

Model letters

The templates below are provided as guidance for communicating with parents via email or online postings. The first offers ideas on how to support student achievement. The second informs parents and caregivers about the classroom independent reading program and asks for their support. The third letter asks for help in finding opportunities to publish student work about specific topics of study.

Template: enlisting support for student achievement

This particular template is divided into three aspects of enlisting support for student achievement: information and support for extending student learning at home, information about the CA CCSS, and information about assessment and grading. Teachers should add, delete, or change details depending on class, school, or district requirements.

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

I am confident that your child will progress and show growth as a reader and writer during this school year. During class time, students read regularly, write frequently, share their ideas, and receive feedback that is encouraging and instructive. I look for growth over time in daily assignments in order to determine where I can offer intervention and enrichment activities to best support the next steps in your child's learning. You and I are partners in this effort so I am writing to encourage you to extend your student's learning at home and to let you know the ways through which your student is assessed.

Information and support for extending student learning at home

You can definitely extend your student's learning at home by supporting a love of reading. Helping your child select books that interest him or her and discussing what he or she is discovering will help your child develop into a mature and engaged reader.

Most of your child's writing will be done in school. However, ask your child to tell you about a particular reading or writing activity that he or she found challenging or thought-provoking. If your child has a device at home, ask him or her to share that particular activity. When you examine a piece of writing together, and your child is using a quote in his or her writing, say, "Tell me why you chose this quote and what it shows" or "What idea are you trying to convey about this quote?" To support reading comprehension, begin a conversation about the reading they are doing in class. Ask questions such as "What do you make of the characters and their decisions?" "What is most engaging and most confusing?" or "What ideas does the writer raise about society?" Even more than checking multiple choice responses from their Solo (homework) assignments, this ongoing conversation will support students in developing reading comprehension skills.

Information and support for informing families about standards

The work that your child is doing is designed to be both challenging and engaging. It is aligned to the CA Common Core State Standards, the CA ELD Standards, and to the CA ELA/ELD Framework. These standards are extensive, but focus largely on 1) the student's ability to use evidence from texts, and 2) challenging students to work with complex texts and using rich, non-fiction reading to build content knowledge. The CA Standards emphasize using evidence from texts in writing, and answering text-dependent questions in reading.

Here are a few more ideas for how we can work together to support learning aligned to the CA Standards:

- If we look at the Grade 6, 7, 8 ELA Vocabulary Standards, we see that students are to “Consult reference materials (dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses) both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or part of speech.” At home, you can encourage your child to look up word meanings and to use new words in conversation.
- If we look at the Grade 6, 7, 8 ELA Writing Standards, we see that students are to “Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.” Middle school students have a lot of opinions. Ask them to support their statements and ideas from what they have read or have heard. Ask them for evidence.
- For more extensive information about the CA Common Core State Standards, please go to ____ [insert link to the CA Standards or to district or school resources on how they are being used].

Template: Enlisting support for independent reading

This template informs parents and caregivers about the classroom independent reading program and asks for support. Teachers should add, delete, or change details depending on class, school, or district requirements.

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Like you, I want your child to read extensively on his or her own and to see reading as a way to learn about things he or she cares about. During class time, students regularly read in an independent reading book, share ideas about the text, and receive feedback. Each student receives individual attention, encouraging him or her to develop the stamina needed to read and enjoy a challenging text. Dedicating this time to supporting independent reading engages students and motivates them to read more and to read more deeply. Along with reading during class time, I expect students to read outside of class for two hours a week—roughly 20 minutes over six nights. Some nights, reading in their independent reading book is the homework. Other nights, students are expected to read in addition to other language arts homework.

I encourage you to begin an ongoing conversation about this independent reading. Help your child select books that interest him or her. [Provide any online resources from your school or district or information about libraries students can use.] If you have Internet connectivity at home, browse the Amplify Library with your child and help him or her to choose books or try reading books together. Discuss what your child is discovering in these books. When you talk with your child, ask: “What are you reading?” “What did you notice in the part you just read?” “Is the main character someone I would like or not?” “What questions do you have?” Check in with your child about his or her reading goals.

I have set up a system in class so I can encourage and monitor your child's progress with his or her independent reading. [Identify your system with details such as: students give at least one book talk per term, post at least two reviews, leave comments for at least three other students, and so forth.]

These are the two or three dates each month [identify dates] when I will use class time to have a conference about independent reading or when students will give book talks. I will follow up with students who are not reading regularly and/or completing their Reading Tracker and will update you as needed.

If you have any questions about our independent reading program, please feel free to text/email/call me. [If you have a school librarian, include him or her as another resource.]

Sincerely,

Template: Enlisting support for publishing student work

This template provides a model for sharing student work with parents and caregivers and asks for help finding opportunities to publish student work about specific topics of study. Teachers should add, delete, or change details depending on class, school, or district requirements.

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am delighted that so many students are writing clear, focused, convincing pieces about _____ [specific part of the text you are now reading] and I want to share a few samples with you. Currently, we are focusing on the skill of _____ [identify skill] in _____ [identify text]. Here is an example of what this skill looks like from one of the students in the class. Note how this student _____ [provide one or two clear descriptions of what you notice the student doing effectively in the sample]. Choose two or three lines that are interesting, maybe from a Spotlight that you are using for instruction in class. Be sure to correct any spelling, punctuation or grammar errors in the student work.

[An example: I am delighted that so many students are writing clear, focused, convincing pieces about changes in Phineas Gage. Students are focused on selecting relevant evidence while reading the beginning of *Phineas Gage: A Gruesome but True Story About Brain Science* by science writer John Fleischman. Here is an example of what this skill looks like from one of the students in the class. Note how this student chooses one direct quote from the text to support his idea and then explains how the quote demonstrates that Phineas has changed.

Another thing that showed how much Phineas has changed was, "The new Phineas was unreliable, and at times downright nasty. He insults old workmates and friends. He spouts vulgar language in the presence of women" (20). Before the accident, Phineas was very pleasant to be around. Now, he is not at all pleasant, because he makes fun of his friends.]

When students see the impact of their writing on a real audience, they want to become increasingly more powerful writers so they can impact even more people. I am always looking for authentic ways for students to be published. I wonder if you have ideas for places where your child and his or her classmates' writing could be published. We are studying _____ [identify texts or topics or skills] over the next few weeks. If you can think of places where students' work could be posted, displayed, or seen and appreciated by others, please let me know. Of course, the student's writing would be edited so that the written work is clearly understood by those who read it.

All the best,