

Top tips for great reporting to parents (all year round)



NZEI's Principals Council offers some tips on how to inspire and motivate parents with great reporting.

1 Great reporting is about great relationships. Find ways to bring parents and guardians into school, besides assembly – meet-the-teacher bbqs; information evenings (get the literacy advisor to talk to parents about what's new in reading); science fairs of students' work. One school invited parents to come in and do a PAT test – and then explained why they did the tests and how they'd use the results.

4 Parents often want to know where their child sits in relation to others in the class. Rating kids against each other is counter-productive, and negates growth. Tell parents where their child sits on the levels of the *New Zealand Curriculum* – this will tell them where their child sits on a national scale.



7 Use the assessment functions of your school's student management system. Collate all assessments directly onto the SMS – you'll only have to handle the data once. Comments can easily be added and the report compiled as each assessment is completed, so there is no big panic as reporting time approaches.

But avoid acronyms like SMS, PAT and other teacher jargon in written reports and conversations. It's easy to forget that professional terms in common use in schools are often not well understood by parents. Convert the jargon to plain English and you'll protect your parents and students from confusion and misinterpretation.

2 Explain your school's teaching and learning programmes, including what the topics are. Parents will gain an insight into the subsequent assessments and reporting of achievements, and they'll have better conversations with their children about school.

5 A child's end-of-term report is the opening line in a conversation. Always offer parents a chance to meet face-to-face each reporting time. Parents need to understand what is being assessed (social and academic) and why it is being reported in the way it is.

3 As far as possible, frame children's progress along a continuum that shows where they've come from and where they're going to, rather than as a set of hurdles they have to leap over. Some schools have developed learning markers, based on a range of standardised achievement measurement systems. Use language like "moving towards", "achieving above".

6 Parents like a "next steps for supported learning at home" section. Frame it as a positive experience for students and parents, and link it to upcoming topics on the teaching and learning programme.

8 On a similar note, avoid using asTTle printouts in reports unless you've done serious work with parents beforehand to explain what they mean. They end up being just another form of jargon behind which a student's performance is hidden.

9 Beware the dangers of cut-and-paste – use the wrong gender/name for your student's report, and you'll have undermined all your good efforts at communicating to parents. ALWAYS spell names correctly.

10 Think about digital portfolios. These support a written report, and there are lots of benefits (learners have more ownership and direction of their learning journey; they're portable, secure, 24/7 access; e-portfolios can evolve over years). Find out more by googling "Digital portfolios guidelines for beginners" – new from the Ministry of Education.



11 If they're interested, use the report as a chance to talk to parents about National Standards. In New Zealand we teach students how to think and process, not to regurgitate. We're a high-performing system (PISA results – 4th in the world for literacy, 7th for maths, 4th for science). For copies of a pamphlet for parents, "Are you confused about National Standards?", email gita.champaneri@nzei.org.nz.

12 We are also one of the top three in the world for child transience. So the report you're writing today may well end up being read by the child's teacher at their new school. It needs to provide a clear snapshot and a baseline of achievement. Ultimately, good reporting supports good practices throughout the education system – for the child and their family.