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Contracts and pledges confirm commitment to student success

To start the school year on the right foot and with everyone on the same page about expectations, many schools and teachers use contracts that list commitments and agreements. These contracts for behavior, homework, parental support, school requirements, etc., are a great check for understanding about what to expect from all parties.

These voluntary pledges, signed near the beginning of the school year, outline mutual expectations for helping each student succeed, reaffirm the dedication and caring of staff, and clarify the basic role parents play in the academic success of their child.

There are contracts for staff, parents and students. The parent pledge stresses the importance of parents in their child's education, the student pledge stresses the student's responsibility for his or her own academic success, and the staff pledge conveys to parents the dedication of teachers to the success of each student.

Tailor your contract for your needs

There are many sample contracts or templates that can be adapted based on specific school or classroom needs. The contracts will be signed by the students themselves, their parents and/or teachers. Be sure that the signers have read the contract and have confirmed that they understand the terms. This is a good opportunity to emphasize the importance of honoring the terms of a contract and only signing after fully understanding the agreements.

Academic contracts can help students understand their academic responsibilities. Contract terms include attendance, participation and completion of work. This contract can be signed by students and parents who agree to support their child academically.

Behavioral contracts are for positive classroom behavior. The terms can establish how students, parents and teachers will work together to promote a positive classroom environment, including parents showing support for school rules and the teachers clarifying classroom expectations and school policies.

Homework contracts can help ensure that students spend adequate time on schoolwork outside of the school day. This can include homework, classroom prep, and time management. Parents who sign this contract agree to support students at home by providing homework help and a distraction-free place to work. Teachers can also sign this contract by agreeing to assign an appropriate amount of homework that is relevant to the work students have done in class.

Technology contracts help ensure appropriate, safe use of school computers and internet ac-

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cess by reminding students that the use of technology is a privilege. Misuse of school technology, including modifying equipment, filters or internet access or damaging hardware or software, can result in revocation of technology access and possibly additional consequences.

Parent pledges

The content of parent pledges can vary by grade level. All parent/family pledges should include an introductory statement giving the reason for the pledge program, encouraging parents to participate and emphasizing that signing the pledge is not mandatory.

Sample introductory statement: I understand that my participation in my child's education is important to his/her achievement and attitude. Therefore, I agree to carry out the following responsibilities to the best of my ability. I will:

- Place a high priority on learning and knowledge.
- Have high expectations for my student and encourage him/her to believe in him/herself
- Encourage my student to do his/her best at all times.
- Encourage my student to read at home each day. Families of elementary students may commit to reading to their child a given number of minutes a day as well as encouraging the child to read independently each day.
- Be sure my child completes all homework assignments — with family help when needed.
- See that my child gets sufficient sleep to be ready to learn at school.
- Make sure my child arrives at school on time and ready to learn.

Some parent pledges also include:

- Treating students and staff with respect.
- Encouraging active, healthy living habits.
- Providing a quiet place for the child to study.
- Ensuring the child spends a given amount of time writing each day .
- Working with the child's teacher(s) and letting staff know immediately if the parent sees a problem in the child's education or a problem that might interfere with the child's education
- Monitoring the child's time spent watching television, playing electronic games, texting and using other social media or electronic devices.
- Volunteering time to the school.
- Attending parent meetings, open house and parent conferences.
- Encouraging student interest and participation in school activities.

Student pledges

Student pledges are often similar to parent/family pledges. They can also include commitments to:

- Doing my best work.
- Learning from my mistakes.
- Following school rules.
- Accepting responsibility for my words and actions in and out of class.
- Respecting myself, the school, classmates, staff and families.
- Reading a given number of minutes a day beyond homework time.

Some schools or teachers also have individual classroom pledges that include items such as following directions, listening to others, respecting the way classmates learn and helping others when possible.

If student pledges are used by the school, families may be encouraged to sign student and family pledges at the same time, discuss the content and plan together how they will carry out their pledge.

Staff pledges

Staff pledges often include:

- Providing a safe, caring environment.
- Providing the best possible education for each student.
- Communicating regularly with families about student progress.
- Respecting the school, students, staff and families.
- Communicating in a positive way about the school, students and staff.
- Organizing challenging lessons and activities that promote student achievement.
- Participating in professional development activities that improve teaching and learning and support working in partnership with families and the community.

School-specific pledges

Some schools use pledges for issues related to bullying, drug use and student safety. In some cases, parents, staff, and students discuss the issue, write the pledge and encourage signing and adhering to the pledge.

Communicating the pledge campaign

The reason for a pledge, the process used for determining the content of the pledge and communications around the pledge are all important to the success of school pledges. Involving the right people in planning and carrying out the project may determine how well the project meets the intended goals.

Parents, students and staff need to know who has been involved, the intent behind the pledge project, that signing pledges is optional and how to use pledges to help students succeed. The project should be a year-long promotion with communications throughout the year referring to the pledges, parent and student meeting agendas, and pledge content used as the basis for commending parents, students and staff for their successes.

Assessment of the pledge program

The pledge project should be assessed in the same way schools assess student progress. Informal and formal evaluation methods can be used to periodically look at results that can be attributed to the use of pledges to encourage student achievement:

Has there been a year-to-year improvement in on-time arrival at school, completed homework and other factors since families and/or students signed pledges?

Are more parents participating in meetings, open houses, conferences and volunteer activities since signing pledges?

Do staff members report improved behavior that can be attributed to students having signed pledges?

Sample contracts

Education World: A parent/student/teacher contract

<http://bit.ly/2XsxaPA>

Western School Corporation: Parent/student homework contracts

<http://bit.ly/2YCAzrA>

Helix Charter High School Contract

<http://bit.ly/2JDsVXJ>

Bellingham School District: Student technology contract
<http://bit.ly/308pLBM>

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Success

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