s instructional style or personality.

Unit 1  
**Math Attitude Survey**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. I see math all around me.  
Yes  Maybe  No

2. Math is about explaining your thinking.  
Yes  Maybe  No

3. It's important to be fast at math.  
Yes  Maybe  No

4. People who are good at math like math.  
Yes  Maybe  No

5. I can do math.  
Yes  Maybe  No

6. When I don't know what to do to solve a problem, I...  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. For me, someone who is good at math can...  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. For me, math is...  
\_\_\_\_\_

A great example of how to discover their feelings and experiences within specific content is exemplified here in McGraw Hill’s newest math program, *Reveal Math*<sup>™</sup>. Embedded in its K-5 Unit 1 “Math Is” Unit, the *Math Attitude Survey* is utilized during the first weeks of school. Here is an example of some of the questions from Grade 2. Notice the rating scale as well as some open-ended prompts.

▶ Learn more about [Reveal Math](#)

*Reveal Math: Math Attitude Survey*

## School Squad

It's important to know the student-staff relationships that have already been established at your site. After all, a child's identity is formed from all of their compounded experiences and interactions with adults throughout their entire life. This strategy will work better in intermediate/secondary grades at schools that have a lower transient population, because it relies on staff input.

Create multiple copies of your class list and put them in the mailboxes of administrators, support staff, specials teachers and all of the teachers in the prior grades with whom your class will have had prior experiences. This list will have just one general direction:

Highlight, star or check off any student with whom you feel you have a positive and special adult-student relationship.

That's it. You are not asking for specifics here, and that is intentional. Compile the tallies on one main class list. You might find that many of your students seem to have several positive relationships with various staff members across your site, and that's fantastic! However, this is not a popularity contest, and that's not actually the information you are tracking.

Pay close attention to the names on the list that have zero to very few checks. In addition to students that are new to your site this year, make it your mission to fill that empty gap and become their cheerleading squad. Consistently work on building a positive rapport with that student as a whole child all year long. Know their likes/dislikes, spark daily conversations about things unrelated to school, and if you can, attend an extra-curricular event they are involved in at some point during the year. They will never forget it! Every student should know without a doubt that you unconditionally value them as your student, a contributing member of a learning community, and cherished person in this world.



<b>Jalen</b>	★	★	★
<b>Maria</b>	★		
<b>Fatima</b>	★	★	
<b>Michael</b>			
<b>Charlie</b>	★	★	



## A Clean Slate

When teachers get their class rosters for the first time, whether that's during the summertime or in the weeks leading up to school, it can be expected that they want to know anything and everything about each child and what kind of student they are. Teachers feel if they have their grip on their levels, skills, etc., before day one, that it can help streamline their back-to-school season. Frequently, you can find teachers traveling to other classrooms to get the "411" on their incoming students.

It is important to remember that every child has a very individual and specific relationship with every teacher, a range of responses to various instructional styles, and adults have their own perception of specific students, their personalities, or how they learn best. Every child, whether in grade 2 or grade 12, deserves a fresh start and a clean slate. Make a valiant effort to get to know your students based on your own experience with them first. As issues arise, inquire with that teacher regarding what strategies worked for them, but don't judge a student or further contribute to their possible unjust learning trajectory based solely on the opinions of others.

**Everyone deserves a clean slate. Read the file, do some diagnostics, and create a relationship based on experience, not preconceived notions. Leveling the playing field for students starts with their teachers providing them a safe space to start over. Most students are really looking forward to that fresh start...especially the ones who desperately need it.**